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INDIA TODAY

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Pt. 1

G. K. V.
Hardwar

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Looking Good

Fashion, always the preserve of the perfumed elite, is suddenly exploding out on the streets. Feeding this rage are a profusion of boutiques selling all kinds of ready-to-wear dreams off their packed racks—and making crores in the bargain.

COVER STORY 76

Contentious Call

The call to Muslims by a section of the community's leadership to boycott Republic Day functions raised a storm. In the forefront of this leadership, was the controversial Janata Party MP Syed Shahabuddin, now isolated and under all-round attack.

CURRENT EVENTS 16

Tragically Widespread

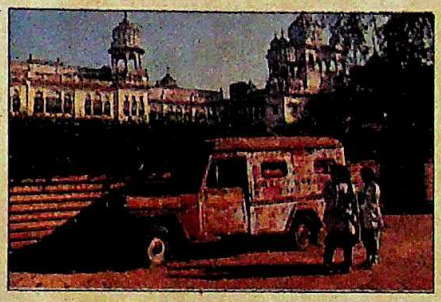
Children, tomorrow's citizens, are subjected to unbelievable torture and cruelty across the country daily. Often the abusers are parents and relatives. Worse, it's not even considered an anomaly. A slice of this hideous reality in Gujarat.

SPECIAL FEATURE 116

Harvest of Hatred

As 1986 drew to a close, killings of Bengalis by tribal extremists escalated, and the toll crossed a hundred in Tripura. As the Centre and state wrangled over possible solutions, the ethnic strife showed indications of getting out of hand.

SPECIAL REPORT 68



Terminal Illness

The prestigious King George's Medical College in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, completed 75 years recently. All that it had to show for its platinum jubilee was a strike by its entire staff, steadily deteriorating services and a shocking state of affairs. A report.

INVESTIGATION 134

Fading Out Slowly

The new cinema movement—identified with film makers like Shyam Benegal, Govind Nihalani and Ketan Mehta—is fast losing ground. Rising costs, bored viewers and TV and video threaten to wipe out serious cinema for good. A requiem.

CINEMA 148

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'ETHNIQUE' DESIGNS IN EL

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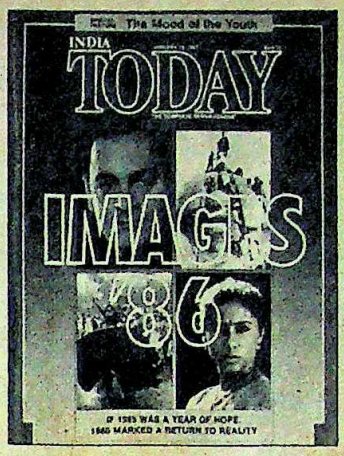

CANDID COVERAGE

Thank you for your brilliant, kaleidoscopic coverage of all the facets of the year that was ("Images '86", January 15). Undeniably, the nation rode roughshod over '86 as events in the Punjab, West Bengal as well as in other parts of the country reveal. The frequent cabinet reshuffles and the bristling issues between India and its neighbours have obviously not helped matters either. We should heed the lessons from the harsh experiences of yesteryear and proceed with due caution.

Sagar — SACHIN SAKSENA

■ Your cover story gave an excellent synopsis of the major events of the year. Exquisite photographs, accompanied by a racy and perceptive narrative, make this an issue to remember.

New Delhi — SUSHIL MEHTANI

■ Your article was very informative and well-designed indeed. In my view, it is the solution to the Mizoram problem, the accord with Farooq Abdullah and the visit of Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev that is the key to our prime minister's policies.

New Delhi — Major BALBIR SINGH

YOUTH FORUM

Your special feature ("The Mood of the Youth", January 15), has truly represented the feeling of the younger generation. Growing discontent among the nation's youth will not be overcome by superficial demonstrations like Apna Utsav. Unemployment is such a serious problem that they have begun to have an increasingly pessimistic outlook. Unless a definite policy is outlined to provide bread and butter, the cycle of progress is bound to be reversed.

Bhilwara — PRAKASH NAWAL

■ Your feature on youth was authentic, bold and frank. Indian youth is becoming frustrated and demoralised due to lack of adequate employment. Even the engineers, scientists and doctors graduating every year are not getting suitable jobs. The Government should take necessary measures to tackle this problem.

Jamshedpur — B.N. BOSE

■ Congratulations for your article explaining the problems of the youth. But the question remains, what is being done to resolve these issues, and how effectively?

New Delhi — MANISH JAIN

■ *The statement attributed to Abha Kundra in the article on youth had actually been made by Sandeep Maheshwari, also of Bhopal.* —Editor

BALANCED ANALYSIS

Congratulations for your balanced analysis of the Punjab situation ("What can be Done?", December 31). Your scheme for resolution of the tangle merits serious consideration. But Barnala is sincerely trying to implement the Punjab Accord under extremely difficult conditions. It is a measure of his willpower that he is fighting these challenges. He should not be removed, rather his position should be strengthened.

New Delhi — Brigadier J.S. BAWA

■ The answer to your question, "What can be done?", is very simple: reunite Punjab. Politicians won't like it, so keep them away for three years, by handing over the administration to the army. Formation of linguistic states was a mistake and a very serious one as is evident in the case of Punjab and Haryana. Why don't we go in reverse gear and start the unification work from Punjab? We can then redraw the map of India on the basis of small, manageable administrative units.

Pune — M.N. BHINDE

■ The hurt to the Sikh psyche is real and is older than Operation Bluestar or the Delhi riots. Similarly, the collapse of the Hindu psyche in Punjab is also a reality which remains an untold story. Any long-term solution has to take this hurt into account. What is required is the restoration of a political, economic and social balance between the two communities on a non-sectarian basis.

Manali — SHARADA

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REAL ACTION

With reference to your article on real estate ("The State Steps In", January 15), Union Finance Minister V.P. Singh deserves a pat on the back for his will and determination. He has indeed effectively fought the sources creating black money. Tax authorities and legal experts should now put their heads together to effectively implement this law at the earliest.

New Delhi — PRAMOD GAMBHIR

DISTURBING TREND

The mounting rate of divorce cases in India, ("Divorce: Getting Common", December 31), indicates that marriage being sacred and sublime is a belief that does not hold good any longer. If this is the trend, sooner or later the old saying, marriages are made in heaven, will have to be replaced with a new one: Marriages are made in hell.

Sonepat — K. GOPAKUMAR MENON

■ Unfortunately, due to materialistic values, an excellent institution like marriage is being disrupted. No self-respecting man should demand or accept dowry. It is demeaning.

Madras — T.M. SUNDARARAMAN

■ Your article betrays the lack of a sense of proportion. The rise in the number of divorce cases appears sensational, but in what context? You have to relate these figures to total population statistics to realise their relative insignificance. Indian families have lived in harmony through the ages. A country that produced strong, dominating characters like Draupadi need not look to the West for sustenance. A hair-raising prognosis helps no one.

Varanasi — S.S. KABRA

■ The figures given by you relate to a very thin stream of society who have access to the legal system. The vast majority of couples who have been separated or divorced without the intervention of a court far outweighs the 'modern' sector. The divorce rate has therefore remained more or less static or, at best, has risen only marginally.

New Delhi — SYED SHAHABUDDIN

■ Your article is well-researched and exposes the real stigma of divorce. But I would like to point out that maintenance cases are filed under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code and not the Indian Penal Code as mentioned by you.

Pune — A.G. DESHPANDE

POLITICAL ROOTS

It is becoming increasingly evident that the real culprits in the Goa agitations ("Language of Violence", January 15) are not the people but criminal and communal elements among politicians to whom the people inadvertently gave legitimacy during the last elections.

Ruwi, Oman — F. MATHIAS

DANGEROUS PRECEDENTS

The recent style of fund allocation to the states due to go to the polls ("Political Manna", January 15), makes one question the reality of Rajiv's "clean" politics. If funds were due and justified, why were they not given earlier? And if this was due to a policy change, then why not go through the normal procedure? Rajiv is setting dangerous precedents.

New Delhi — PANNALALL MUNDHRA

SALES GIMMICK

Congratulations for the excellent write-up analysing Kapil Dev's latest fiction-thriller ("Settling Scores", December 31). When it comes to the "great little master", Kapil Dev certainly suffers from an inferiority complex. Clearly, he hopes to create a sensation by writing bitchy remarks about him because Kapil knows it is the surest way to boost the sales of his book.

Sohar, Oman — PRAKASH KOLKER

■ *By God's Decree* and *Cricket My Style*, are not Kapil's autobiographies but weapons he has used against Sunil Gavaskar. It is a shame that these two superstars are fighting like political leaders. If they continue in this manner, the Sharjah lessons may never be learnt.

Madras — K. RAMA CHANDRAN

TIMELY REMINDER

Your comment, ("Limits to Law", December 31), is a timely and forceful reminder to the powers-that-be that enacting laws one after the other will not serve to contain extremism, or for that matter, solve any problem facing the country. None of these laws have been able to create a flutter in the fiefdom of terrorists, let alone set them on the run. Political will is the need of the hour.

Ahmedabad — M.V. RAVINDRAN

LENS EYE

The beautiful Taj Mahal ("The Taj Mahal", January 15), was even more beautiful when seen through the lens' eye of Raghu Rai and surpassed all the other images of 1986. A thing of beauty is indeed, a joy forever.

Kairana — NEERAJ KUMAR BANSAL

■ Raghu Rai's pictures on the Taj are unique and fabulous. His photographs are an added attraction to the magazine's lovers.

Belgaum — POONAM JOSHI

SPLIT SOLUTION

Your special report ("Area of Darkness", December 31), presents in a capsule the tragedy of Bihar. It has become a battlefield for landlord mafias, coalfield thugs, lawless policemen and class-cum-caste groups blinded by mutual hatred and driven by greed. The solution to the problem is to split up Bihar into three viable states: only then will it be possible to proceed with radical reforms, else its staggering backwardness will continue to defy all attempts at amelioration.

Hyderabad — K. MANIMALA

■ The trouble in central Bihar has been going on unabated, making a happy hunting ground for petty politicians who exploit this highly explosive situation for their own nefarious gains. There is absolutely no administration worth the name in Bihar. As a result of the infighting between Bindeshwari Dubey and fomer chief minister Jaganath Mishra, the worst sufferers are the people.

Muzzafarpur — HARESHWAR SHARMA

STRONG STAND

With reference to your article on the Sino-Indian border ("Face to Face", December 31), India should take a leaf from the book of history of these nations. India needs to face the Chinese pressures with equal force. Compromise is not the answer. No concessions that we make are going to stop China from asking for more. In fact, as long as the present position of face to face persists between India and China, there will be no peace for India. For, China will readily play the border card whenever there is inclement political weather in India.

New Delhi — TASHI PHUNTSOK
Joint secretary, Tibetan Youth Congress

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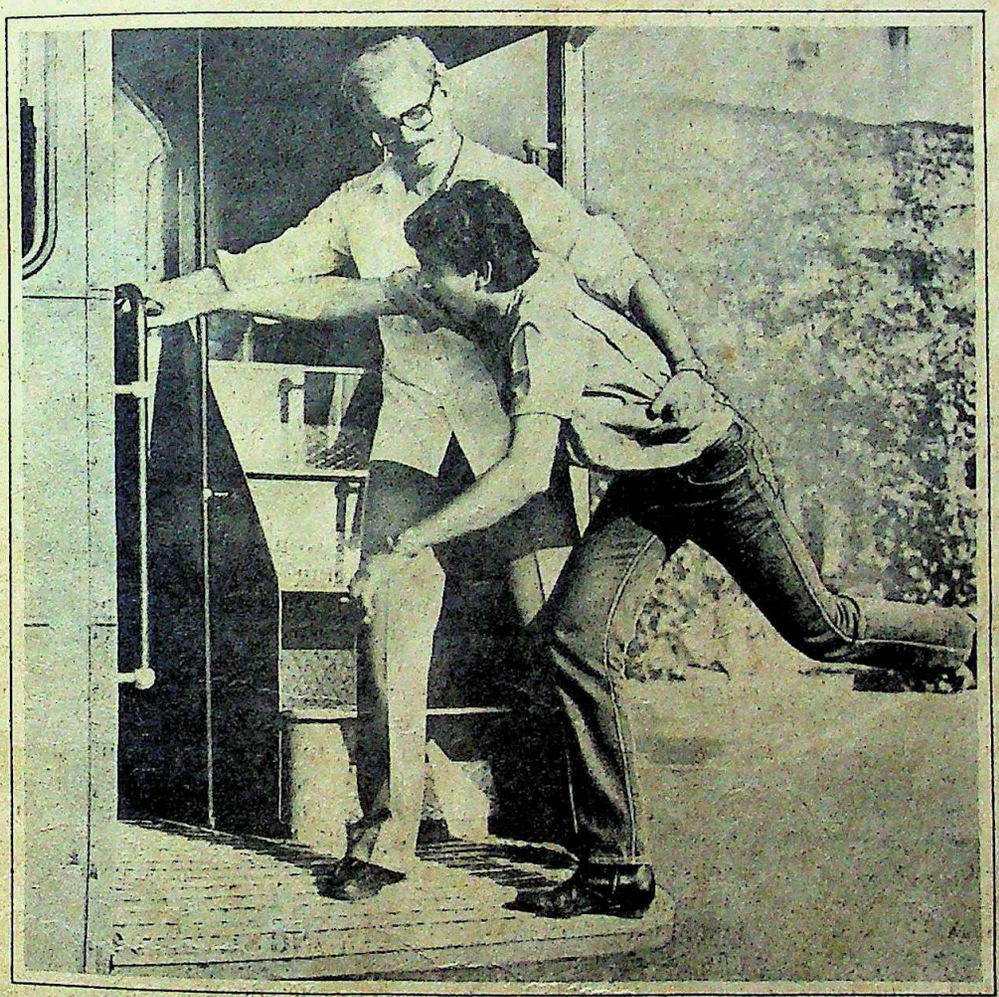

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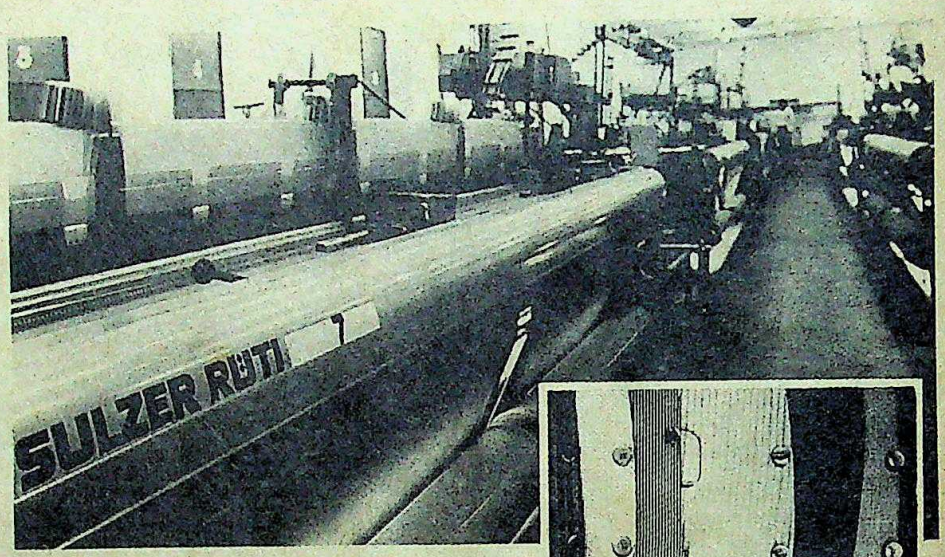

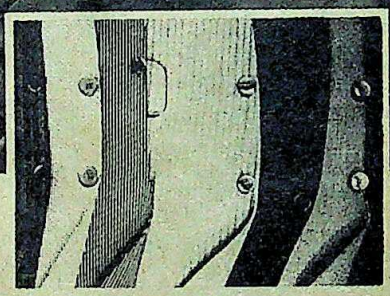

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ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

- Prestigious Modern Group Company.
- Existing, Dividend paying Company.
- Dynamic management of the Modern Group with an excellent track record.
  - Profit before interest and depreciation increased from Rs. 22 lakhs in 1980-81 to Rs. 104 lakhs in 1985-86.
  - Turnover increased from Rs. 340 lakhs in 1980-81 to Rs. 1503 lakhs in 1985-86.
  - Net Worth grew from Rs. 58 lakhs as at 30.4.1981 to Rs. 224 lakhs* as at 30.6.1986.
- Equity Share of Rs. 20.00 (market price as quoted in Delhi Stock Exchange on 10.12.1986) being offered at par.
- Debentures.
  - Fully secured.
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  - Buy-back at par after one year.
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  - Simple interest @ 29.58% p.a. in Cumulative Scheme
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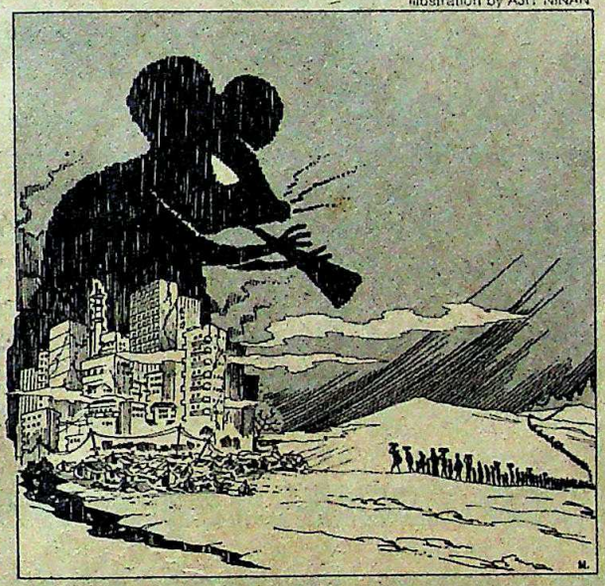
Urban Apocalypse

CALCUTTA, with half of its 9.1 million people living off the streets, has become perhaps the world's largest 'slumpolis'. In Bombay workers squashed into swift moving suburban trains take as much time to reach office as farmers on bullock-carts take to get to a village market-place. In Madras people sleep beside public water taps to be able to beat others to get their daily bucketful. And in New Delhi the sun may not shine over the ancient solar clock of Jantar Mantar—a huge 12-storey building being erected nearby could block it out.

India's cities have become cesspools of squalor, rot, confusion and shameless urban mismanagement. Town planners, with their outdated master plans, grandiose schemes and empty civic coffers, have been able to do no more than circumambulate, like headless chickens, the new wasteland of aimless macadam and rivers of filth that most cities have degenerated into. The cities have crawled sideways. They have spiralled skywards. But still, by last year the housing shortage in urban areas had touched a disastrous six million. A third of the people in urban areas live in shacks with gunny sacks as doors and pavements as toilets. Another half of them live shrouded in a concrete jungle of flats, not able to see beyond their neighbour's window. Parks and airy spaces are being gobbled up by hungry builders. And skyrise monstrosities have sprouted in the best planned areas of most cities.

Illustration by AJIT NINAN



Everywhere, overloaded city civic services are collapsing under the ceaseless hammering of the population bomb. City buses and suburban trains are bursting at their seams with commuters. Power shortages are common with most cities experiencing 'rolling blackouts'. Water is even scarcer with per capita supply in cities one of the lowest in the world. The less said about sewers the better. Phones scarcely work in most houses. Pot-holes only get deeper. Anarchy cascades down on what loosely pass for roads and highways in the name of traffic. The cities wallow in the filth and slime of their own pollution and congestion and slowly choke themselves to death.

And the giant melting pot of cultures and life-styles that cities have become is fast turning into a festering boil. Along with the buildings crime is going up. Suicides are up, so is unemployment. And social tensions are hitting new highs. As traditional neighbourhoods wither away or perish altogether, people fall prey to loneliness, isolation, and anomie in which television, notwithstanding its alien values, becomes the people's best friend. Through it the deprived of our cities and slums can switch on and off a world of instant *maya*.

Yet the pied piper-like clarion call of cities continues to exert a magnetic attraction. The endless stream of migrants in the last three decades has become a sea whose human debris has clogged most cities. India's urban population has grown from just 60 million before Independence to a staggering 156 million in 1981 and now constitutes 23.7 per cent of the total population. A fourth of them huddle together in just 12 metropolitan cities. And in Rajiv's 2001 the urban population threatens to swell to a mammoth 350 million giving India the dubious distinction of having one of the largest urban populations in the world.

The urban behemoth has to be tamed. But how? To many the answer seems crystal clear. Develop smaller cities and towns to act as "counter-magnets" to metropolitan cities. But in the sixth plan an effort to develop 231 towns as alternative growth centres didn't work out because states dragged their feet over the issue. The Central Government recently launched the ambitious National Capital Region Development Plan to halt Delhi's stupendous growth by developing cities in neighbouring states but it still hasn't set aside enough funds to get the project moving.

There is no time for vacillation. The solution doesn't lie in making existing cities grow bigger or developing suburbs that soon become uglier, phantasmagorical extensions of the parent city. The umbilical cord of job prospects, civic amenities and entertainment that sucks migrants to the big cities has to be cut and fragmented in order to develop feeder lines to newer towns and cities.

Funds for developing alternative growth centres have to be found and development plans implemented post haste. The national housing bank proposed sometime ago to fund and coordinate building activity has to be set up to halt the slumming of cities. Cheaper building material needs to be devised to cut costs.

The need to decentralise has become paramount. Central and state governments must take the lead by shifting less important departments and offices of public sector undertakings away from state capitals. Industries that have no direct bearing on the consumer needs of big cities should not be allowed to come up within its environs. Instead, incentives should be provided to set them up in smaller towns as is already being done in many states. In the long run planners would find it cheaper to fund development of newer towns rather than pump money into big cities to improve their overloaded civic services.

All this needs to be done on a war-footing before the hum of cities, as Lord Byron once prophetically remarked, becomes the sounds of human torture.

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Zia's Unease

● South Block analysts have detected perceptible discomfiture within the Pakistani Government—and a consequent softening towards India during the last few weeks. President Zia has been rattled by a cooling in popular sympathies for Afghanistan after the Karachi riots (in which about 500 Urdu-speaking Muslims have been sl-

aughtered by Pathans, many of whom are Afghan refugees) and Mikhail Gorbachev's offer to pull out Soviet troops from Afghanistan within 18 months, a development that jeopardises the logic of increased US military aid. And the massive Indian military exercises on the western front are also causing considerable alarm on the other side of the border.

Quick to take advantage, India first despatched Home Secretary C.G. Somiah and then Foreign Secretary A.P. Venkateswaran to Islamabad for high-level "normalisation talks" with several offers, including a new proposal for a friendship treaty, the opening up of the Khokrapar-Munabar border checkpost in Rajasthan to facilitate travel between the two countries, a free exchange of books, periodicals and students, more trade and easing of visa and police reporting requirements for Pakistanis.

Pakistan responded cautiously but favourably. The most noticeable shift was that for the first time, it tacitly accepted as valid the Indian complaint that Sikh extremists operating in Punjab were being trained and armed there and promised to investigate and put a halt to it. "This is the furthest Pakistan could go without openly acknowledging its complicity," said one diplomat.

Political Gloss

● Last fortnight Uttar Pradesh Health Minister Lokpati Tripathi, who is also president of the state Olympic Association, held a gala press conference at a New Delhi five-star hotel to announce plans for the Indira Gandhi Gold Cup Hockey Tournament, organised by the association, in which eight countries are to participate. Reporters were issued specially-packaged glossy material, in expensive jackets. But the material turned out to be a painful disappointment. It contained not

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

the details about the upcoming sports event or information about participants but rather elaborate propaganda about the 20-Point Programme, glossy mugshots of Rajiv Gandhi, and copies of speeches by Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh. With that the fine distinction between sports and politics was finally obliterated.

Riding Roughshod

● Morale among security agencies guarding the prime minister has not been particularly high after the Rajghat episode. A recent incident in the Andamans involving a senior officer of the Special Protection Group (SPG) has given it a further knock. Rajiv, vacationing there, wanted the driver of the white Ambassador he was travelling in to go

faster. The driver resisted, aware that the bullet-proof, air-conditioned car had a speed limit. A disgusted Rajiv finally took the wheel and raced the car. Expectedly, the car heated up and stopped. But the already-annoyed prime minister really lost his cool when the replacement turned out to be a black Ambassador—one he dislikes.

The unfortunate recipient of his wrath was N.R. Reddy, deputy director of the SPG. A furious Rajiv instructed his secretary Sarla Grewal that Reddy be flown back to the mainland. Grewal resisted carrying out the order, and later asked Rajiv if he still insisted on it. Thereupon, she was instructed to accompany Reddy on a special flight back. A distraught Reddy was last fortnight trying to figure out what to do about his uncertain future. Informed sources feel that Rajiv was taking out his wrath over the Rajghat case on Reddy, who is being blamed for not taking the prime minister by a different route even after the first shot had been fired.

Convention Centre

● The prime minister's image of a whimsical globe-trotter, Congressmen say, is increasingly rubbing off on the ruling party and the Government. Both, it is being increasingly said, are placing more emphasis on international gloss and glitter rather than domestic bread and butter. Members of the ruling party, as well as several senior ministers, are fed up to the gills with the spate of international conferences organised by the Government and the party.

At least half a dozen such conferences have been held during the last year alone, the latest being a two-day international symposium on apartheid organised by the Youth Congress(I) at a cost of Rs 40 lakh and attended by 167 delegates. Next is a 15-nation conference in the memory of Indira Gandhi, with the theme

"Towards a New Beginning". Some key ministers who have met Rajiv in recent weeks have candidly told him that their constituents have begun to frown on these wasteful extravaganzas and would rather have the party and the Government concentrate on rurally-oriented meetings. In other words, how about a new beginning at home?

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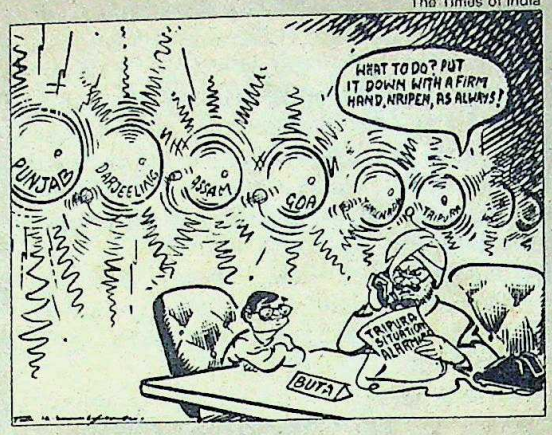

- *It is not the job of the ruling party to strengthen the Opposition.*
  ■ VASANT SATHE in *Sunday Review*

- *The present Congress(I) is not a Congress party at all.*
  ■ PRANAB MUKHERJEE, president, Rashtriya Samajwadi Congress

- *We are no killers but law-enforcing men.*
  ■ JULIO F. RIBEIRO in *The Sunday Observer*

- *I am in the mainstream. What Ghising says is his problem. It is not my problem.*
  ■ NAR BAHADUR BHANDARI, when asked if he supported the Gorkhaland movement, quoted in *The Statesman*

- *The competition is so strong now that anybody who is inactive or incompetent cannot stay in any position in the Congress.*
  ■ ANAND SHARMA, Youth Congress(I) president, in *Sunday Mail*

- *It is a very vulgar trend in journalism today to peg issues down to personalities.*
  ■ RAJEEV SETHI in *Probe India*

- *What matters in any individual is the background and norms he inherits, and what I have inherited are middle class norms. This has been much more important in shaping my personality than any imposed discipline at Lever.*
  ■ ASHOK GANGULY, chairman, Hindustan Lever, in *Business India*

- *The first interview, like the first kiss, is hard to forget.*
  ■ M.V. KAMATH in *Imprint*

- *I have come to the conclusion that it gives people immense pleasure to see authority being pulled down. It shows them that we are truly democratic.*
  ■ NALINI SINGH, television personality, in *Sunday*

- *Run...run...you have to defeat all...fly....This has been the command I feel in my being.*
  ■ P.T. USHA in *Weekend Review*

- *I am so incurably lazy...sleeping is my favourite hobby.*
  ■ ARJUNA RANATUNGA, Sri Lankan cricketer, in *The Sunday Observer*

- *I always used to think of myself as an ugly duckling at school...which is why I believe more in talent than looks.*
  ■ PADMINI KOLHAPURE in *Telegraph Magazine*

- *I want to forget those years of solitary confinement. My Rajneesh phase is over, once and for all....Now, I hate the very mention of his name.*
  ■ VINOD KHANNA in *Newstime*

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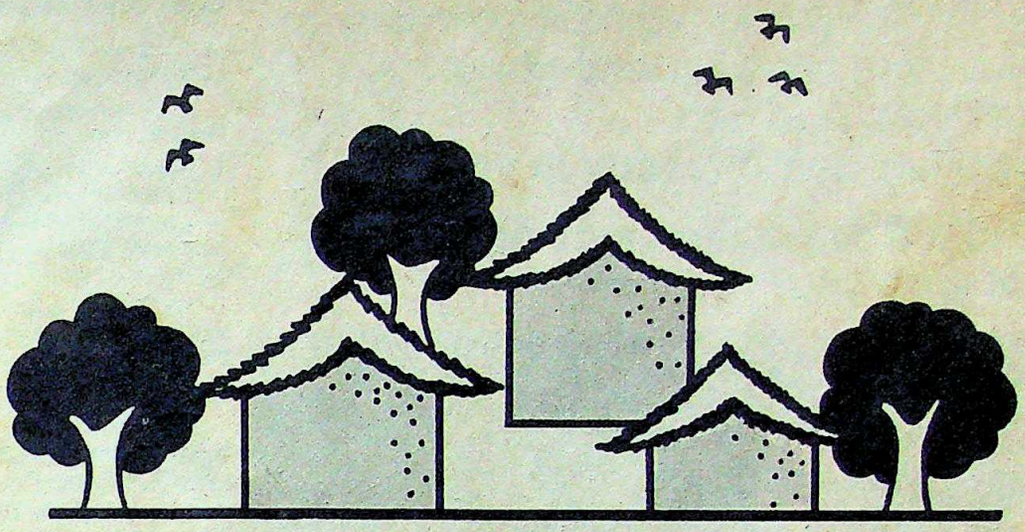

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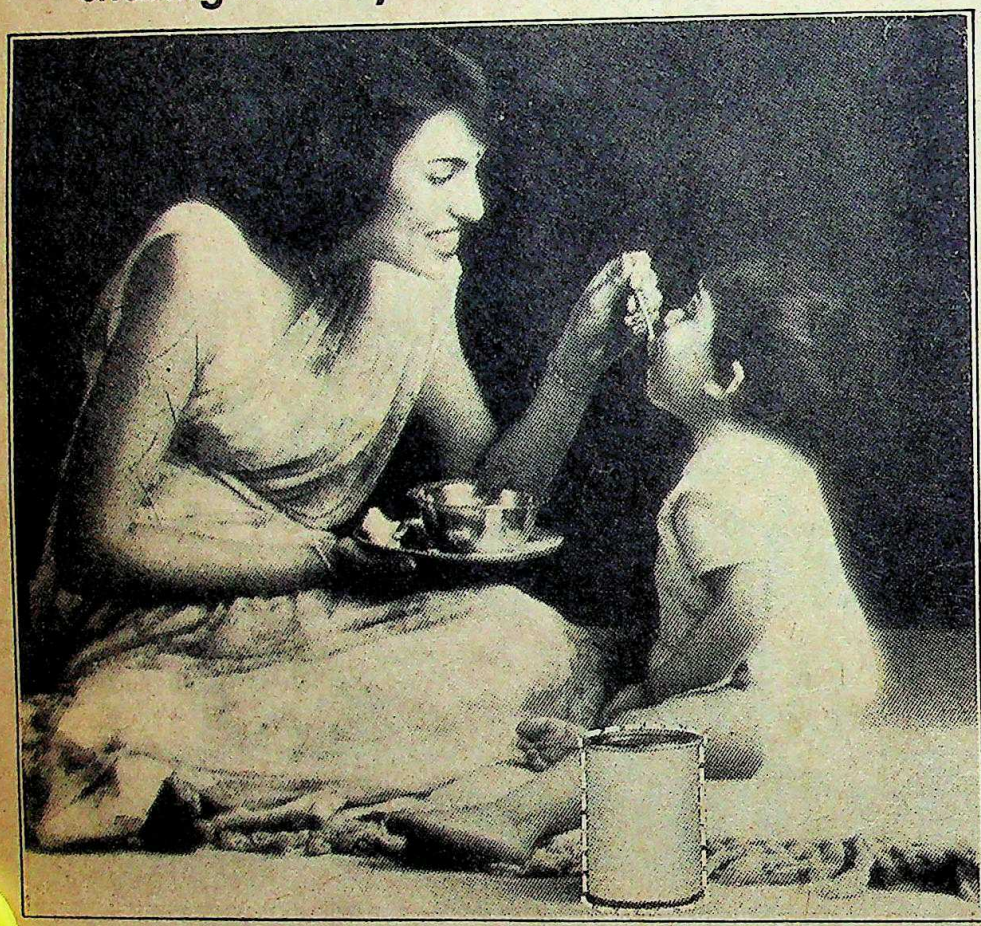

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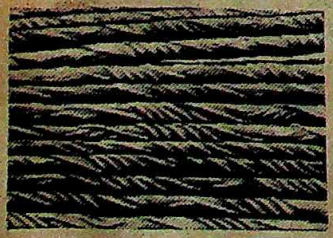

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VIP DOGS

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

■ Empress Ts'u-hzi, Imperial China's dowager empress walked, talked, and travelled in the company of her ribboned Chihuahua perched regally on a silk cushion. Interestingly, the Himachal Pradesh Government has taken a leaf out of the empress' royal book. According to records for the last financial year, four dogs, one bitch and a pup were treated as state guests and given the same treatment as their masters.

The records show that five VIPs—this includes a member of the fourth estate—who were accompanied by their dogs, were treated as state guests. The red carpet was rolled out on their arrival and the VIDs (very important dogs) and VIPs walked out of the Government vehicle into the suites reserved for them in state rest-houses.

The Government's intentions are honourable but the drain on the exchequer has been severe. During 1985-86, the state Government declared 1,574 persons as state guests, and spent over Rs 30 lakh on their accommodation and transport. The amount seems considerable, but considering that no distinction is made between man and beast in qualifying to be a state guest, it isn't really surprising.

SPIRITED BURGLAR

■ It is commonly believed that burglars are all brutalised characters who will go to any length to ensure the success of their nocturnal missions. But the man who broke into a residence in an Alleppey home seemed a class apart. Entering the house which the family had left behind securely bolted, he quickly filled his empty airbag with Rs 1 lakh in currency notes, gold ornaments and some electronic gadgets.

Then, pulling out a quarter bottle of rum, he fished around in his host's well-stocked refrigerator and proceeded to plough his way through a quiet dinner by candle light. The cold potatoes, generous hunks of salted meat and bread, were all washed down with pure and undiluted swigs of rum.

But the sumptuous feast and generous quaffs slowly began to have their effect and as the uninvited guest rose from the table, he was floating on cloud nine. Reaching into the bulging airbag he had packed before dinner, he began to draw out hundred rupee notes and strewed them around the room with gay abandon. Soon after, he sauntered out minus the airbag leaving a trail of gold behind.

OMINOUS RING

■ Court marriages are still associated with couples who have eloped and wish to formalise their relationship, before their wrathful parents get to them. Consequently, most marriage rooms are dark and depressingly crowded chambers, with grim magistrates and anxious couples queueing up two by two, waiting to get over the legalities of getting married. But

room number 137 in Delhi's Tis Hazari Courts is quite unlike any other marriage room or even unlike any other room in that rambling, shoddy building. Wine-red carpets, sofas, woodwork and an assortment of well-tended potted plants, makes it look more like an elegant lounge, rather than a place of legal activity.

It is rumoured that the room was given a face-lift in response to a number of complaints. But what still remains disconcerting is the last statement couples have to read out before the magistrate can declare them lawfully wedded. The declaration, one aspect of the Special Marriages Act of 1954, ends by saying that if any of the statements made by them is false, then they are liable to be imprisoned. Legally this may be desirable, but it does give the whole happy occasion an ominous, unpropitious ring.

LOVE COLLECTION

■ It is not uncommon to meet or hear of avid collectors of stamps, match-boxes, cigarette packets and sometimes even shoes. But collecting love letters is indeed a novel and unduplicated hobby. The Rajya Sabha was recently informed by an Andhra Pradesh member of his chance meeting with a postman who collected love letters instead of delivering them.

The retired postman apparently came to the parliamentarian for the express purpose of reading out a love letter written in chaste Telugu. When the member asked the postman how the letter had landed in his possession, the unabashed collector replied simply that it had been his hobby throughout his long and eventful service to collect well-composed

love letters. He even showed the MP a bundle of several hundred such letters, part of his larger, well-endowed treasure. On tiring of his retired existence, he would leaf through these letters like anyone else would his favourite novel. But how he guessed the contents of the letter before delivering it at some anxious lover's house is anybody's guess.

—Compiled by ANN NINAN

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THE MUSLIMS

A Contentious Call

THE difference was dramatic. On December 23, when Syed Shahabuddin called a press conference to convey the decision of the newly-formed All-India Babri Masjid Conference (AIBMC) calling on Muslims to boycott the Republic Day celebrations, barely a handful of journalists turned up. Nineteen days later, when the Coordination Committee set up by the conference met again to endorse the call, a battery of newsmen and photographers were waiting outside Shahabuddin's house in New Delhi to hear the outcome.

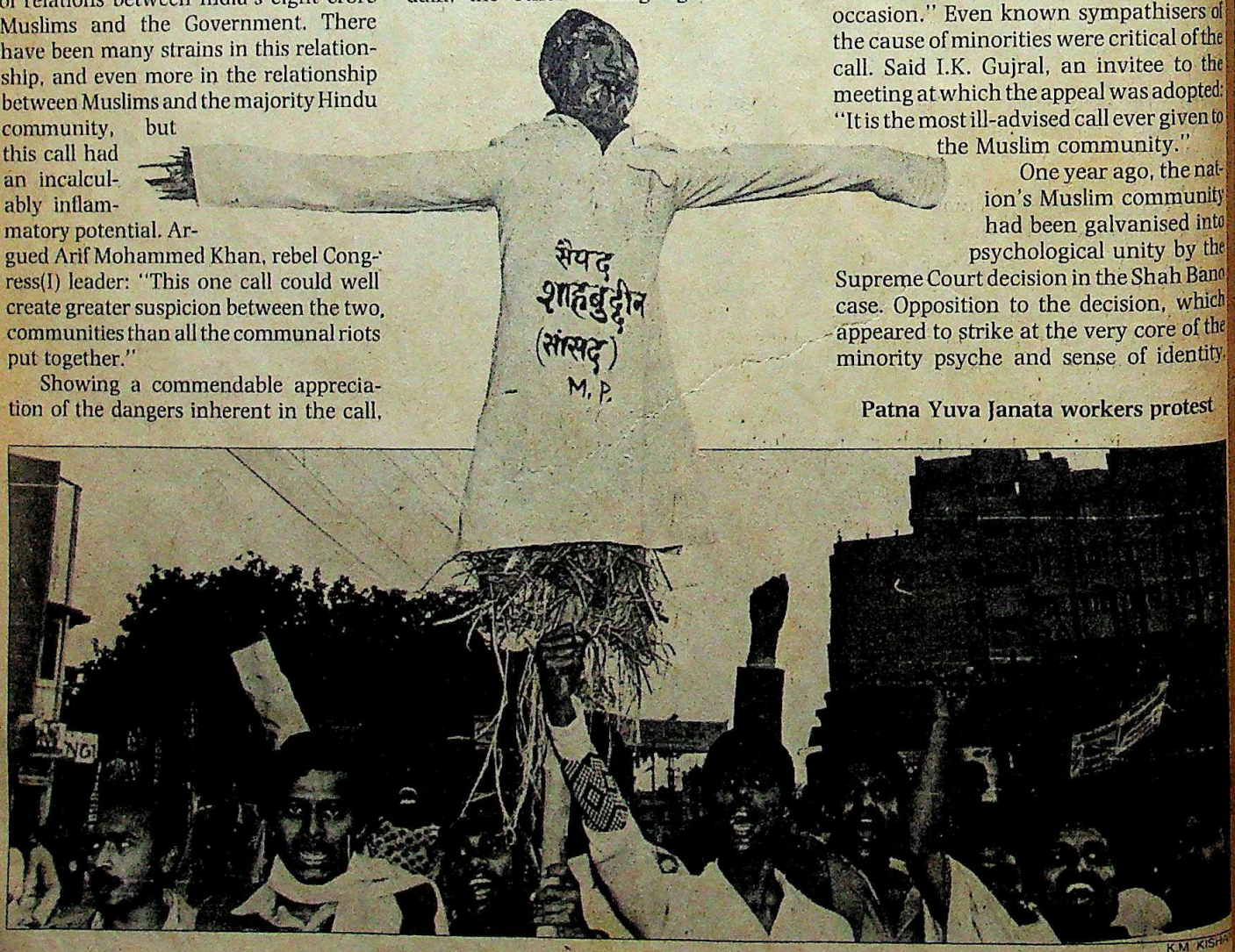
For good reason. In the interregnum, the boycott call—which Shahabuddin ineffectively tried to defend as a call to Muslims to "not associate themselves with official functions"—had blown up into a controversy that threatened to become a tragic watershed in the history of relations between India's eight crore Muslims and the Government. There have been many strains in this relationship, and even more in the relationship between Muslims and the majority Hindu community, but this call had an incalculably inflammatory potential. Argued Arif Mohammed Khan, rebel Congress(I) leader: "This one call could well create greater suspicion between the two communities than all the communal riots put together."

Showing a commendable appreciation of the dangers inherent in the call, Muslim leaders from an amazingly wide spectrum came out in opposition to the call. Muslim Congress(I) ministers and MPs, leaders of opposition parties, vice-chancellors, editors, jurists, administrators, industrialists—virtually every responsible opinion-maker in the community—criticised the boycott call as inflammatory, irresponsible and anti-national. Said a joint appeal issued by over two dozen eminent Muslims: "(The call will) further provoke inter-communal tensions and conflict and above all, alienate the great and creative Muslim community from the common heritage of democratic India." Argued Rizwan Ahmed, editor of Patna-based Urdu daily, *Azimabad Express*: "This call is suicidal for the community."

The purveyors of communal politics behind the call—apart from Shahabuddin, the other leading figure in the Coordination Committee is Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) President Ibrahim Sulaiman Sait—have never been so isolated within the community. The same forces were under attack last year also on the Divorce Bill, but then they had powerful support from Islamic scholars and Congress(I) Muslim leaders. This time, even those who were ranged on opposite sides over the Divorce Bill were speaking from the same platform. Both Union Minister Zia-ur-Rahman Ansari, a strident supporter of the Bill, and Moonis Raza, the vice-chancellor of Delhi University who had just as fervently opposed the Bill, condemned the boycott call at a seminar called by the AICC(I). Said Ansari: "Calling for a boycott is like banging your head against a wall. This is madness."

Janata Party President Chandra Shekhar, always very accommodative of the confrontationist politics of Shahabuddin, asked the Muslim leaders to reconsider their call. Said Chandra Shekhar: "The Republic Day is a day of rejoicing for the nation. Whatever may be the provocation, no community should do anything to minimise the importance of the occasion." Even known sympathisers of the cause of minorities were critical of the call. Said I.K. Gujral, an invitee to the meeting at which the appeal was adopted: "It is the most ill-advised call ever given to the Muslim community."

One year ago, the nation's Muslim community had been galvanised into psychological unity by the Supreme Court decision in the Shah Bano case. Opposition to the decision, which appeared to strike at the very core of the minority psyche and sense of identity



Patna Yuva Janata workers protest

K.M. KISHAN

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AKHBAR-E-NAV

Shahabuddin (third from right) and others at Babri Masjid meet

gained the semblence of a nationwide movement as intellectuals, mullahs, middle class housewives, traders and labourers joined together in condemning the verdict and threatening a mass agitation for its revocation. Suddenly, obscure Muslim politicians and organisations gained prominence as the harbingers of a new Muslim politico-religious movement. Sensing the volatility of the issue, the Government hastily soothed it with the ointment of the Muslim Women's Bill.

IT is significant that the Muslim community—which was swayed by its leaders on the Shah Bano issue so far as to threaten to show disrespect to the Constitution—has now shunned a similar call on the Babri Masjid imbroglio, a matter about which Muslims feel equally strongly in Uttar Pradesh. It became increasingly obvious from this conundrum as it was played out last fortnight that the Muslim leaders had not only misjudged the character of the bandwagon they were riding, but had also exposed to public view their totally exaggerated communal self-importance. And the Muslim community had shown that while it would agitate over religious issues and against discrimination, it was not willing to be led into sacrificing its position under the Indian sun.

Between Shah Bano and Babri Masjid lie critical distinctions. In the first case Muslims felt, rightly or wrongly, that the very reference point for their existence and preservation of their identity—a special clause within the Constitution—had been rent asunder. They believed that if the Constitution itself had been rendered a toothless protector, any protest was justified. In the Babri Masjid case, as the Muslims so amply demonstrated, the community was neither united nor willing to pay heed to calls for anti-national brinkmanship over what was essentially a local Hindu-Muslim tussle over a disputed place of worship. They did not see in this controversy a situation in which the Government appeared to be pitted against the community's sentiments and were therefore unwilling to participate in a desecration of Indian nationhood. Most thinking Muslims, even when they protest injustices, imagined or real, still use the Constitution as a starting point. And they also realise that communal conflagrations, in which they have suffered, are not the same as organised religious persecution.

In choosing to single out Republic Day, the event marking the birth of the Indian Constitution, the AIBMC leaders chose not only the wrong symbol but also exposed themselves as opportunistic communalists who believed that they could direct the Muslim angst into a display of anti-national brinkmanship.

Muslims of all shades reacted with alacrity. They questioned first the grassroots support of the AIBMC. Its constituents—the Babri Masjid Action Committees of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, and the Babri Masjid Restoration Committee of the Majlis-e-Mushawarat—can claim no all-India following. All the three bodies comprise politicians of limited appeal.

Most important, Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi, president of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board, which represents a cross-section of Muslim sects and religious thought, declined to attend the conference that called for the boycott. In fact, Nadvi was the first to oppose the call issued by Syed Shahabuddin for Muslims to agitate last year against the reopening of the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi lock following an adverse court decision in Faizabad. It soon became obvious, gauging the mood in Shahabuddin's own backyard in Bihar, that the wily MP is neither a national leader of the Muslim community nor a *Khalifatul Muslimeen* (undisputed Muslim religious head) to whom rank and file Muslims may

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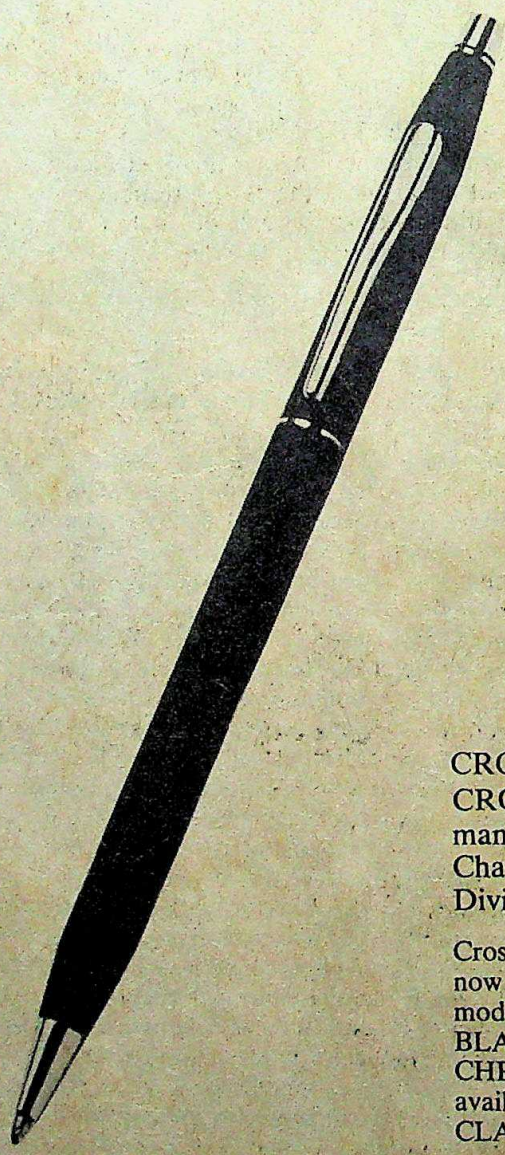

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be obliged to pay serious heed.

Shahabuddin argues that the call is justified because of two reasons: the takeover of the Babri Masjid is the wish of Hindu chauvinist forces wanting to square up history's account with Muslims; and the Government's inaction on restoring the staus quo ante is proof that it "does not have the guts to defend the Constitution". "Therefore," he concludes, "this government has no business to celebrate the Constitution. Therefore, this celebration is a farce. Therefore, we shall not participate."

Shahabuddin maintains that all mosques have equal sanctity but Islam recognises the religious sanctity, of only three mosques: the ones at Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. Muslims worship Allah, not his houses. The Babri Masjid issue has yet to become one of nationwide concern for Muslims. Babri Masjid committees have been formed only in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. Even Muslims in other Hindi heartland states, let alone the south, have yet to come to the streets to demand its restoration. Said Hakim Rais Ahmed of Sambal: "This is a purely political call given by destructive people. *Yeh sab rahzan hain, rahbar nahin* (they are pirates, not leaders)."

That the politics of emotion being played out by Shahabuddin and company became an embarrassing mirror of their political ambitiousness was aptly evident in this summation by Syed Adibuzzaman Rizvi, a lawyer from Hazaribagh: "These so-called Muslim leaders have always tried to seize opportunities to emerge as the spokesmen for the community; but every time their plans are defeated by the Muslims themselves. They must realise that we are a new generation of Muslims and are not easily swayed by these kinds of appeals from clerics and mullahs." In fact, people from a wide cross-section wondered aloud why undue importance was being

SYED SHAHABUDDIN

Mixed Up

SYED Shahabuddin, 50, is a bundle of contradictions. He has a brilliant intellect but a narrow vision. He is articulate but he is convincing fewer and fewer people. He is a bright ex-diplomat who entered politics because he believed good men should enter public life. But even his closest friends now think he is a malevolent influence. He is secular in his personal life but patently communal in his politics.

His heart bleeds for the underprivileged but he sees only Muslim hurts. He deliberately named the journal he edits *Muslim India* but he refuses to concede criticism that the title is deliberately provocative. He says he speaks for the Muslims because nobody else does but his most bitter critics are Muslims. He is driven by the desire to address the wounds of his community but he takes a stand only on issues which do not concern their real grievances. He says his role model is Maulana Abul Kalam Azad but his confrontational politics is more in the mould of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. He says he is not trying to emerge as the "sole spokesman" of the community but he can't resist the temptation to boast that he told Minister of State for Defence Arun Singh in the Central Hall of Parliament last month: "I am standing between the Government and the Muslim masses and I won't do that any longer." He is very conscious of his Indian identity but he talks of getting Arab lawyers for arguing the Babri Masjid case.

He argues that the insecurity among Muslims cannot be addressed if the issues troubling them are not brought out in the open. But the pitch at which he argues their case only ends up offending most ears. He says he is not trying to capitalise on the community's insecurity but appeals such as the Republic Day boycott can only accentuate this very insecurity. He wants Muslims to be equal partners in the nation's destiny but he does not concentrate his energies on ensuring that the Muslims take full advantage of the opportunities they have. Among his friends he is known as a reasonable man but he refuses to accept that steps like the Republic Day boycott can only increase communal tension. Before his latest call, many liberal Hindus were willing to listen to him; now they too are convinced that he is a rabid communalist.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Shahabuddin: a narrow vision

He is a keen student of history but he does not seem to realise that his latest call marks a tragic watershed for his politics. He has been a student of mass politics from his days as a leftist university leader but he has misread the Muslim mind in the Republic Day call: he does not realise that all the rights for Muslims flow from the same Constitution that he is asking the Muslims to dishonour. He wants a solution to the Babari Masjid issue but he does not realise that this cannot happen unless Hindus cooperate.

He is not power-hungry—he spurned many overtures by Mrs Gandhi—but he desperately wants to be the undisputed Muslim leader. He is consumed with ambition but he does not realise that his pursuit of it is destroying him. The growing attack on him even has his wife worried. As she told a confidante: "When he had quit the Indian Foreign Service, I used to walk with my head high. Now, I am forever explaining on his behalf."

He could have been the bridge between the Muslims and the Hindus, but he is today a shrill voice that nobody wants to hear. He could have been one of independent India's heroes; instead he has emerged as a villain in a progressively grimmer communal scenario. For the tragedy of Syed Shahabuddin, he has only himself to blame.

—AJAY KUMAR with FARZAND AHMED

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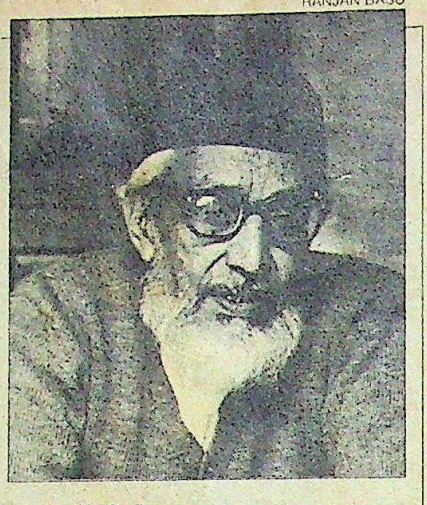
given to Shahabuddin's call in the first place.

In large parts of western Uttar Pradesh, a stronghold of Muslims, there was only scattered support for Shahabuddin and the AIBMC. Mostly, the community was confused—eager that the Babri Masjid issue in which, the community believes, an ancient mosque was captured by the Hindus through politically-tainted legal recourse, needs to be resolved by government action, and yet frightened by the boycott call. As Mufti Abdul Khalique, general secretary of Jamait-ul-Ulema-Hind in Meerut, put it: "If the purpose is just to register our protest, it is all right; but the boycott call is meaningless."

The Janata Party itself went through a convulsion of a kind last seen when it split seven years ago on the issue of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The demand grew within the party for Shahabuddin's expulsion; the party's central office was deluged by over 200 letters and telegrams asking for action against him. Three West Bengal leaders, including a national executive member, Ava Maity, quit the party in protest against Chandra Shekhar's lack of action against Shahabuddin.

The butt of the intra-party criticism against Shahabuddin was simple. He was using the umbrella of a secular party for patently communal politics. Said Janata MP and General Secretary Jaipal Reddy: "If Shahabuddin does not withdraw the call he should be expelled from the party." Party General Secretary Yashwant Sinha hinted strongly that Shahabuddin could well be expelled. Said Sinha: "Our party will not compromise on the issue of secularism."

RANJAN BASU



"If the purpose is just to register our protest, it is all right; but the boycott call is meaningless."

MUFTI ABDUL KHALIQUE
general secretary, Jamait-ul-Ulema-Hind

The Congress(I) coalition with the IUML in Kerala also came under considerable strain. The issue, in fact, first came to prominence in Kerala where the CPI(M) tried to embarrass Chief Minister K. Karunakaran for associating with the party when Ibrahim Sulaiman Sait was involved in the call. Karunakaran prevailed on the state unit of the party to dissociate itself from the boycott call but the demand grew within the Congress(I) for snapping links with the IUML.

Politicking aside, one thing was clear: by choosing the path of confrontation—Shahabuddin's semantics on "non-association" and "boycott" notwithstanding—an irresponsible and communal leadership is doing the greatest harm to the Muslims. It is still difficult to understand what the agitation on the Babri Masjid loses by withdrawing its contentious call. If the boycott call raises the temperature of communal intolerance to the point of violence, the blame will be entirely on this leadership. But, of course, the price for that will not be paid by these leaders. That tragedy will only visit the poor and the unprotected Muslim masses, the same masses these leaders claim to be speaking on behalf of.

—AJAY KUMAR with FARZAND AHMED

AYODHYA SHRINE

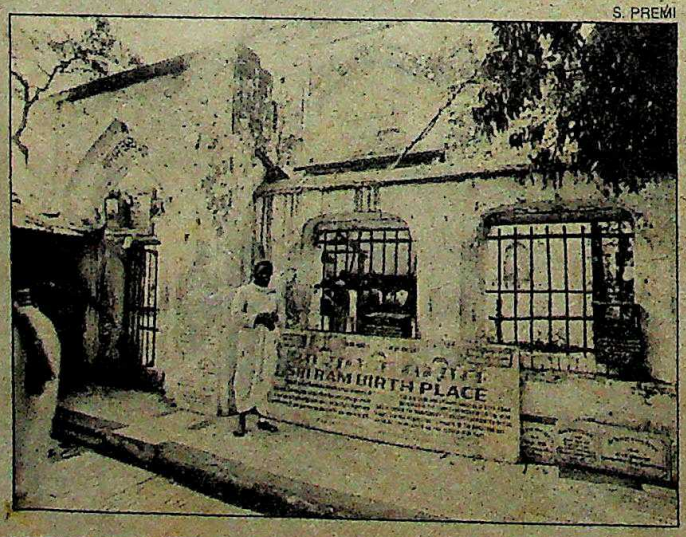
In Dispute

THE issue which triggered the boycott call is itself a matter of dispute. The Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi temple is in the centre of Ayodhya, a holy city for the Hindus. Hindus have been claiming it as the birthplace of Lord Rama for at least 150 years. But till 1949 it was, de facto, only a mosque. On the night of December 22 that year, an idol of Lord Rama mysteriously appeared inside. As tension mounted, the then district magistrate of Faizabad, K.K. Nayyar, put a lock on the outside gate of the compound. A court receiver was appointed and the court was asked to decide on the ownership of the property.

The issue remained frozen till early last year, when a Hindu filed a case in a Faizabad court asking for the lock to be removed as the original court order was not specific. The district judge granted the plea. Ever since, Hindu devotees, having thus "liberated" Ramjanmabhoomi, have been praying there. For Muslims, however, the order came as a judicial stab in the back. To them, it was handing over a disputed property to one side even before the hearing. A Babri Masjid Action Committee was set up in the state, which tried to take the issue to the streets with protest days and bandhs. Over 50 people have already died in the resulting communal incidents and police firings.

The shrine: centre of controversy

S. PREMI



In March last, Rajiv Gandhi assured a host of Muslim MPs that he would take action soon. In July, Union Home Minister Buta Singh promised a solution in Parliament. But the Government's options are limited. A writ challenging the district judge's order is still stuck at the admission stage.

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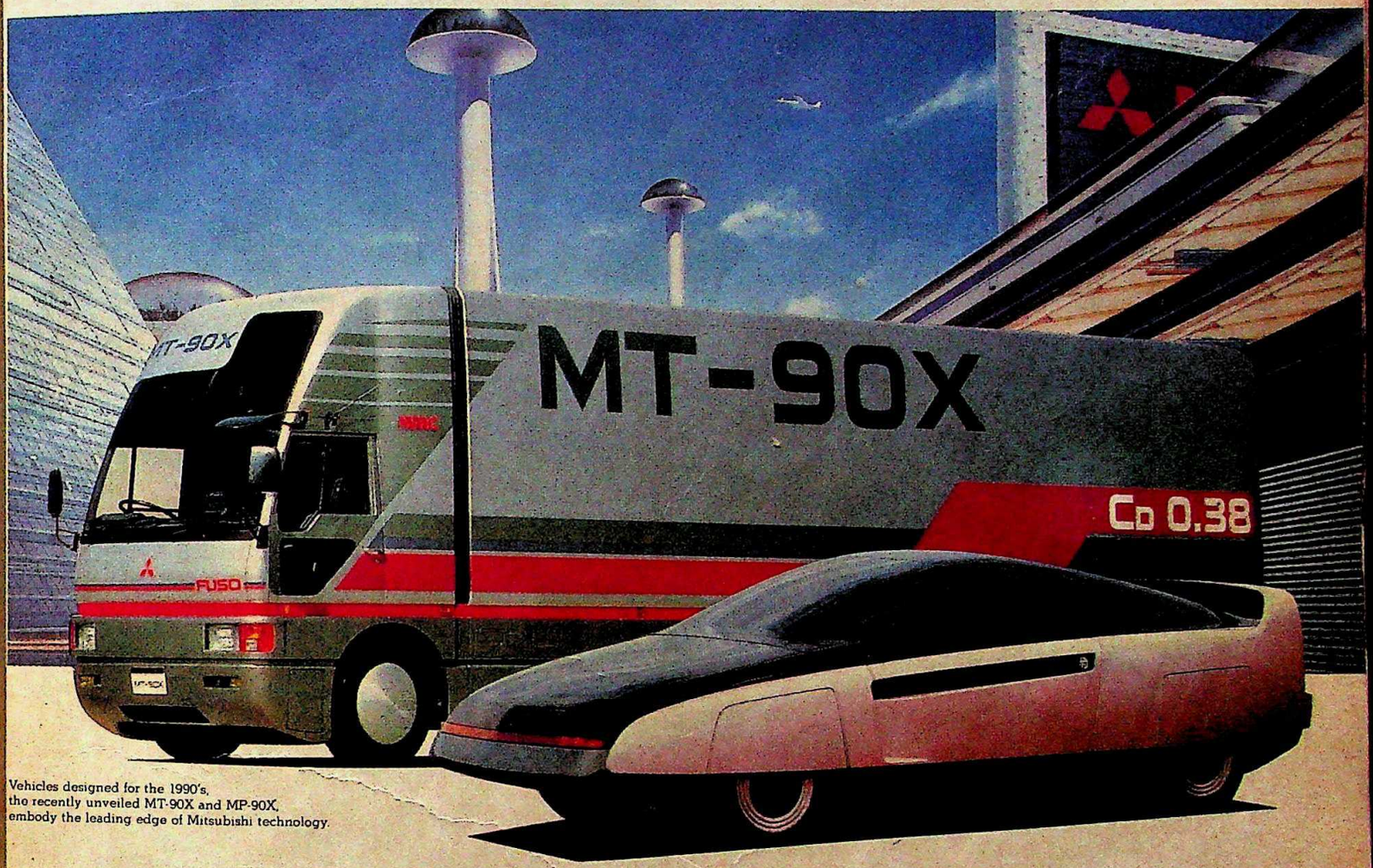

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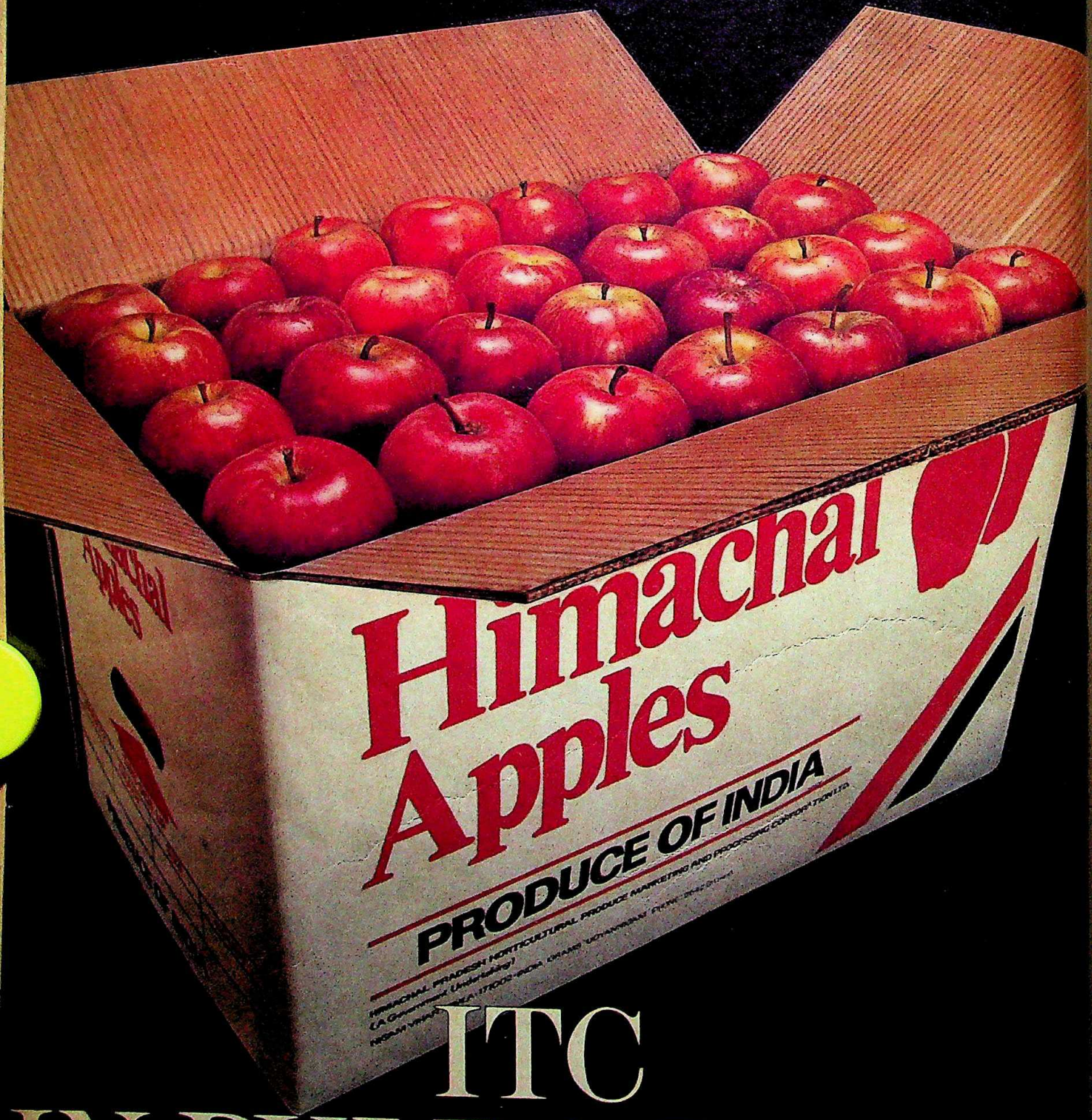

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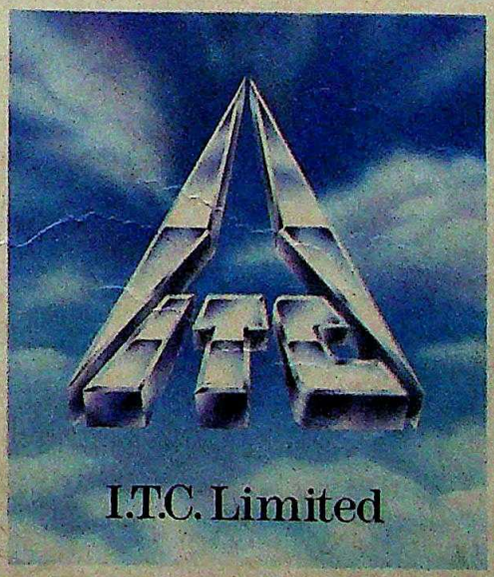

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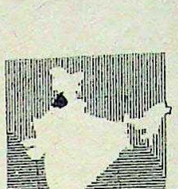
PUNJAB

Held to Ransom

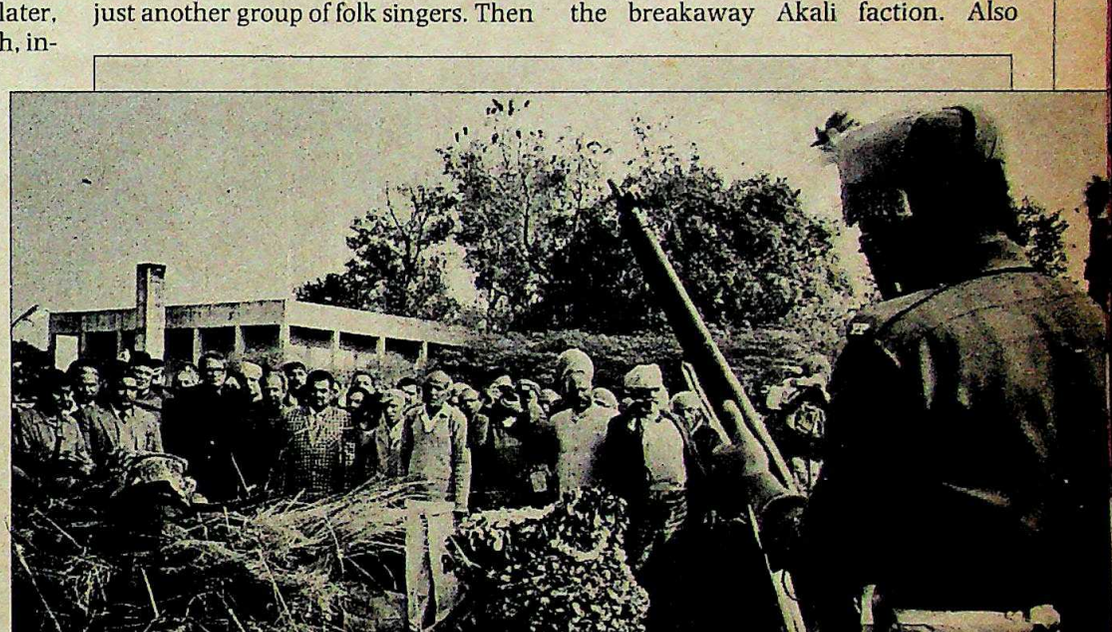


PUNJAB'S increasingly volatile political scenario took yet another turn for the worse last fortnight, with a series of ominous and bloody developments. First, Roshan Lal Bairagi and Manjit Singh Bhandi, two captured terrorists, escaped from police custody at the Beas Bridge, near Amritsar. Barely a week later, terrorists gunned down T.C. Katoch, inspector-general of prisons (rules), in one of the busiest quarters of Chandigarh where he had gone shopping. Still, the death squads did not rest. A Sikh family—that of Gurjit Singh, headman of village Utur, near Amritsar—consisting of seven members, was wiped out in a hail of bullets and, within hours, three farm-workers of a ruling Akali Dal supporter were done to death a few kilometers away. Some days later, four women in Guru Ka Pind, near Tarn Taran were slaughtered because they were friends and relatives of a person, the terrorists believed, was a police informer.

But more devastating than the sky-rocketing number of butchered innocents was the appearance, for the first time in the state's recent history of violence, of members of the Khalistan Commando Force, who have taken credit for some of the killings, on a public platform last fortnight. The self-styled commando force, along with the Khalistan Armed Police, the Dashmesh Regiment and other such organisations, forms the shadowy, underground, terrorist network that has reduced Punjab to a state of permanent terror. So far, these organisations have been content to hide behind such political fronts as the All India Sikh Students Federation and the Damdami Taksal have offered. For these forces to come out in the open was a terrifying indication that each day of the Centre's drift and indecision on Punjab has strengthened the hands of the terrorists by leaps and bounds. Even police chief Julio Francis Ribeiro recently admitted that with no new political initiatives or action plan emanating from the Centre, the morale of policemen, judges, prosecutors and the common people is rapidly falling.

When the three youths in black clothes and black leather jackets took the stage at the public meeting called by Jathedar Darshan Singh Ragi in the village of Brahmpura, to protest against "excesses" by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), they were taken at first to be just another group of folk singers. Then the leader calmly announced that they were there to represent the Khalistan Commando Force led by Labh Singh, a terrorist on the most wanted list of the Punjab Police. The group made no speeches but chose to express their political beliefs in verse. In traditional folk style they sang, *Longowalwad bura, kursi da swaad bura* (Longowalism is wrong, taste for power is wrong), along with ballads of the "valour and glory" of such known killers as Sukhdev Singh Sakhira (in whose name 22 bus passengers were recently massacred), Billa and Avtar Singh Brahma.

The Brahmpura meeting was called by the newly appointed jathedar of the Akal Takht, in order to protest against the alleged atrocities by a group of CRPF men in the village on December 27, when they were hunting for Avtar Singh Brahma. Those attending were representatives of virtually every political faction in the state, other than the ruling Akali Dal. Among those who have publicly proclaimed themselves as moderates were Amarinder Singh, Gurdev Singh Badal and other senior leaders of the breakaway Akali faction. Also present were two of Barnala's ministers who had resigned recently over the question of Gurcharan Singh Tohra's imprisonment, after his election as president of the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee. None of the moderates were, however, allowed to speak. Instead they sat meekly listening to what is euphemistically described as "the voice of the youth". Nobody man-



Police funeral for Katoch

Barnala feels he cannot fight the militants unless the Centre strengthens his hands but Delhi is unconvinced of his ability.

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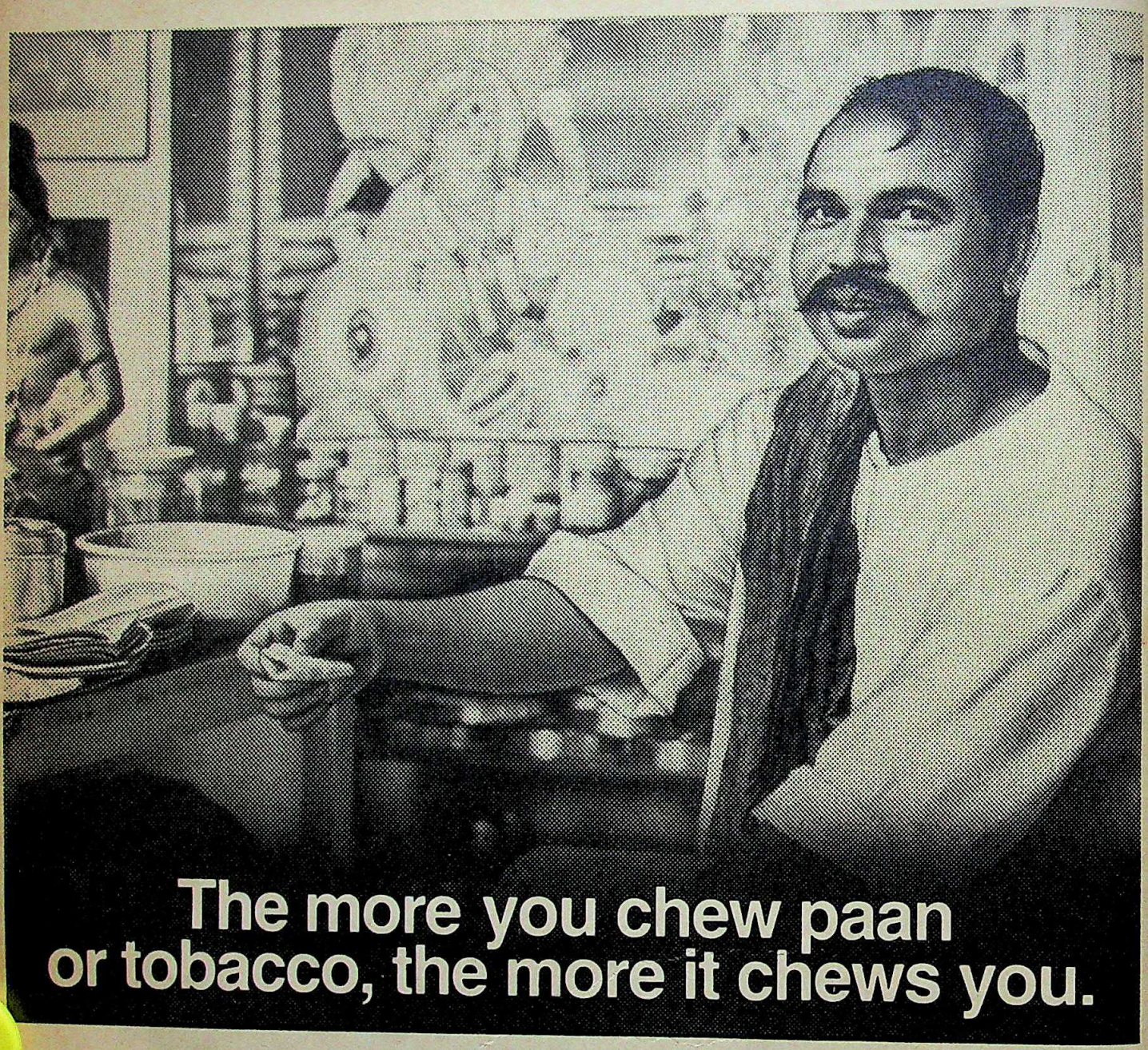

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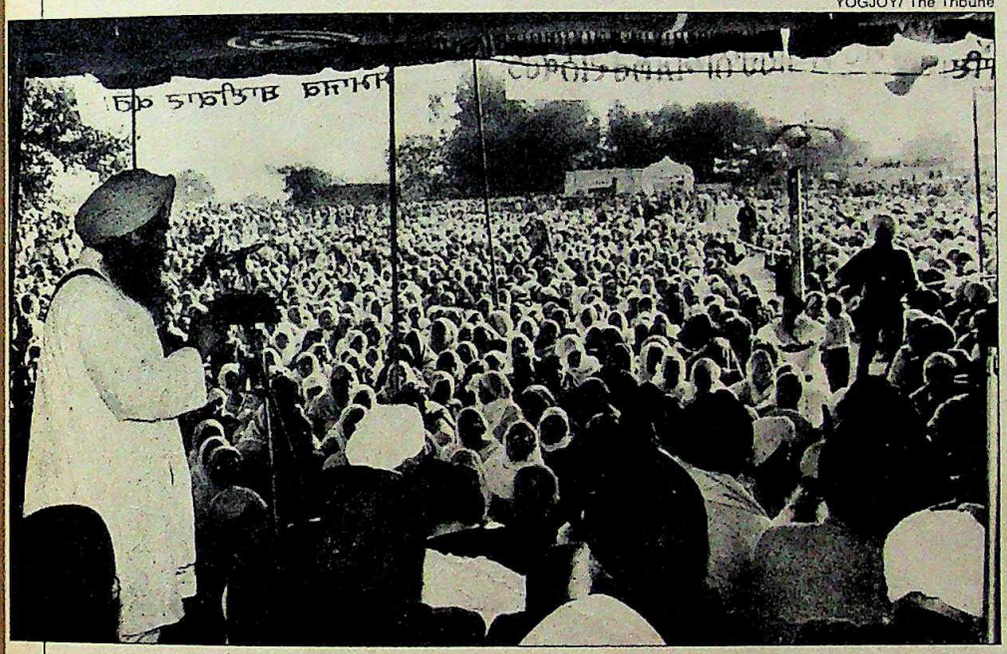
aged to summon up enough courage to intervene. Moderate leaders when asked afterwards what they were doing on the same stage as killers and secessionists came up with the stock answer that Parkash Singh Badal has used over and over again in the past year—they could not be responsible for what people belonging to other parties said on a public platform that they were only sharing.

ON the Brahmpura incident itself, the CRPF and the villagers have different versions of what happened. But nobody disputes that it all began due to a speech made by Avtar Singh Brahma, one of the ten most wanted terrorists in the country. Villagers say Brahma came out of the blue and started making a speech from somewhere in the village around 10 p.m., saying that villagers should not cooperate with the CRPF contingent housed in the village school. The speech continued for some 20 minutes and then Brahma and his accomplices started firing at the CRPF men, challenging them to come and get them. There was no response from them, according to the villagers version, till CRPF reinforcements arrived from other villages.

Then, nearly an hour later, the CRPF men smashed their way into people's houses and began the search. But Brahma had disappeared. Said a senior officer: "This village is known to have harboured Brahma and other terrorists in the past which is why the men broke into houses when the doors were not willingly opened. They really believed he was hiding in the village."

Officers argue that if the problem of terrorism is to be tackled firmly then the CRPF will probably have to get even more tough than it did in Brahmpura. This is where the real questions about Brahmpura arise. Punjab Chief Minister S.S. Barnala condemning the operation told INDIA TODAY: "One of the DSP's has been suspended but this is not enough. To my mind the guilty persons should be punished according to the law." The Government then went one step further and instructed the security forces to stay completely away from the public meeting. The residents of Brahmpura, and the militants in general, naturally saw this as an outright victory for them and the natural consequence was the demand for the CRPF to be removed altogether from the district.

YOGJOY/ The Tribune



Ragi addressing villagers of Brahmpura: ominous developments

At the crux of what appears to be going steadily more wrong with Punjab is Barnala's consistent uncertainty and his belief that he is really in no position to take a firm stand against the militants until the Centre makes some effort to strengthen his hand. He cited implementation of the Punjab Accord, release of the Jodhpur detenus and the release of the Misra Commission report—followed by punishment of the guilty men in Delhi—as some of the things that would help him take a stronger stand. Delhi far from being eager to comply with this very tall order, appears to be unconvinced of Barnala's ability to take a strong stand no matter what they do.

Throughout the fortnight Barnala, like an obedient serf, flew back and forth between Chandigarh and Delhi for meetings with Home Minister Buta Singh and Arjun Singh who is once again involved in Punjab affairs, but returned to Chandigarh without any clear view of the Centre's thinking. Worse he was later snubbed cruelly by Rajiv Gandhi who refused to meet him for three days in Delhi. A brief face-saving meeting was finally arranged at the airport lounge but nothing came of it. People in Punjab are beginning to vent their anger at the Centre, particularly at Rajiv Gandhi because they are unable to sense any appreciable concern or initiative.

If the Centre's calculations are directed towards winning the Haryana elections—dismissing the Barnala Government and pushing in the army in order to make a political impact just before the poll, the results could be as tragic as earlier. Exactly five years ago the late Mrs Indira Gandhi opened up the waters dispute question between Haryana and Punjab and created the atmosphere for the massive Akali morcha that escalated into violence, leading ultimately to Operation Bluestar and the devastation of Punjab's politics and social fabric.

In the current atmosphere of dithering and delay by the Centre, the only winners are the opportunists and the extremists. Barnala's policy of taking half-way strong measures and then apologising for them has—ever since the police entry into the Golden Temple last April and his subsequent shoe-cleaning—strengthened the Akali Dal (Badal) view of itself as the real Akali Dal and of Barnala as incompetent. Since this group's grassroots base is not absolutely certain, they are concentrating on trying to ensure it by kowtowing to the most dangerous kind of extremism. They admit privately that the demand for Khalistan and the violence disturbs them as much as anyone else but nobody has the courage to raise his voice and risk his life in the process, to say this.

So Punjab continues to be held to ransom by a group of terrorists representing districts around Amritsar and Gurdaspur. Figures recently released in Punjab speak for themselves: more than half the number of killings in the state during 1986 occurred in these two districts. Unless decisive action is taken now the voice of these violent districts will be heard all over as the voice of Punjab and talk of political solutions will then become irrelevant.

—TAVLEEN SINGH and GOBIND THUKRAL

daCunha/ICS/15/86

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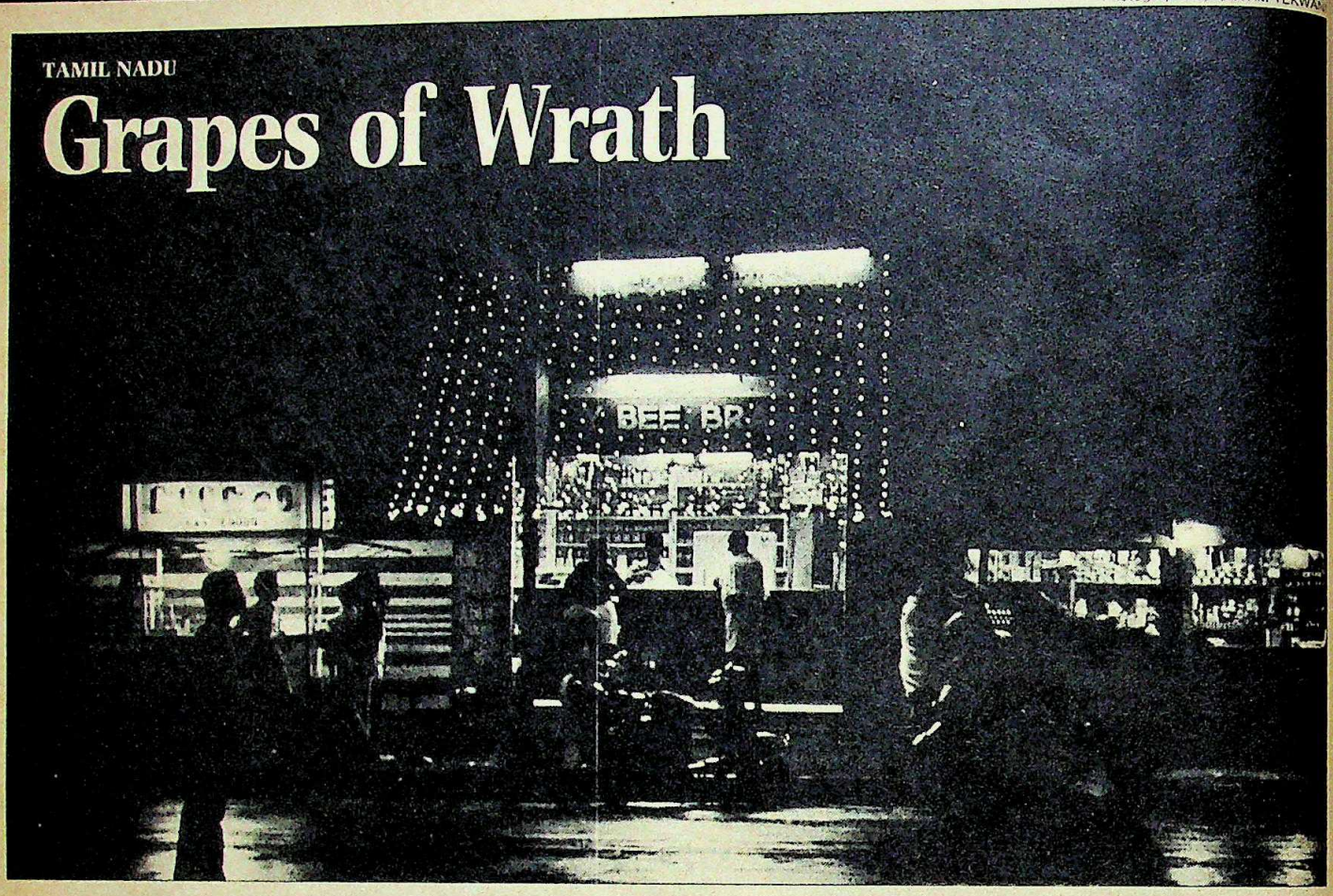
TAMIL NADU

Grapes of Wrath



Liquor store on Madras thoroughfare: aiming for the affluent

TAMIL Nadu's liquor business has seen some curious ups and downs in keeping with the changing political compulsions of the Government of the day. And so it was in the new year, when Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran reintroduced prohibition, which he himself had lifted five years ago.

As 16,000-odd retail arrack and toddy shops downed shutters on January 1 1987, and over 20,000 of those employed in the trade contemplated a bleak future, Excise and Information Minister V.V. Swaminathan ringingly declared: "We are determined to implement the provisions of the Constitution. Under the Directive Principles, both the Union Government and the states are bound to ensure total prohibition. We did relax it temporarily but have now decided to enforce it more forcefully. It is a commitment our leader MGR gave to the people of Tamil Nadu."

But pious proclamations such as these that accompanied the ban neither told the whole story, nor were they convincing. The new prohibition covers only arrack, the poor man's drink, and not the more expensive Indian-made foreign liquor (IMFL). Indeed, the facts show that there is a deliberate attempt to aid the strong and influential IMFL lobby.

MGR's dramatic announcement about the return to dry days from the new year had come in mid-1986 at a public meeting. Later, a government spokesman explained the supposed logic of the decision. According to the official explanation, the state was reverting to prohibition because of the liquor addiction among the poor and the heightened social tensions this was generating.

If the state Government has changed its prohibition policy four times in a dozen years, it has been influenced each time by reasons that are both political and financial. It was K. Karunanidhi who, as chief minister, first scrapped it in 1971—and faced corruption charges relating to allotment of liquor vends. He reintroduced it in 1974 when the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) split and MGR walked out. In fact, Karunanidhi had imposed prohibition at MGR's insistence.

MGR came to power in 1977 and lifted prohibition four years later, only to reintroduce it now, five years afterwards. In 1981, he had changed his mind on the issue because, in the absence of free sale, bootlegging had become so widespread that the administration could no longer hold it down. In that year, MGR had even liberalised rules for the selection and appointment of new wholesale and retail outlets, both for arrack as well as IMFL. Apart from the smell of legal liquor, there was also more than a breath of scandal that time: the MGR Government was accused of favouring certain liquor barons with licences for wholesale IMFL distribution as also for arrack-bottling plants (INDIA TODAY, October 15, 1982). Today, the MGR Government faces strikingly similar charges.

If the state Government is willing to forego an annual revenue loss of a staggering Rs 200-crore in excise revenue, it is because, apart from other things, there is also political capital to be gained. There are about a crore regular arrack drinkers, with whose wives the liquid is not popular because of the expense and the tensions it causes. MGR clearly had his eye on the women's vote which traditionally welcomes a crackdown on drinking. It also helped counter DMK allegations that he was encouraging growth of the habit in Tamil Nadu.

It had also initially appeared to some in the ruling party that the step was aimed at hitting MGR's former cabinet col-

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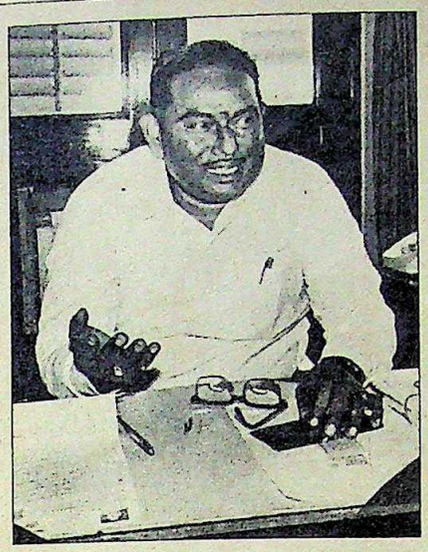


"We are bound to ensure total prohibition. It is a commitment our leader MGR gave to the people of Tamil Nadu."

V.V. SWAMINATHAN
minister for excise and information

ous than most people realised. In a state where Swaminathan forcefully talked of enforcing the Directive Principles of the Constitution, the Excise Department's actions seemed totally at variance. While, on the one hand, the department was ordering closure of all arrack shops and bottling plants, on the other, it was issuing new licences for outlets of IMFL. Between September and December last year, the Excise Department appointed 978 new IMFL dealers in addition to the 953 who already existed to bring the total to 1,931 for the entire state (*see chart*).

Charged Karunanidhi: "Liquor trade means money. This Government has made frequent changes in the excise policy only to help a few people. We want total prohibition but under the new law, rich people and expensive liquor have been left out. It is patently obvious that it has been designed to help the IMFL trade."

Indeed, the entire business was handled peculiarly, and particularly odd was the method of selecting new IMFL retail vendors. Applications for licences were invited through advertisements as early as May 1985 and more than 1,900 people responded before the last date, July 31, 1985. At that point, the question of introducing prohibition had not even been raised. Allotments were to have been made by January 1986 but, instead, the department sat tight on them until September 1986. This unexplained delay strengthened the allegation of the local liquor trade that the MGR Government was under pressure from the IMFL lobby, led by a north India-based distillery, to close down the arrack trade and aid the sales of their own products.

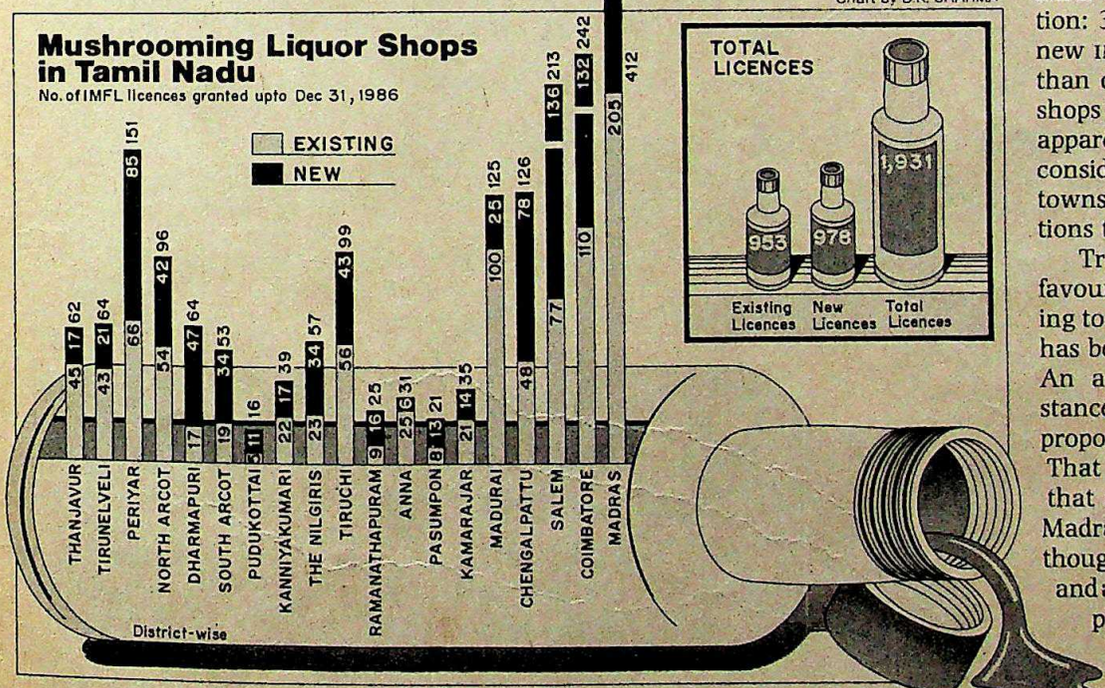
Suspicion grew to certainty when the selection of new IMFL vends got underway along with the ban on arrack sales. Moreover, the selection process could only be described as extraordinary. Instead of auctioning outlets to the highest bidder, as is the normal practice with most state governments, the MGR Government preferred to prescribe a beggarly fee of Rs 20,000 per shop. If auctions had been carried out, the state Government could have earned about Rs 20 crore, assuming a rough going rate of Rs 2 lakh per vend. But by going in for a small flat fee, the state has inexplicably settled to lose Rs 18 crore. Since the excise commissioner was the final arbiter to decide on allotment, inevitably, over a dozen parties have gone to the courts questioning his orders and seeking redress.

As if the gross violation of all established norms in deciding on the sellers was itself not enough, what was also shocking was the sheer number of licences issued. Madras district (population: 32.76 lakh, 1981 census), now has 412 shops selling IMFL compared to a total of 323 until last fortnight—118 for arrack and 205 for IMFL. In Coimbatore district (population: 30.60 lakh, 1981 census), 132 new IMFL licences were issued, more than doubling the number of liquor shops to 242. The Government, it was apparent, had deliberately and with considerable forethought chosen large towns with sizeable affluent populations to site new liquor shops.

Traders in Tamil Nadu allege favouritism in the selection. According to them, every second application has been rejected on flimsy grounds. An application in Madras, for instance, was turned down because the proposed premises were near a school. That would seem fair reason, except that at least three other vendors in Madras have got the go-ahead although their locations too violate rules and are adjacent to either restaurants, places of worship or schools.

A section of the opposition parties believes that the powerful industrial and liquor lobbies from other states were also instrumental in changing the state Government policy. Tamil Nadu, with an annual production of over 700 lakh litres of raw alcohol, which is required to produce IMFL, is comparatively better placed in alcohol production as compared to other states. However, since 500 lakh litres were being allotted for arrack production, alcohol-

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



league, R.M. Veerappan, who had recently been sacked from the ministry. Speculation on this score was fuelled by the belief that a majority of the arrack vendors were close to the former minister. In fact, AIADMK leaders felt that the chief minister decided to come down heavily on the arrack trade only after first ridding himself of Veerappan.

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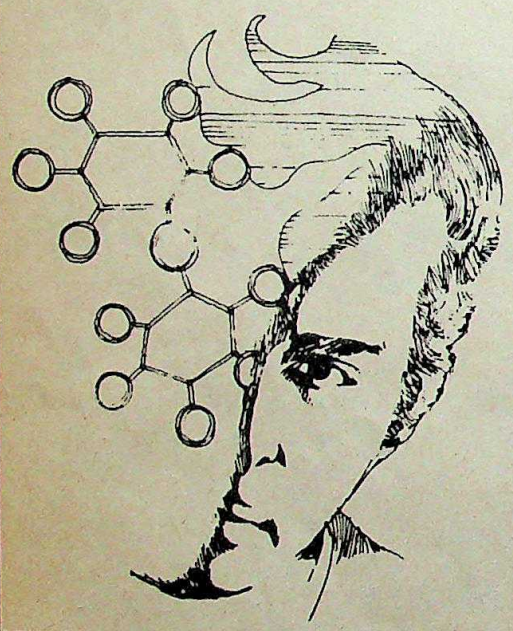

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based industries and IMFL units were being denied their full requirement of raw alcohol. Some distilleries had made representations to the state Government on this count and some had even gone to court to get more favourable allocations. But they had had little success.

Now, with the ban on arrack production, 500 lakh litres of raw alcohol has suddenly become available. Though there is no official announcement, according to well-placed sources, the major beneficiaries are not only local industries who have been allotted an additional 150 lakh litres, but also liquor business in other states, which will get the rest. Said V. Gopalsamy, a DMK Rajya Sabha member: "The MGR Government has already made a deal under which the extra alcohol will be allotted to all the liquor manufacturing units in north and western India. We know these units have been hobnobbing with state Government officials." He also pointed out that it was similar export of alcohol by Karnataka which led to the allegations of corruption against Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde's Government.

But MGR seems unconcerned about the allegations. He was also unmoved by the bureaucracy's scepticism about the new policy. Official cynicism is ground in experience of the past when prohibition had bred innumerable illicit liquor stills. Police officials recall vividly the poor thirsting for adulterated liquor, which was as inevitable as the rise of a hoochmaker's mafia. Besides, as it is, an incredible 1.20 lakh excise cases of violation of dry laws are pending in court, while another 60,000 are under investigation. The new change will mean a fresh floods of cases, although the backlog is far from being cleared. This is bound to mean a substantial increase in the police work-load.

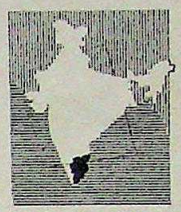
On the other hand, civil liberties activists have good reason to be worried about the misuse of law by the administration to implicate people it is displeased with. Memories are still fresh of the pre-1981 days when the police were accused of falsely implicating, in excise cases, people against whom they bore animosity. Sometimes, this was done simply by planting liquor bottles in their vehicles.

It seems doubtful if the prohibition policy will have the kind of salutary effect the MGR Government claims it will. After the immediate political and financial objectives are achieved, it would surprise no one if the Government stand is reversed before the decade is out.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Madras

TAMIL NADU

Language Bomb



VIOLENCE has finally scarred the placid south Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Last month saw the state rocked by no less than a dozen blasts, the loss of four lives and injury to 50 others. Coming in the wake of the crippling anti-Hindi agitation, the blasts created a sense of panic among people. Security had to be stepped up at the Central and state government offices and there were policemen all over, frisking people at random, inspecting luggage boots of cars and the side carriers of two-wheelers.

The blasts, behind which the police saw the hand of Dravidra Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) activists, erupted soon after the police crackdown on that party's leadership. Some 20,000 DMK activists were arrested for burning copies of the Constitution and disrupting state services as part of the party's month-long anti-Hindi agitation.

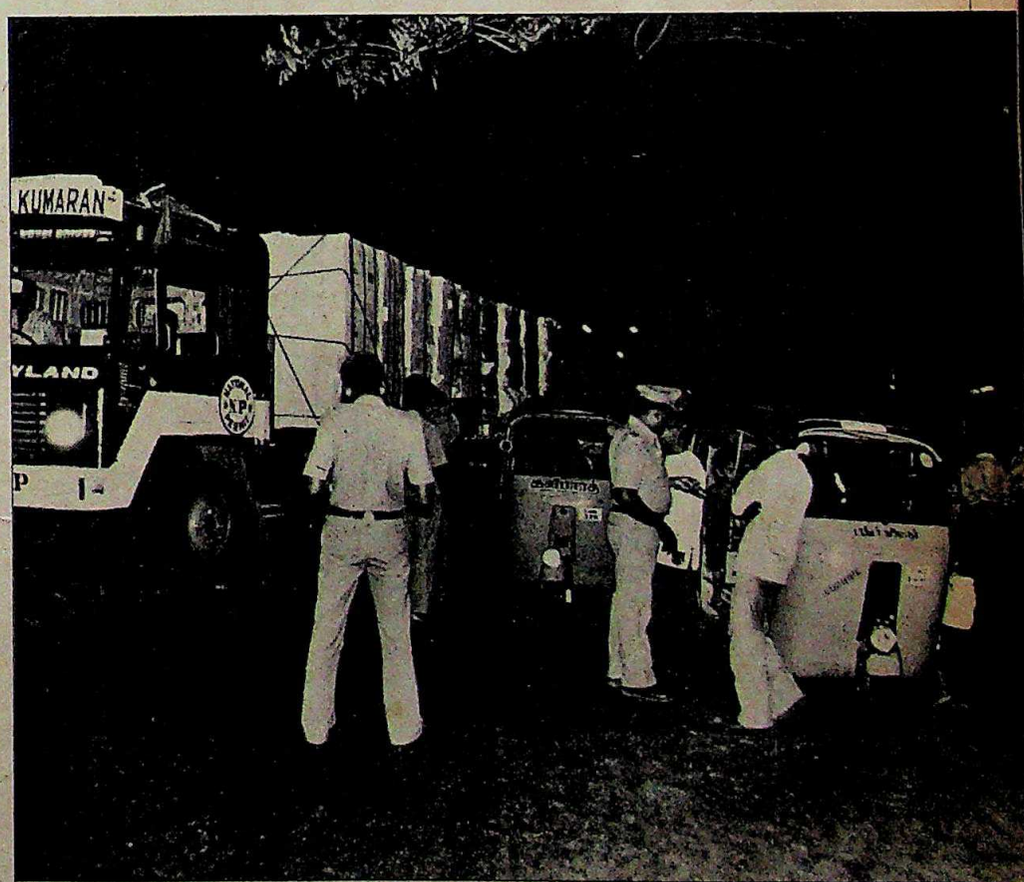
The first blast went off on the very day K. Karunanidhi, DMK president, was arrested—December 9. The blast shook the Hindi Prachar Sabha building in T. Nagar in Central Madras. No one was injured but it damaged office equipment and the building facade.

Soon after, a string of moderate to very powerful blasts shook the state. One of the most serious incidents was the explosion in a compartment of the Tiruchi-Erode Passenger train at Mutharasanallur railway station near Tiruchi in the early hours of December 23. A man was killed and 25 others were injured. Police believed it to be a powerful time bomb. Later a time bomb went off in Madras killing a woman pavement-dweller and injuring her rickshaw-puller husband.

A total of 19 persons, including a member of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation, Karthik, were arrested in connection with the blasts. Most of them belonged to the DMK. A top police official, alleging DMK involvement, said in many cases, blasting expertise available with the dropouts from some of the Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups like the Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam, Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation, and the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front had been used.

The DMK, however, strongly refuted the charge. Said K. Manoharan, the

Security check at night in Madras



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deputy general secretary of the party: "The MGR Government and police have embarked on a witch hunt against us."

The bombs themselves were only simple gelatine sticks tied together, and attached to a detonator. Sometimes the whole contraption was linked to a timing device. But the general effect on the populace was frightening.

Confessed Y. Prabhu, a chartered accountant: "I have been regularly travelling all over south India but now I feel nervous about train journeys." Echoed T.T. Vasu, president of the Music Academy: "We are thinking of advancing our evening programmes, so that people do not have to stay late."

The fortnight also witnessed a hoax bomb threat at the chief minister's Ramavaram residence on the south-west fringe of Madras. But a frantic search revealed nothing. Said Walter Dewaram, Madras city police commissioner: "Every day we receive 40 to 50 bomb threat calls."

But by the end of the nightmarish fortnight the police were feeling more confident of dealing with the situation. Said K. Ravindran, director-general of police and chief of the force: "The situation now seems to be under control. All the bombs which burst or which were detected before bursting used gelatine sticks. Now we have sealed all the gelatine shops in the state and the sale of the material, even for genuine purposes like deepening of wells and earth-breaking, has been banned." But how far this measure will succeed in putting the lid on the language chauvinists remains to be seen.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

MADRAS

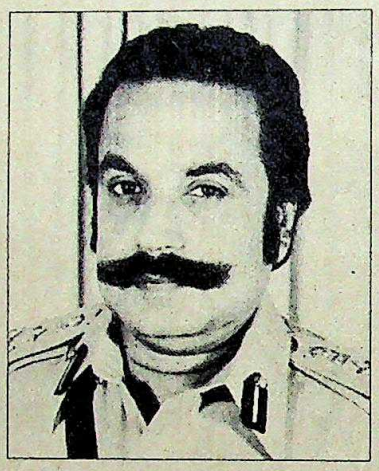
Police Affair

COMING as it did from Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, the summary transfer of K. Mohan Das, 55, director-general of police (intelligence) to the obscure post of commissioner for training and administrative reforms, was indeed, nothing short of a bolt from the blue.

When Home Secretary T.V. Venkatraman was instructed last fortnight to issue the orders forthwith, he could hardly be faulted for disbelieving his ears—the unpredictable MGR had again done the unexpected by easing out one of his closest confidants. Requests from the state police Director-General K. Ravindran and Chief Secretary A. Padmanabhan to rethink the matter persuaded MGR to relent, but only slightly. Mohan Das was made to go on long leave.

What exactly led to the downfall is not clear, but it is believed that the police officer and the chief minister differed on how the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and their leader Velupillai Pirabhakaran, should be handled. Mohan Das wanted to deal firmly with them, as with all other Tamil militant groups, for transgressing the law, stocking illicit arms and illegally operating their own wireless. But MGR's patronage of Pirabhakaran came in the way.

In fact, their widely divergent attitudes largely contributed to the confusion following Operation Disarm—the police swoop on the militants in November last when arms were confiscated and scores of militants arrested. An outraged Pirabhakaran protested



Das wanted to deal firmly with militants for breaking the law but MGR's patronage of Pirabhakaran brought matters to a head.

to MGR alleging maltreatment by the police. And as always pandering to Tamil sentiments, MGR directed that some of the weapons seized from the LTTE be returned. But the police promptly retrieved them. MGR had to personally order the return of a wireless set, seized under Mohan Das' directions, when Pirabhakaran undertook a dramatic fast unto death.

After that, matters snowballed. The militant leader alleged that the intelligence chief had established clandestine contacts with the Israeli secret service Mossad while on a recent trip to Bombay. Mohan Das was also supposed to have visited Singapore without the prior official sanction required for all overseas trips. He is also said to have stayed there in a hotel whose part-owner was a Jaffna Tamil having, oddly enough, close links with some Colombo-based Sinhala groups. That was disturbing enough for MGR to believe that his intelligence chief was not playing ball with him and although his privilege leave was later sanctioned, it did not help Mohan Das.

Tense and upset, Mohan Das said that there was a malicious smear campaign against him by colleagues jealous of his professional success and claimed that "I was not asked to go on leave. In fact I had to plead with the Government to give me long leave for my daughter's marriage. I went to Singapore only after obtaining the oral consent of the chief minister and I had also informed the chief secretary and the home secretary about my trip. As for the seizure of the militants' arms and wireless sets, as a professional police officer, I only carried out orders from the competent authority".

If the stocky Mohan Das looked shocked, this has to be viewed in the context of his remarkable ascent. From the time he had first caught the chief minister's eye while an enquiry officer with the Sarkaria Commission probing charges of corruption against the then DMK government of K. Karunanidhi, to his meteoric rise as DGP, Mohan Das had enjoyed total access to MGR, supplying him information on rival politicians and purveying political gossip. As a top government official acknowledged: "Whatever his official designation, Mohan Das had practically become the deputy chief minister."

With MGR maintaining an enigmatic silence, the rumour mills worked overtime but answers were few and far between.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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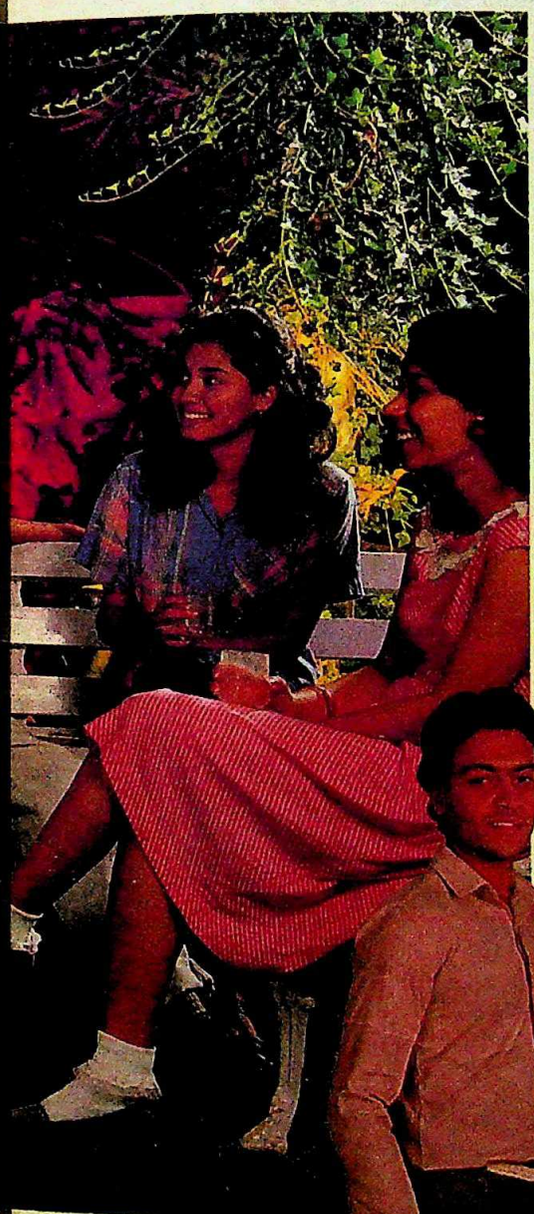

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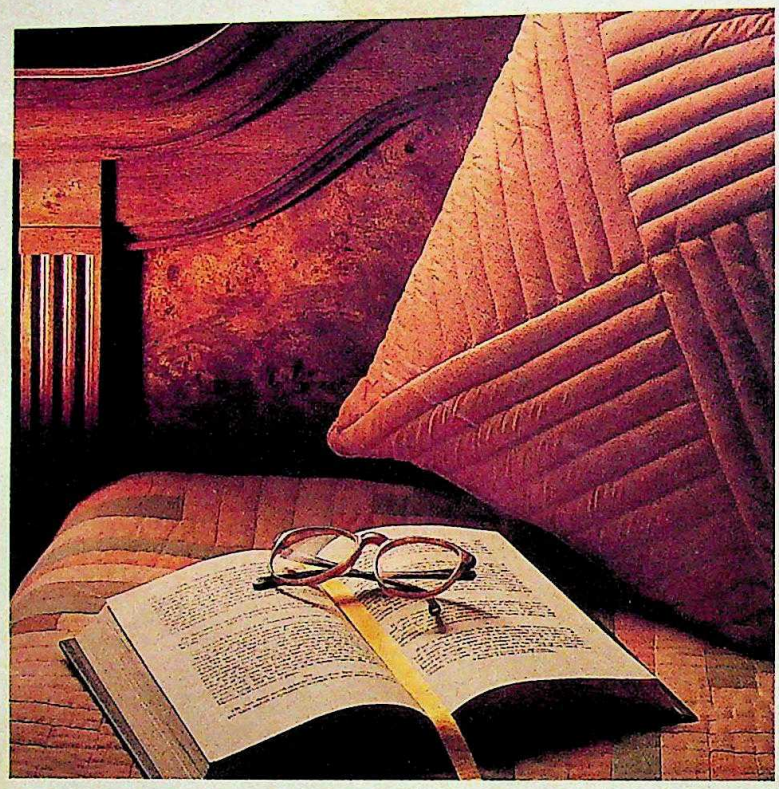

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BOMBAY

The Money Scramble

INCESSANT political and bureaucratic bickering held up a Rs 100-crore grant that was to benefit Bombay's slum-dwellers, until last fortnight when the city's Congressmen agreed to stop quarrelling and start spending. The money in question was an unexpected gift to the estimated 90 lakh people of this exploding metropolis from Rajiv Gandhi at the time of the Congress centenary celebrations in December 1985. For some time, not much was heard of what became of Rajiv's offer, except of course when there was an extended semantic dispute over whether the money would be a "loan" or a "grant" to the city of his birth.

That matter was settled when some energetic lobbying by the Bombay Regional Congress(I) Committee chief Murli Deora produced a clarification from the Union Finance Ministry: the Rs 100-crore was to be a grant from the Centre to tackle the inter-related problems of housing and slum improvement in Maharashtra's capital. But before the money started pouring in, the state Government had to submit a scheme to the Centre on how it would be utilised. This took longer than expected, and the scheme was about to be cleared by the Union housing and urban development ministries when it was enmeshed in another unseemly controversy.

In a flurry of activity, Gurudas Kamat, the youthful Congress(I) MP from Bombay North-East, the largest parliamentary constituency in the state with 14 lakh voters, protested to Rajiv, Maharashtra Chief Minister S.B. Chavan and state's Housing and Urban Development Minister V. Subramaniam that the people of the suburbs were being unjustly ignored in the state Government's proposal to spend the grant.

Kamat felt that the suburbs deserved a larger slice of the centenary cake. "We Congressmen have an emotional attachment to the fund, so my demand was that the money should be allocated on the basis of the population or equitably to all assembly constituencies," he stated, adding, "after all, the majority of Bombay's population, and especially the slum-dwellers, live in the suburbs."

Kamat's salvo against Subramaniam led to a public wrangle which was finally settled after a four-hour-long meeting between the housing minister and the city's MPs and MLAs who had begun demanding that projects be taken up in their constituencies too.

Said Subramaniam: "The prime minister was clearly against the dispersal of the grant and felt we should do something tangible to set an example in housing and slum improvement. He was also keen that the Rs 100-crore should provide a nucleus for raising institutional finance, and we are likely to raise another Rs 100 crore to Rs 150 crore from the Housing and Urban Development Corporation and urban and co-operative banks for the various projects under the scheme."

Since an ambitious shelter programme which seeks to provide 85,000 dwellings to the poor under a Rs 285-crore World Bank-aided scheme has already been taken up by governmental agencies and the municipal corporation, Subramaniam proposes to utilise the Congress centenary grant mainly for the renewal of dilapidated buildings and upgradation of existing slums.

Under the scheme, the Government will spend Rs 32 crore on the development of Dharavi, a slum with a population of nearly 3.5 lakh; Rs 41 crore on repairs of dilapidated buildings; and Rs 22 crore for slum improvement. For emergencies Rs 5 crore will be reserved.

But Bombay's problems are so gargantuan that the scope of the scheme was inevitably restricted, making many Congressmen feel left out from its benefits. Of the 20,000 buildings which the state Housing Ministry identified for repairs, nearly 4,000 are on the priority list and another 1,500 are beyond repair. To patch up all the dilapidated buildings, the authorities need a mind-boggling Rs 1,500-crore. In fact, Rs 41 crore earmarked under the grant will at best put right 4,000 tenements in about 40 to 50 buildings in the older lo-

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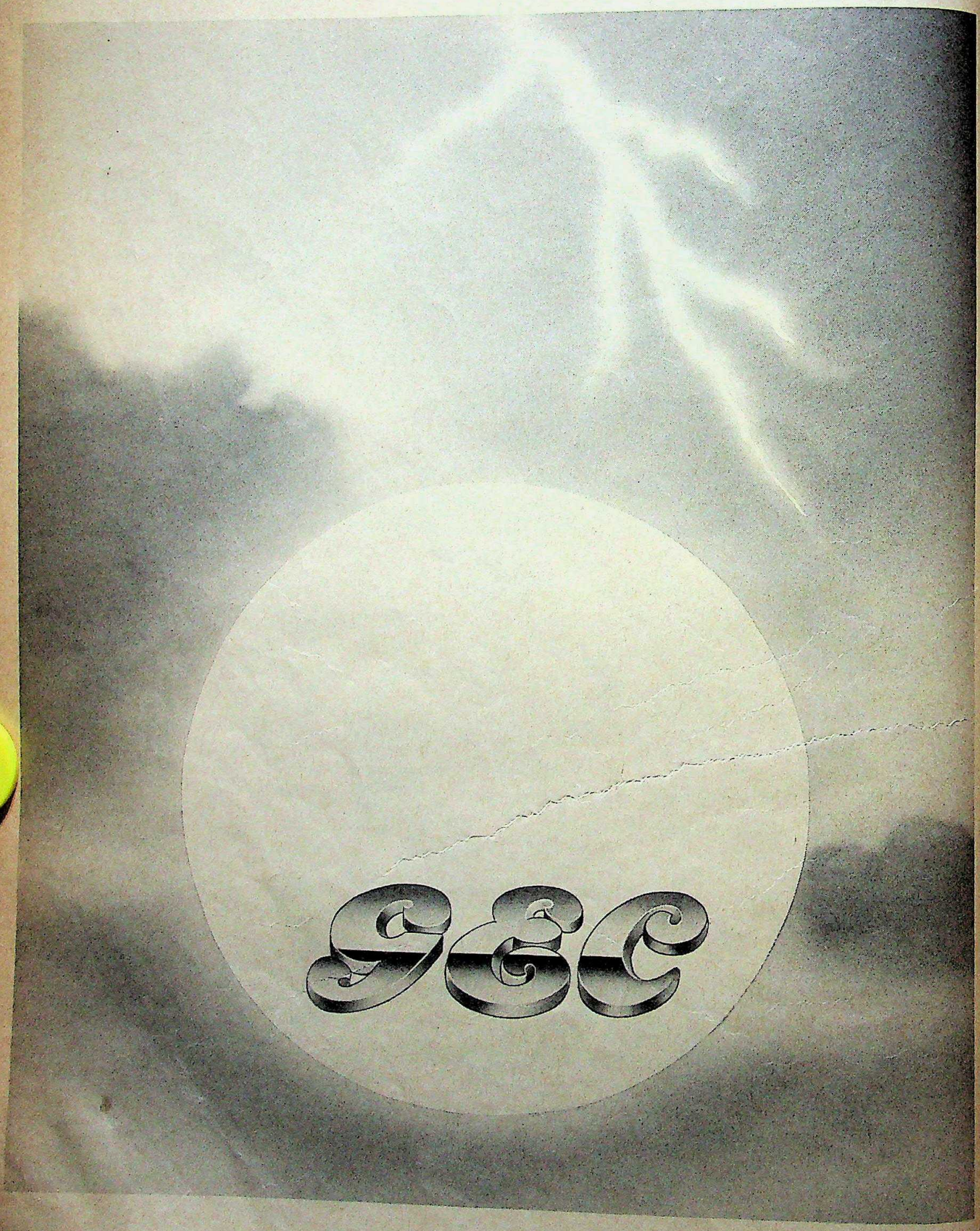
THE WORLD AS ELECTRIFIED BY



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calities of central Bombay, extending from the sleazy area of Kamathipura to the labour localities of Parel and Lalabaug.

The Government hopes to make a show-piece of the Dharavi project, since this 175-hectare expanse in the heart of Bombay epitomises both the city's adventurous spirit and its decay. "Dharavi is representative of Bombay's cosmopolitanism with people from all parts of the country," says Subramaniam, "and we would like to make an impact there."

Dharavi is also where, as general secretary of the Congress(I), Rajiv first came into contact with the misery and degradation of life in a slum. During his *padyatra* through the area more than four years ago, Rajiv had created hope among its residents that some of their perennial problems would be solved. If nothing else, it is appropriate that his impulsive generosity in gifting Rs 100 crore to Bombay should at least benefit the people of the city's largest slum.

—M. RAHMAN

RSC

Ragtag Band

AND now enter the Rashtriya Samajwadi Congress (RSC). President and theoretician (undisputed): Pranab Kumar Mukherjee. Conscience-keeper (self-appointed): Sisir Kumar Bose. Crowd-puller (optimistically): Ramarao Gundu Rao. Also starring: Prakash Mehrotra, Shyam Sunder Mohapatra, F.M. Khan, Jambuvantrao Dhote and last but not the least, Mayapati Tripathi. Guest appearances: Maneka Gandhi, Sarat Chandra Sinha and K.P. Unnikrishnan. Box-office rating: sure flop, say political pundits unanimously; wait and see, say Messrs Mukherjee, Bose and Rao.

Even the party's formation was like a re-run of an old film. As in 1978, when the Congress(I) was formed, the venue was Delhi's Vithalbhai Patel House. Eyewitnesses to both events confirmed that the turnout (around 3,000, allegedly Congressmen), the size of the shamiana, and even the level of enthusiasm was the same. But there was one crucial difference: there was no Mrs Indira Gandhi. The absence of a similarly charismatic personality was enough for many to dismiss the party as a non-starter.

There were other telling differences. Mrs Gandhi had 22 MPs with her; Mukherjee has only Khan and himself. Two chief ministers came to her convention: Chenna Reddy and Devraj Urs. This time there weren't even any ministers. Even the number of MLAs could be counted on one's fingertips. As Mukherjee later said candidly: "Most of those who came were ex-MLAs, ex-ministers, ex-office-bearers."

For the rest, it was the usual *tamasha*, complete with a declaration of intent, a 16-point alternative programme for the nation and a series of speeches painting Rajiv Gandhi in the most damnable personal and professional terms. It was predictable, boring and thoroughly unconvincing. The press inaccurately dubbed them Indira 'loyalists'. Mohapatra, Khan and Dhote—all members of the party's 10-member working committee—had been removed from the Congress(I) by Mrs Gandhi herself. It also called it a collection of disgruntled Congressmen, united only by the fact that they had all been deprived of the loaves of power. There was merit in this, though, as Mukherjee asked: "You can call us disgruntled, but what about the thousands of middle-level Congressmen who came?" Political observers were unanimous that the party had little more than nuisance value: bereft of a constructive ideology, a credible leadership or a mass following of any note.

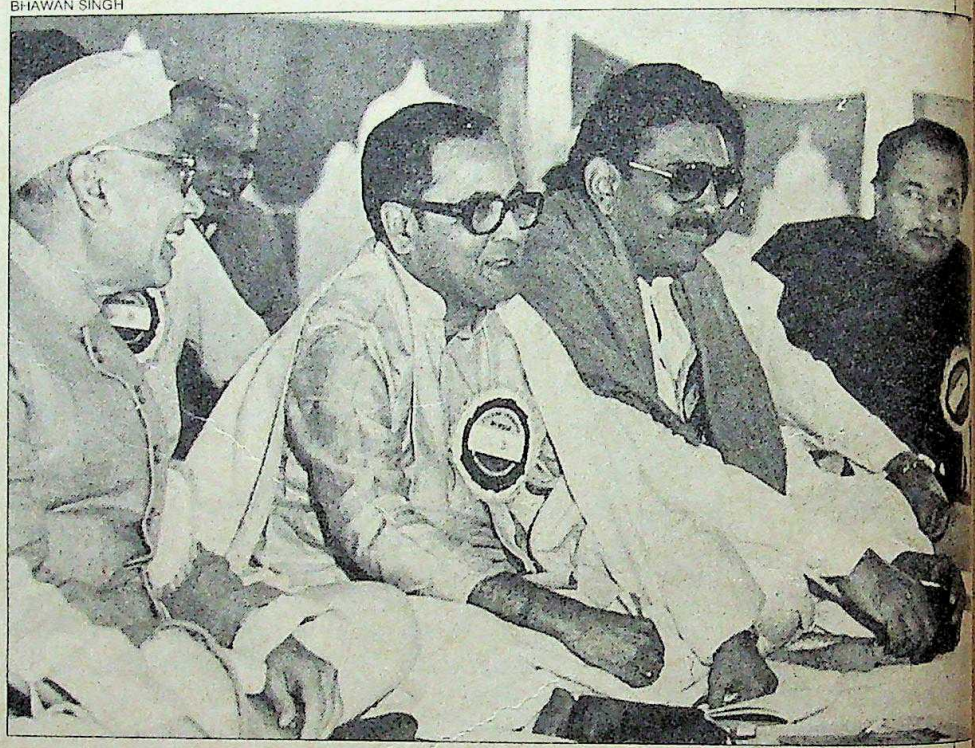
But Mukherjee is undismayed; on the contrary, he is full of hope. Puffing on his pipe, sitting behind a desk in the sprawling bungalow allotted to him on Willingdon Crescent, he explained his reasons. Congressmen are increasingly disgruntled with Rajiv. Unlike his mother, they cannot approach him directly. Neither has he set up any institutional forum for them to vent their grievances. More ominously, they are developing doubts about his ability to get them elected. Bluntly put, it was Mrs Gandhi's ability to guarantee this that drew Congressmen to her.

Today, they are with Rajiv—why should they leave him? But if the string of electoral failures is repeated in Haryana and Kerala, they will start looking for an alternative. The RSC will spend the next three years building up an organisation and extending its influence among the "Congress masses". When, as Mukherjee expects, the fence-sitters in the Congress(I) develop doubts about their leader on the eve of the next general election, the RSC will be ready to receive them. As he says: "Where else will they go? Congressmen have always looked for alternatives within the Congress framework."

In effect then, the final tally of box-office returns of this latest political starrer can only be drawn three years hence. "Ours is a marathon, not a 100 metres sprint," said Mukherjee. The problem is: few believe that Mukherjee, or his rag tagbag of colleagues, have either the credibility, mass following—or the stamina—to last.

—AJAY KUMAR

BHAWAN SINGH



Leaders at the launching: old wine

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"The first paperless society in the world".

Is India about to acquire this dubious distinction?

Pardon us for indulging in what might appear to be a bit of advertising hype.

But the situation is serious enough to warrant it.

The problem: India's Paper Industry is in a mess.

The mess begins in the forests of India, from where bamboo—the essential raw material for making paper—comes.

Even though the Paper Industry uses less than 2% of India's wood resources, forest based raw materials, including bamboo, are normally in short supply.

And whatever little is available, the State Governments make it prohibitively expensive by imposing irrational royalties.

The way out, of course, is to encourage paper mills to develop plantations for their own use. Strangely, the State Governments have been lukewarm to the idea.

Consequently, raw material prices have shot up 217% in the last decade.

In the same period, power/fuel prices and excise duty have also, so to speak, scaled new heights; up 358% and 390% respectively.

Enough, clearly, to break the back of any industry.

All this, unfortunately, is only one part of the story. The other, and equally damaging, is an obsolete piece of legislation called the Paper (Control) Order.

Introduced in the early 70s—a period of acute paper shortages—its purpose was laudable, and strictly short-term: supply of paper at concessional rates for the educational sector.

The shortages disappeared.

The short-term arrangement continues to date!

Every paper mill in the country has to sell 25% of its output to the educational sector at a price well below the cost of production. The Industry is expected to recover these losses in the open market. Unfortunately, that doesn't happen, thanks largely to shortsighted Governmental policies.

A case in point is the supply of writing printing paper. A buyer can get it minus excise if the Registrar of Newspapers so wishes. In practice, the Government does not allocate it to the newspaper industry, thereby denying them the excise benefit.

This only encourages imports because Indian paper ends up being far more expensive than imported paper.

The overall result is quite naturally, sickness on an alarming scale in the Paper Industry.

To get back to the beginning. While it's unlikely India will become 'the first paperless society in the world', the situation has all the makings of a national catastrophe.

And that's not advertising hype.

That's fact.

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KARNATAKA

Electoral Surprise

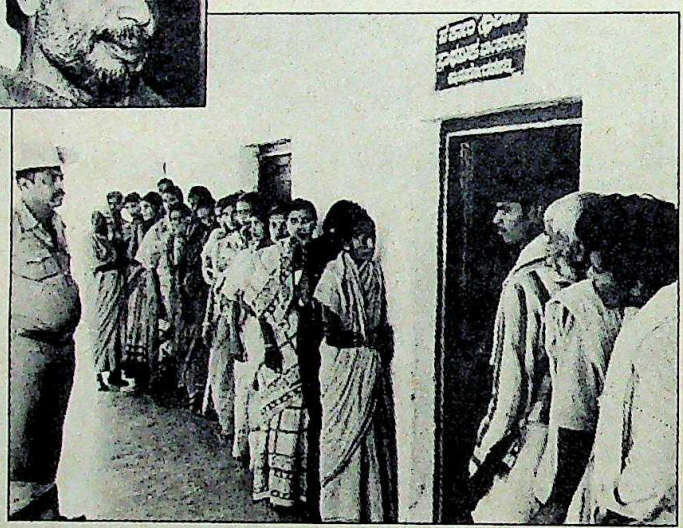
IF there was much jubilation in state Congress(I) circles last fortnight, it was for good reason. So impressive was the party's performance in the crucial state zilla parishad elections that it took even party leaders by surprise. Although the Janata Party won control of 17 of the 19 zilla parishads, the Congress(I) won 395 of the 887 seats. This did not compare poorly with the 449 seats won by the ruling Janata Party, considered unbeatable in Karnataka. Said state Congress(I) President Oscar Fernandes happily: "Voters have given a befitting reply to Hegde's so-called value-based politics." Even Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was elated. In Bangalore soon after the results were announced, he described it as "a movement in the right direction".

Because of the nature of the elections, at first sight it was the Janata that seemed the clear victor: it had gained control over all but two of the zilla parishads. In three of the 19 parishads, however, it won because it had a larger number of MLAs, who, as ex-officio members of the parishads, exercised voting rights, and thus tilted the balance in Janata's favour.

It is easy to see why the Congress(I) is excited. In the March 1985 Assembly elections, it had won only 66 of the 225 seats. Since then it was believed to have lost ground further due to a failure of local leadership. But this time the party polled 3 per cent more votes than the 41.10 per cent votes it had polled in 1985. Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde acknowledged his adversaries' political come-back when he said that his Janata "has been forced to learn some lessons".

If the elections were a referendum on the performance of the four-year-old Hegde Government, the verdict was clearly not in its favour. Last fortnight's was the second electoral warning in less than five weeks of the Janata's weakening hold on the electorate. The first was the result of the assembly elections in which the party retained its three seats, but with slightly reduced margins.

From the Congress(I)'s point of view, it has been balm for the humiliation it had to bear after the last elections. Besides, for its leaders, it is a reply to Hegde's taunts they have had to suffer about their ineffectiveness as a party in Karnataka. Said Veerappa Moily, chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and former leader of the Opposition in the state Assembly: "The verdict is decisively in our favour. People have endorsed our role as a responsible opposition. Hegde's charisma has finally begun to fade because it was held up by only publicity stunts."



Voters queueing up outside a polling booth; and (inset) Ramakrishna Hegde: "forced to learn some lessons"

MUSHTAQ AHMED

Indeed, the Janata victory did not come easily. To ensure his party's hold on the 1.20-crore electorate, Hegde undertook an extensive electioneering campaign which took him to nine of the state's 19 districts. Travelling in his Vijayavahini, a specially designed campaign-van, Hegde covered over 4,000 km and stopped at nothing. He liberally announced new welfare schemes and development programmes and, with an eye on the elections, ensured the implementation of certain promises he had made during earlier campaigns, like the supply of sarees, dhotis and mangalsutras at subsidised rates.

The campaign was weighted heavily in Hegde's favour from the beginning because the state Congress(I) does not have a person to match his stature. Oscar and other members of the party countered this disadvantage by putting up new and young candidates: 40 per cent of them were less than 40 years old.

But the chief minister's trump card was his state government's discretionary power to restructure constituencies, a power he put to full use. The Congress(I) alleged that constituencies were carved out in a way that suited the Janata's strength in various areas. Under this, over 100 of the 887 non-reserved areas were converted into reserved areas.

Charged Fernandes: "Hegde played a lot of dirty tricks. All our strongholds were declared reserved seats, which meant that all the powerful and effective Congressmen from these areas were kept out of the elections." Refuting this allegation, Janata's M. Raghupathy, former education minister, said: "The chief minister believes in passing on power to the weaker sections of the population. Our government gave more seats in the zilla parishads to scheduled castes, women and minorities."

But Hegde's gesture seems to have backfired. The new job reservations policy, by including almost everyone, has

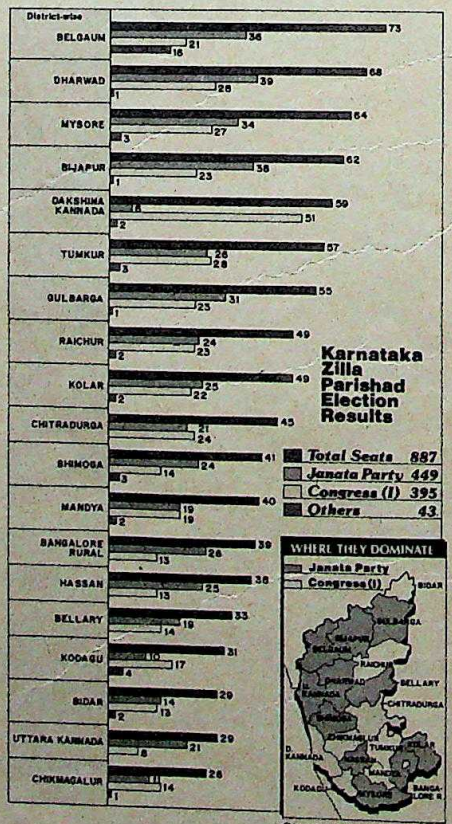


Chart by B.K. SHARMA

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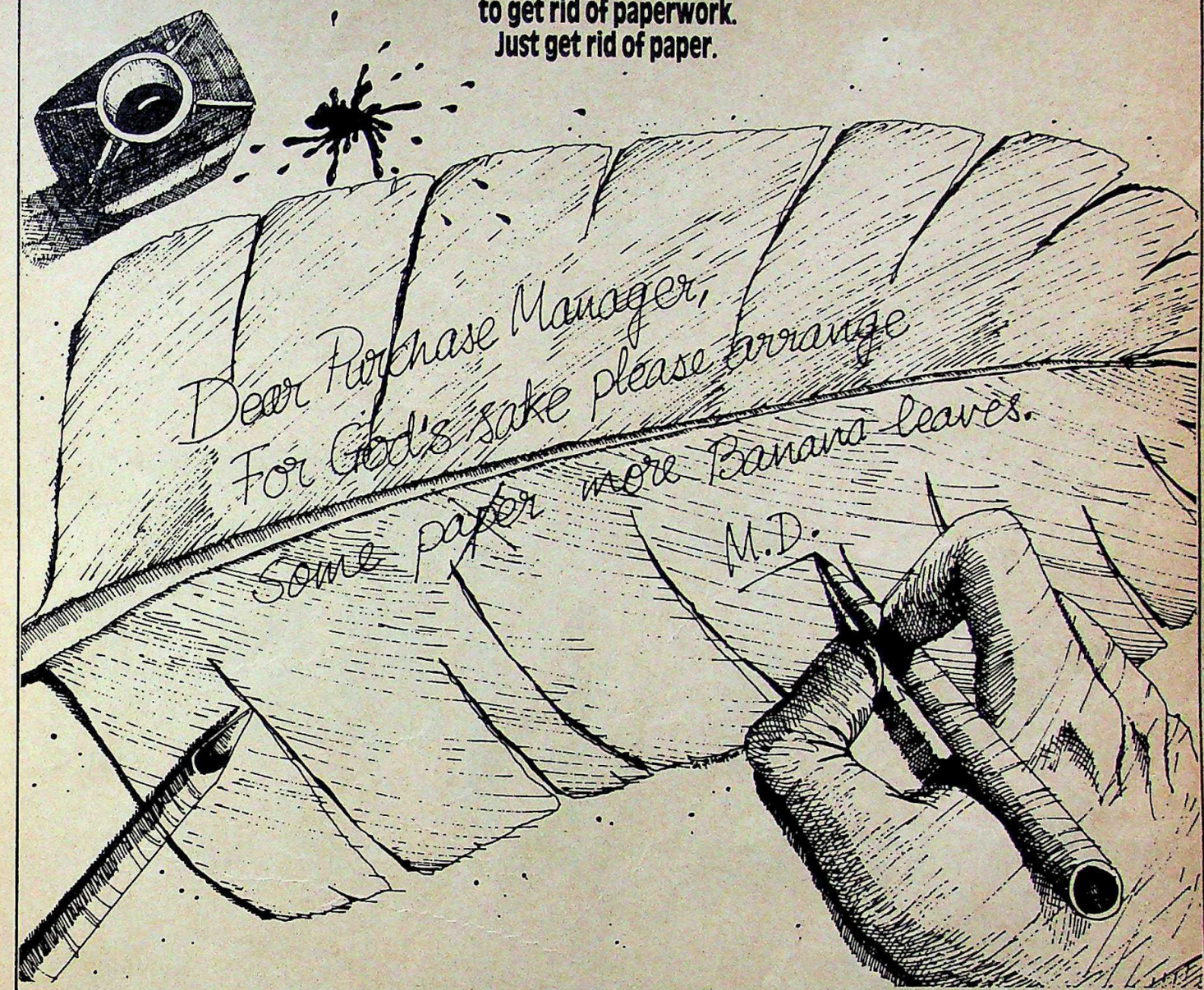
It's easy to get rid of paperwork. Just get rid of paper.



Faultless logic, isn't it?

If one were to examine the relationship between the Government and the Paper Industry over the last 15 years, one could easily arrive at a strangely disturbing conclusion: the Government appears to be following the kind of logic mentioned above.

Some examples of what we mean.

The essential raw material for making paper, bamboo, comes from forests.

Even though the Paper Industry uses less than 2% of India's wood resources, forest based raw materials, including bamboo, are normally in short supply, thanks to the State Governments' grossly inadequate afforestation programmes.

The way out, of course, is to encourage paper mills to develop plantations for their own use. Strangely, the State Governments have been lukewarm to the idea.

And whatever little raw material is available, the State Governments make it prohibitively expensive by imposing irrational royalties on it.

Consequently raw material prices have shot up 217% in the last decade.

Another example. The cost of making paper has increased 186% in the last 10 years. End prices have simply not kept pace with inflation. A case for excise reliefs appears to be clear, right?

The Government, on the contrary, has increased excise by 398% in the last 10 years.

Under the Paper (Control) Order, the Government picks up 25% of the paper in the country for the educational sector at a price well below the cost of production.

The purpose, ostensibly, is to make educational books available at low-cost. In reality, this doesn't happen.

In any case, this order was created in the early 70s as a strictly short-term measure to combat a situation of acute shortages.

The shortages have disappeared, and with them the logic of this legislation.

In terms of technology, the Indian Paper Industry is well behind the developed world.

To upgrade—and clearly that has to be done — massive investments are required. The paper mills cannot do so on their own since they've been virtually stripped of cash. The Government doesn't help.

A Catch-22 situation, if ever there was one.

The overall result is sickness on an alarming scale.

The situation, to put it mildly, has all the makings of a national catastrophe.

And that's something no one wants. Not you, the reader. Nor the Government. And least of all us, the paper mills of India.

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adversely affected the Scheduled Castes—18 per cent of the electorate—and they voted against the ruling party. The Janata Party lost heavily in areas dominated by them. Fernandes and his men, sensing the alienation of this section, effectively used this dissatisfaction to show that the Hegde Government stood for the rich, the upper castes and urban people.

However, the charges and counter-charges notwithstanding, its victory has given the Janata Party control of rural politics through the newly instituted system of zilla parishads. Parishad chiefs, who hold the rank of ministers of state, will control 40 per cent of Karnataka's Rs 800-crore annual budget. It will leave them in a comfortable position to distribute favours and jobs, the very basis of state politics.

Karnataka is now readying for the next round of elections—later this fortnight—to the panchayat mandals, grassroots level bodies below the parishads. Inspired by the recent outcome, the Congress(I) is now determined to consolidate its hold over the rural electorate. If it succeeds, Hegde's ambitions of making it politically at the national level will have to be shelved.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

BJP

Rural Pitch

THE Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) search for a political identity found yet another horizon at its three-day National Council meeting held in Vijayawada last fortnight. Long characterised as a representative of the urban middle class and small traders, the party donned a new mantle by attempting to champion the interests of the farming community. An entire day was devoted to adopting a charter on 'The Basic Rights of the Kisan', which culminated in a call for a country-wide rally of peasants in March in Lucknow.

The leadership explained the move in predictable 'the-farmer-is-neglected' logic but clearly another short-term objective had been at work: the need to come closer to the Lok Dal's stand on farmers. The two parties are partners in the Haryana Sangharsh Samiti, expected to be the major opposition front to the Congress(I) in the ensuing assembly elections in that state.

The 10 basic rights listed in the charter contain all the predictable demands: among them, remunerative prices for farm produce, adequate supplies of water and power, protection of tenancy rights, compensation at market value for lands acquired by the Government, and better wages for farm labour. The charter also demands a replacement of the Agricultural Costs and Prices Commission by a broad-based agency comprising farmers and consumers.

Kalyan Singh, chief architect of the charter and BJP leader in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly, drew attention to known statistics underlining the neglect of agriculture: plan resource allocation for agriculture dipping from 37 per cent in the first plan to 24 per cent in the seventh plan and the gap in the ratio of rural and urban incomes widening from 1:2 in 1950-51 to 1:4 in 1983-84. Argued Singh: "Our efforts are intended to liberate the kisan from perpetual poverty and exploitation."

But the charter offers no solutions to the problems it highlighted. Admitted Kailash Joshi, BJP leader from Madhya Pradesh: "The charter revealed the raw deal meted out to farmers but failed to come up with anything new." In the event, the BJP's espousal of the farmers' cause may well turn out to be a non-starter.

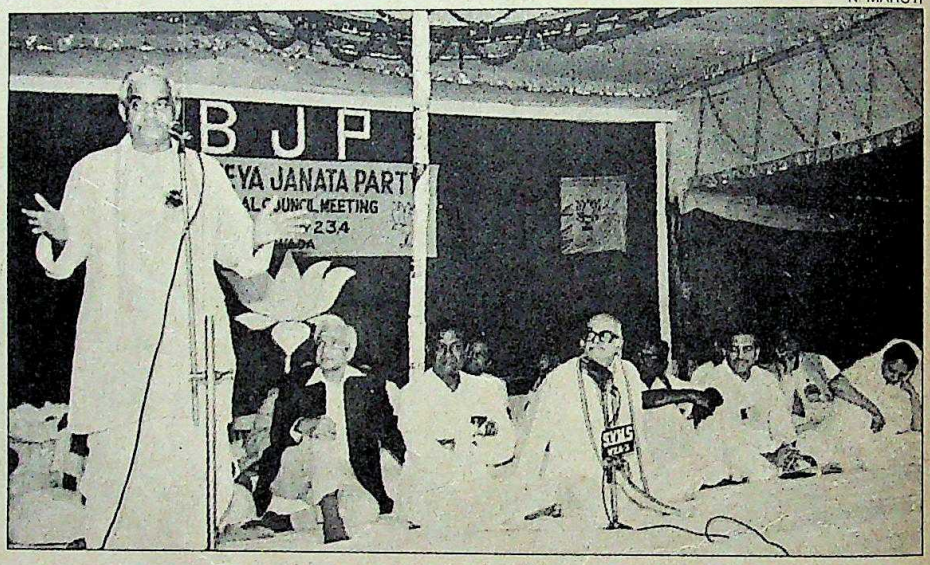
For the rest, the Vijayawada meeting was mostly business-as-usual. The ruling Congress(I) was criticised for its policy of drift, the party's home-grown creed of integral humanism was incorporated into the constitution, the threat from the growing infiltration from Pakistan and Bangladesh was highlighted. Former party president Atal Behari Vajpayee raised a few eyebrows by predicting a split in the ruling Congress(I), but he didn't adduce his reasons. Party president Lal Kishan Advani sprung a surprise, however, by saying that the party "had an open mind" on the question of a presidential form of government. The party had strongly opposed the move when it had been first mooted during the Emergency. Advani explained that the party's earlier stand was because it feared that the proposal was merely a ruse to confer dictatorial powers on Mrs Gandhi. Now, he said, the same danger did not exist.

Vijayawada marked another point of departure for the BJP. Barely two years ago, it had contested the Lok Sabha and Andhra Pradesh assembly elections as a partner of the Telugu Desam but last fortnight, the party came out with a 100-point chargesheet against the Telugu Desam Government accusing it of maladministration. Said state party general secretary M.P. Venkiah Naidu: "There is growing discontent in the state as the Telugu Desam is going the Congress way. The BJP is cashing in on this situation to become a stronger political force in Andhra Pradesh."

Vijayawada was chosen as the venue because the party is keen on extending its influence in the south. But results of the zilla parishad elections in Karnataka—where the BJP won a mere six seats—came as a damper even as the meeting was in progress. For all that, the BJP still hopes to emerge as a national alternative. This optimism, however, seems somewhat misplaced: in truth, the party is still in search for as clear a political identity as its earlier *avatar*, the Jana Sangh, had.

—AMARNATH K. MENON in Vijayawada

K. MARUTI



Vajpayee at Vijayawada: rallying peasants

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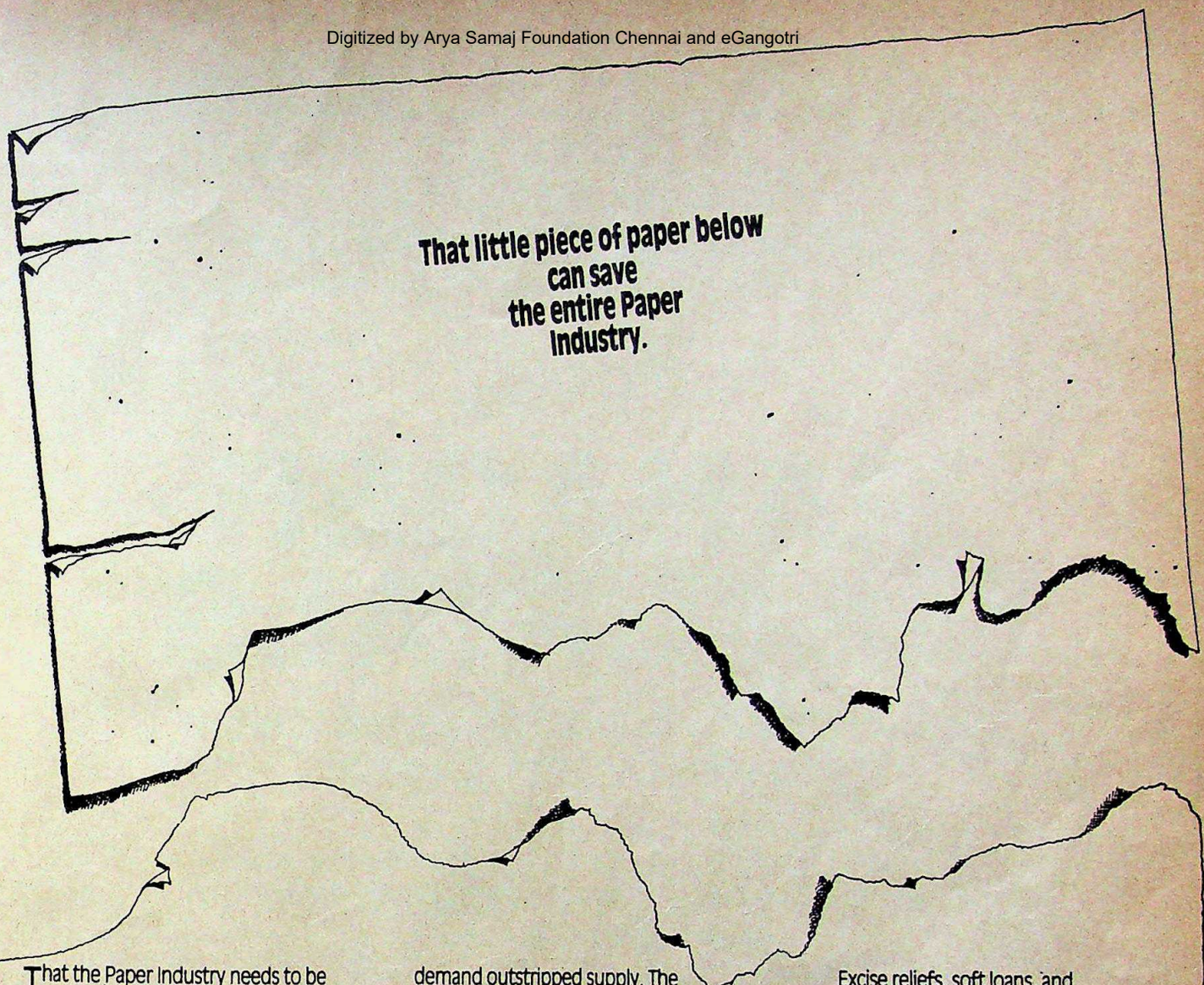

That the Paper Industry needs to be saved is no longer a point of debate.

And if 'turn of the century' targets are to be met, remedial measures have to be taken now.

Listed below is a 10-point 'get well' programme that the Government should implement immediately.

1. Stimulate demand. At present, India imports about 2 lakh tonnes of newsprint.

The Indian paper mills can easily substitute almost half of this by cream wove paper.

This can be treated as 'deemed export' and it would go a long way in reviving the Paper Industry. Also, India would save about Rs. 80 crores in foreign exchange every year.

2. Encourage paper exports and ban import of coated papers.

The former can be done by increasing the cash assistance from a current 8% to 25% of export price.

The latter also is perfectly feasible since the manufacturing capacity for coated paper is underutilised in India (only 57%).

3. Repeal the Paper (Control) Order. This order was instituted (in 1974) when demand outstripped supply. The situation is the exact opposite today.

All that this legislation has managed to do is impoverish the Paper Industry.

4. Reduce excise duties. The consequent increase in capacity utilisation will more than make up the loss to the Government.

5. Rationalise royalties on forest-based raw materials and encourage the development of industrial plantations.

The present rates are extremely high. Also, they're revised arbitrarily every year, thereby making any kind of financial planning a nearly impossible task.

The benefits of encouraging paper mills to develop their own plantations are self-evident.

6. Continue duty-free import of pulp and waste paper. Not only does this protect forests in India, it will also, in the long run, allow the paper mills to develop alternative raw materials for better grades of paper.

7. Encourage modernisation and expansion plans. Most of the mills rely on obsolete technology. And since they've been virtually stripped of cash, they're hardly in a position to invest on their own.

Excise reliefs, soft loans, and concessional duty on imported equipment would serve the purpose adequately.

8. Encourage new investments. The necessity of new investments is obvious. All that's required is a package of fiscal measures — say, excise relief equivalent to 75% of the value of plant and machinery, and easy term loans.

9. Encourage 'environment protection' measures. One example of this would be the replacement of wood packaging by corrugated packaging.

10. Evolve a stategy for reviving closed/sick units. The Government has already done that in the textile industry.

And it's working.

So why not here?

These 10-points have been amplified upon in a memorandum which the Paper Industry has recently submitted to the Government.

The facts are all there. They are also incontrovertible. And they suggest an obvious course of action.

It's now up to the Government.

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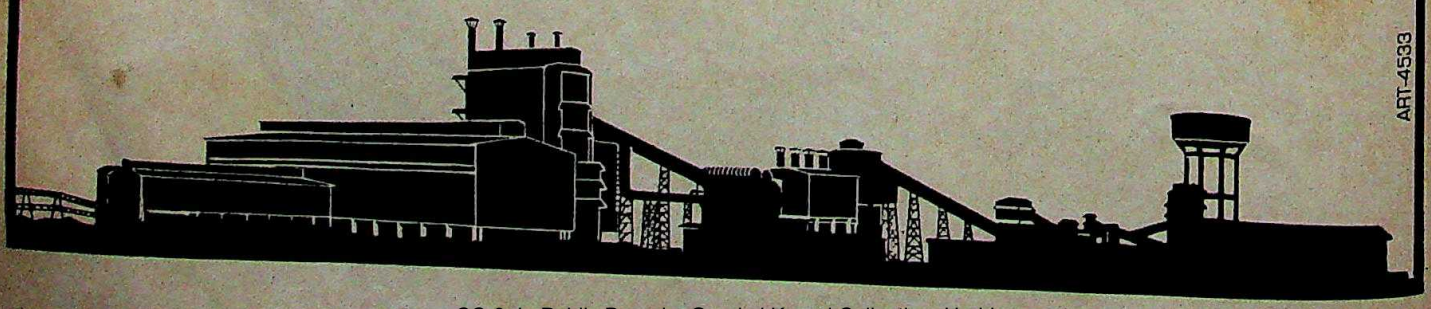

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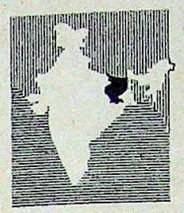
BIHAR

Draconian Ordinances



EVEN to a state long accustomed to rule through ordinances, the sudden amendment of the Bihar University Act and the Patna University Act last fortnight had the effect of a political bombshell. Ostensibly designed to de-politicise the seven strife-torn universities, the two ordinances sparked off vehement charges from the academic community that the Government was out to emasculate university autonomy and victimise teachers.

There was no denying the draconian scope of the ordinances which strengthened the state Government's grip on the universities. They suspended the democratically-elected senate and the syndicates, which acted as vital checks on the authorities, and vested their powers in the vice-chancellor, generally a political appointee.

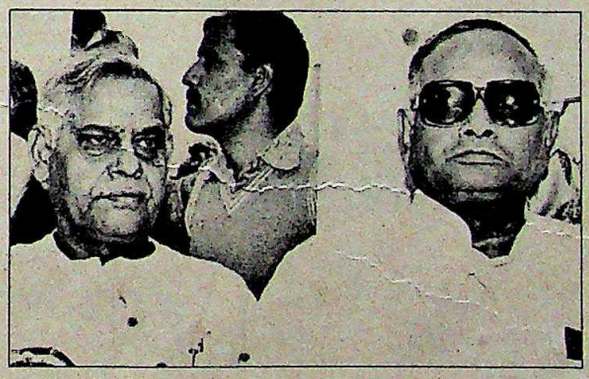
That the brain behind the ordinance was Bihar's Governor and Chancellor P. Venkatasubbaiah was evident for he had been campaigning for long to get the campuses cleansed of politicians. The clause barring ministers from becoming members of any university body or the governing body of colleges was especially believed to be his handiwork. While that in itself was laudable, the academic community, comprising some 20,000 teachers, was upset over the arbitrary powers the governor had acquired including that of transferring teachers. Besides, by conferring wide powers on the pro-vice-chancellors and registrars, the potential for conflict with the vice-chancellors had become explosive.

The joint action committee of the Federation of University Teachers Associations of Bihar (FUTAB) and the Federation of University (Service) Teachers Associations of Bihar (FUSTAB) charged that the Government had gone back on an agreement entered into with striking teachers last August whereby no decision on the university set-up was to be taken without consulting the teachers.

When teachers observed a "betrayal day" last fortnight, the state Government made it clear that it would not backpedal on its stand. Education Minister Lokesh Nath Jha firmly declared that the provisions of the ordinance had been drafted with a view to improving the administration of higher education in the state. Proof of the Government's good intentions, he claimed, was evident in the mere suspension—and not abolition—of the syndicates and senates. The explanation did little to cool frayed tempers, for the ordinances were silent about the basis on which new members would be nominated to the re-constituted senates and syndicates.

This was, however, not the first attempt by the state Government to control the universities. When L.K. Mishra was sacked as vice-chancellor of Bihar University on charges of corruption by Venkatasubbaiah last year, nobody was fooled about the real reasons behind the action. Mishra was known to be a follower of the dissident Congress(I) leader and former chief minister Jagannath Mishra and it suited Bindeshwari Dubey to get rid of him. The motives became even more apparent when Venkatasubbaiah asked all the vice-chancellors to resign "voluntarily"—most of them were known to be Jagannath Mishra's men.

Perhaps the only instance of constructive change was when the late chief minister Kedar Pande superseded the university administrations and appointed IAS officials as vice-chancellors in the early '70s. It brought peace, but only temporarily, for the officials had to be withdrawn following political pressure and the Jayaprakash Narayan-led agitations again left the campuses in a shambles. The Emergency brought discipline only to give way to the Janata wave and the ordinances of 1978 and 1979 conferring vast powers on the chancellor and vice-chancellors were withdrawn following strong objections by the UGC.



Agitating teachers (above): and Venkatasubbaiah (right) with Dubey: playing politics

But the scope and sweep of the present ordinances go far beyond anything ever contemplated or attempted before. And as political scientist V.P. Verma argues, in perhaps no other country has university autonomy been sacrificed at the altar of political expediency.

However, one strong dissenter was the English language daily *The Indian Nation*, which pointed out: "Nominated senates and syndicates do not prima facie appear desirable in a democratic set-up but it is well to remember that conditions in Bihar are extraordinary. We have an overdose of democracy in our universities which has played havoc with the future of our students."

—FARZAND AHMED

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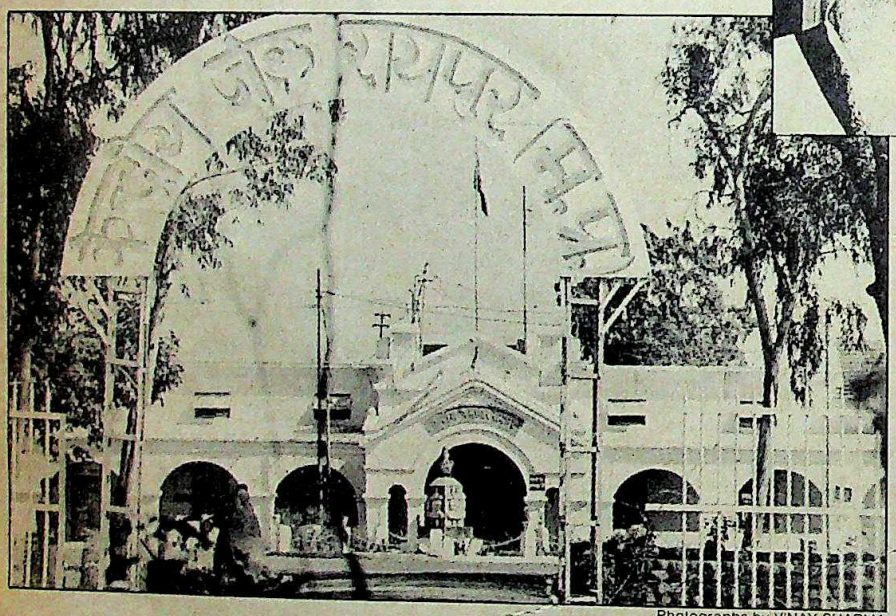
MADHYA PRADESH

Unwilling Hosts

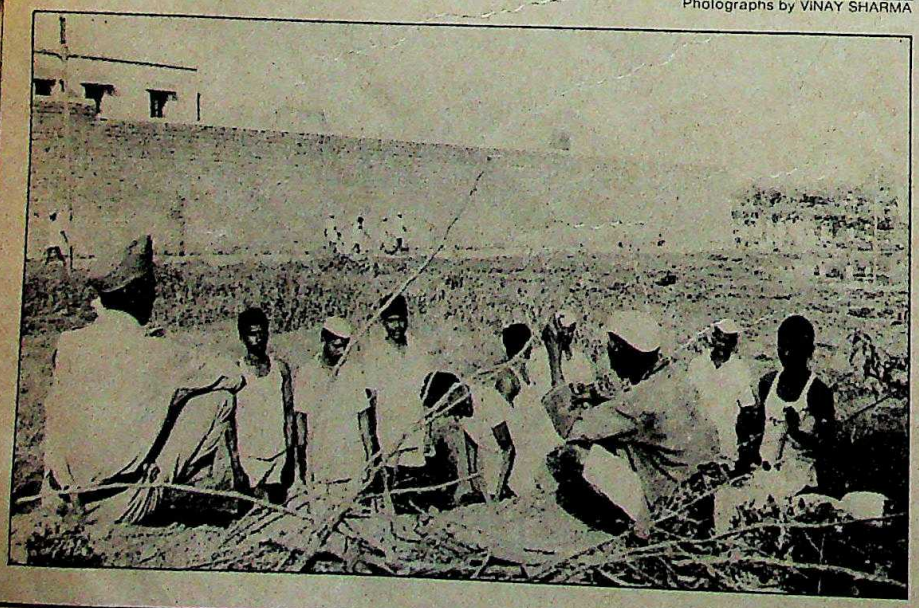
IN a move reminiscent of the post-Operation Bluestar days, jails in Madhya Pradesh are again being used to house Akali leaders under the National Security Act (NSA). While the chief of the breakaway Akali Dal, Parkash Singh Badal, has been lodged in Jabalpur jail, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the president of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, is in Raipur jail. Similarly, other jails—Rewa and Sagar in particular—are being readied to receive another group of 12 detainees from Punjab. But, unlike the last time, when their presence in the state hardly invited any attention, this time citizens and political parties have not taken kindly to their being sent to the state's jails.

Their main apprehension, growing out of Tohra and Badal's flirtation with the extremists in Punjab, is that the presence of the NSA detainees will give a spurt to terrorist activities. Durg, near Raipur, which has a large population of Sikhs, is listed in intelligence dossiers as an important base for extremists operating from the state. The arrest of some individuals from Durg, who the police claim were involved in the assassination of General Vaidya in September last year, has ensured the town's notoriety.

(Below) Raipur jail, where Tohra (inset) has been detained; and (bottom) jail staff clearing bushes around the prison premises: tightening security



Photographs by VINAY SHARMA



Tohra's arrival in Raipur jail triggered off a volley of protests from politicians—mainly from the Bharatiya Janata Party—and student leaders who threatened to launch an agitation for the Akali leaders' removal from the state's jails. Some students united under the banner of the Prerana Parishad and held a public meeting and burnt an effigy of a terrorist to draw attention to their demand. In Durg, the police had to take measures to prevent any outbreak of violence because of the escalating tension between the two communities.

However, Chief Minister Motilal Vora seemed unruffled by the protest, saying: "Tohra is totally safe in Raipur jail and I see no reason to move him to another prison." He also denied reports in local papers which claimed that Raipur jail did not fulfil many of the requirements for keeping VIP—hence high-risk—detainees. "Every condition laid down by the Centre has been completely fulfilled," he maintained.

Senior bureaucrats and police officials too believe that from the point of view of security, the state's jails are ideal: they offer comfortable facilities for VIP prisoners, have adequate security arrangements, and air-link facilities necessary for the periodic visits of members of the NSA advisory board. They concede, however, that their wards are giving them a sleepless time. "We know that both Tohra and Badal are respectable politicians but in view of terrorist activities we keep our fingers crossed all the time," said a concerned senior police officer in Raipur.

Consequently, security has been made even tighter in and around both places and surveillance operations of civilians intensified in the area. Jawans of the Madhya Pradesh Special Armed Forces have been deployed outside both the jails and equipped with the latest electronic devices and automatic weapons. A special anti-terrorist commando force selected from the ranks of the police has been posted around these prisons. Mini-police outposts with wireless links have been erected at both jails. At Raipur, the entire area around the prison has been cleared of bushes and any other kind of habitation. A motorable path for patrolling has also been constructed around the outer walls.

Security inside the jails has also been

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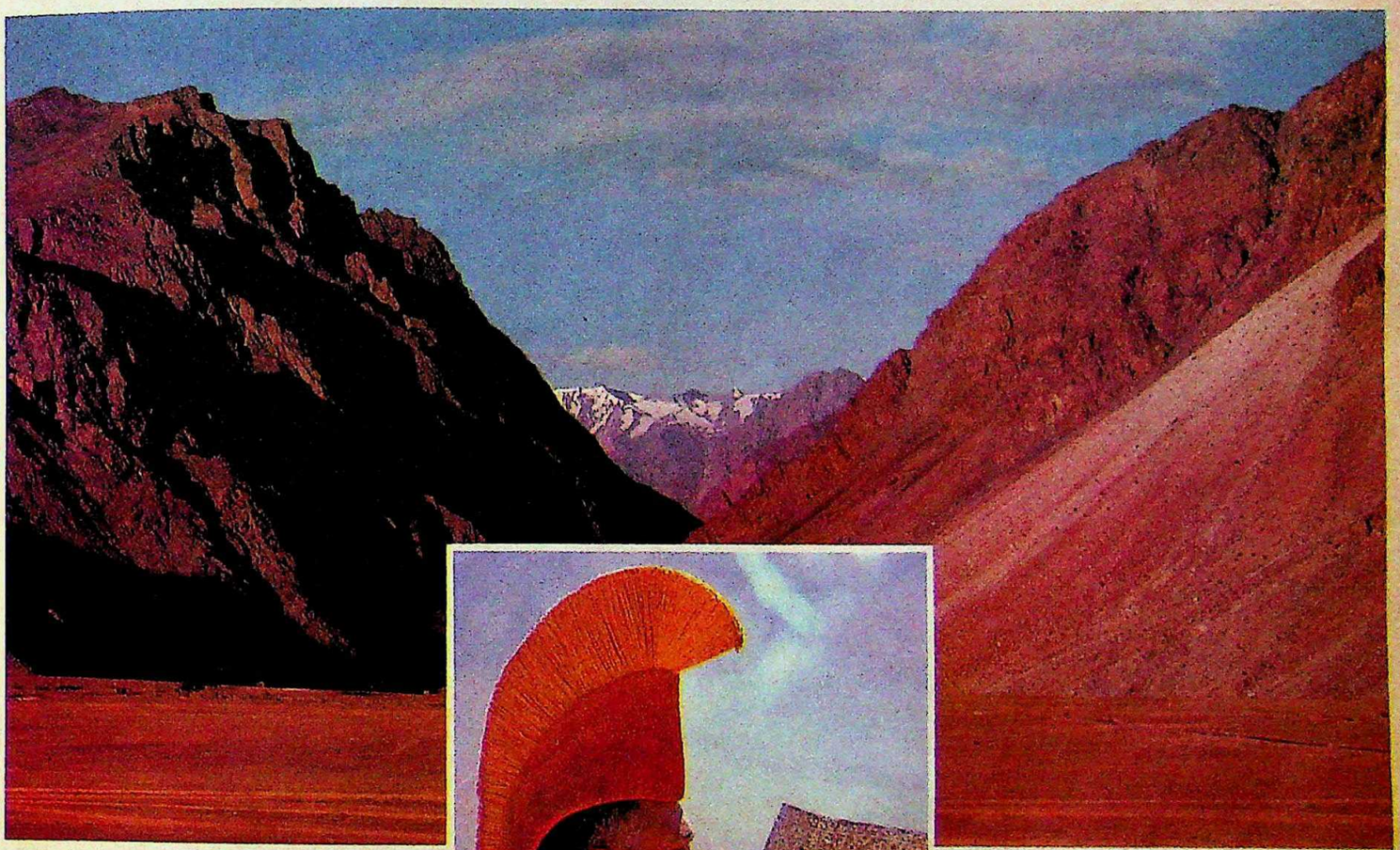

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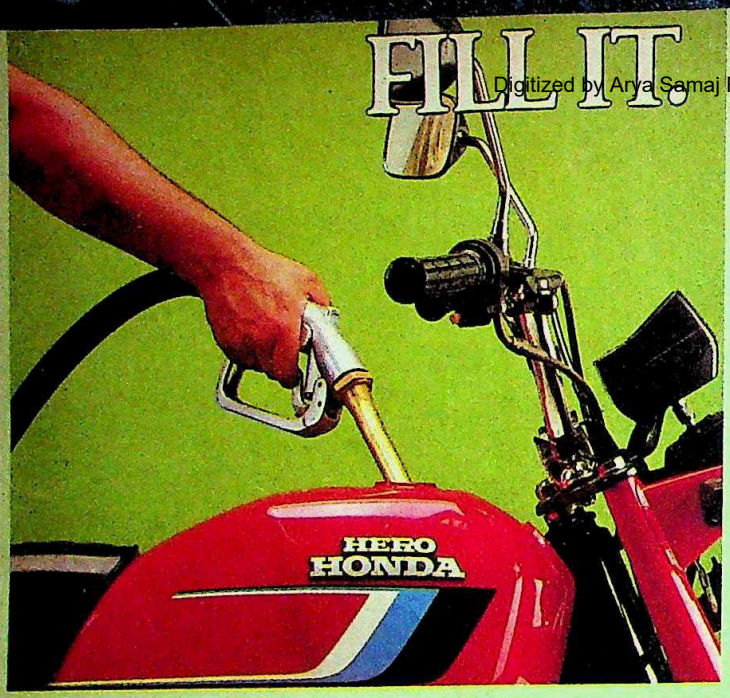

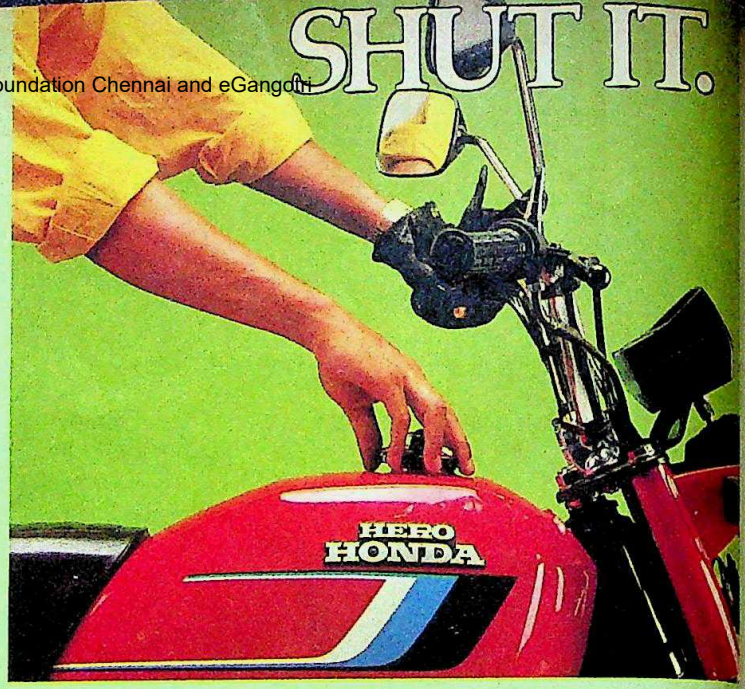

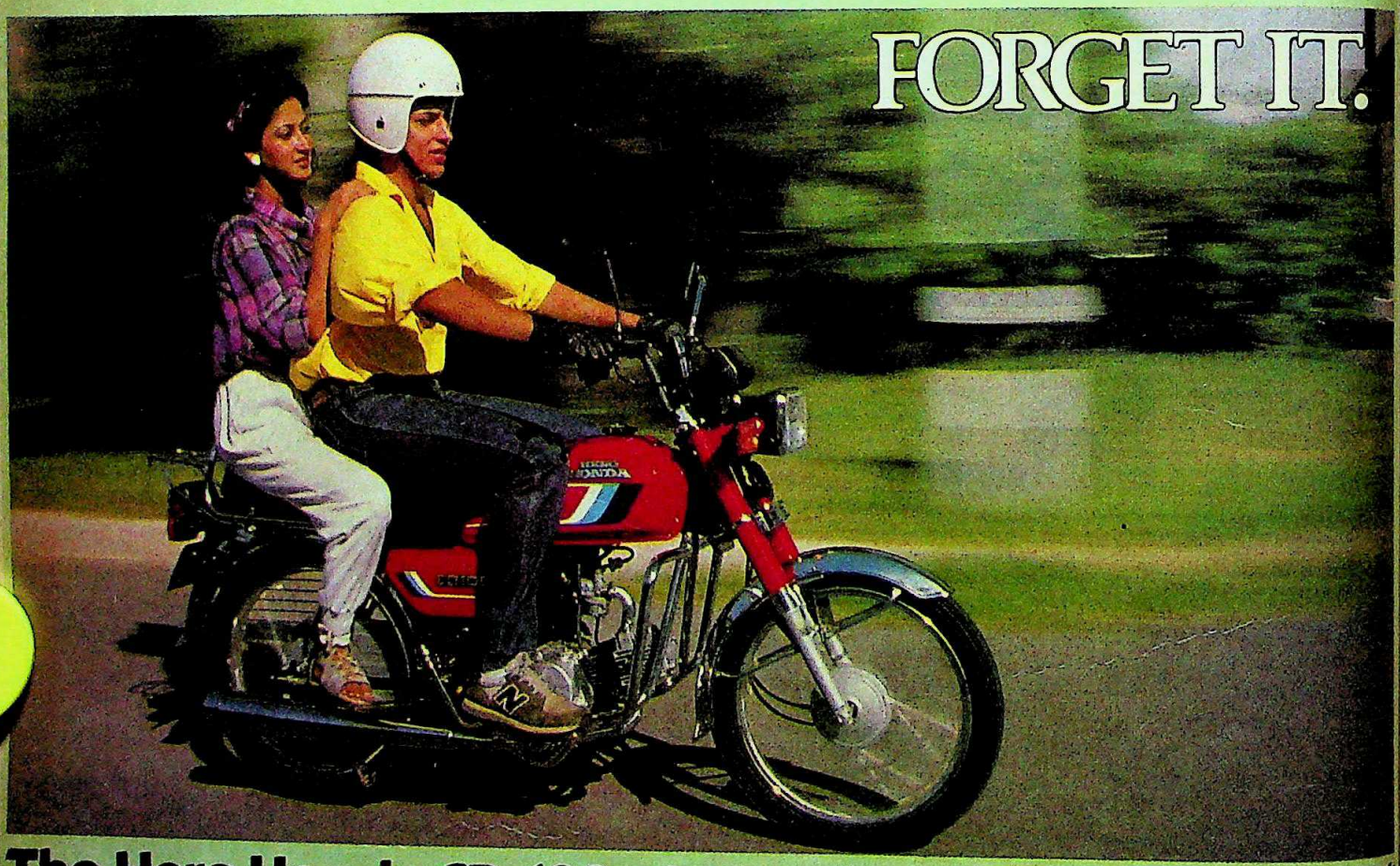

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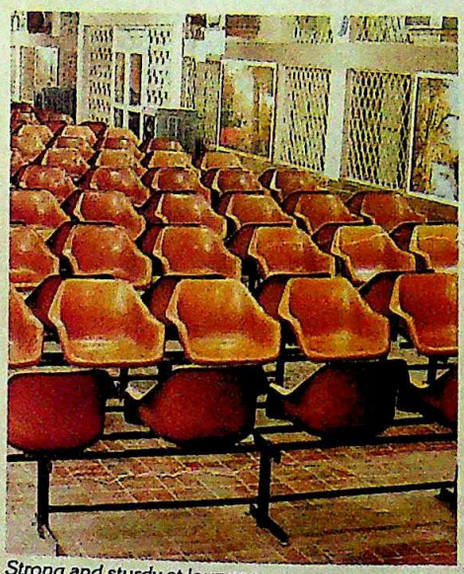

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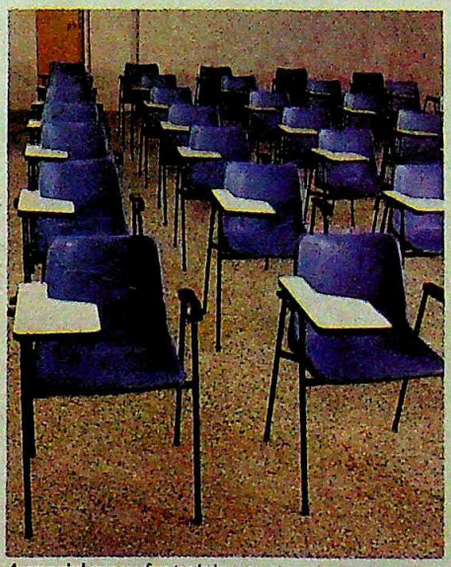

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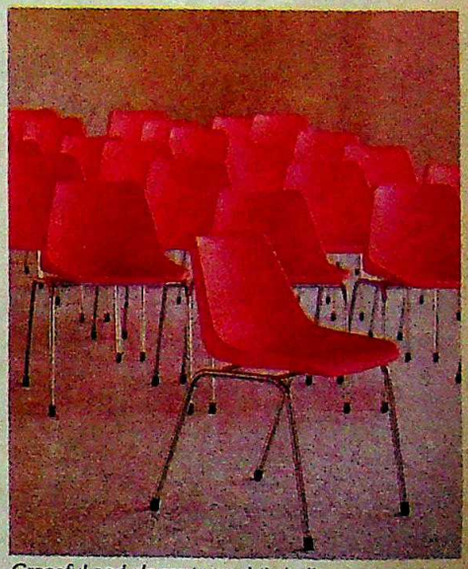

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tightened. According to jail officials, both Tohra and Badal have been segregated from other prisoners and the area has been made out of bounds even for jail staff. Tohra's barrack has been spruced up and carpeted, the walls painted and furniture put in. He has reportedly asked for Punjabi and English newspapers and a TV set. Badal, it is reported, keeps himself busy cooking, something he enjoys immensely. During his sojourn in Pachmarhi in mid-'84 he used to do all his own cooking assisted by a helper provided by the jail authorities.

The elaborate arrangements notwithstanding, apprehensions remain regarding a well-planned attempt to break into the jails, particularly Raipur. The state Government, however, has no other option but to play the role of the reluctant host.

—N.K. SINGH in Raipur and Jabalpur

MADHYA PRADESH

Shadow Play

FOR Motilal Vora, the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, it was, finally, a time for assertion. Weary after spending one-and-a-half years in the dominating shadow of his predecessor, Arjun Singh, now Union communications minister, Vora last month set about establishing his authority by gunning for Singh's men. In one fell swoop, he got rid of B.K. Mukherjee, director-general of police, K.S. Thakur, chief of the state's 20-point programme implementation committee, and Surendra Singh Solanki, chairman of the Bhopal District Cooperative Bank. The moves were particularly striking because Vora's critics have often accused him of harbouring a fear-complex about Singh.

Retaliation was not long in coming, though. Singh set about proving that in spite of his removal from the powerful post of Congress(I) vice-president, his clout in Madhya Pradesh remains unaffected. Although his whirlwind tours of the Vindhya, Gwalior and Chhattisgarh regions did not exactly set either the Chambal or the Mahanadi on fire, he succeeded in proving his point.

Singh's followers accorded him tumultuous receptions everywhere and the low-profile Vora, who accompanied him to some places, was simply sidelined. It was the Gwalior trip that first provided evidence of the schism between the two. Singh's supporters had organised a farmers' conference at Morena with him as chief guest. Although it was attended by Singh's trusted lieutenant, state party chief Digvijay Singh, and other politicians, Vora, who was in nearby Gwalior, was pointedly left out. To add insult to injury, Vora had to attend functions in Gwalior where the arches welcomed Singh but did not so much as mention his name.

Even in Chattisgarh—considered the stronghold of his arch foe in state politics, V.C. Shukla, and the homeground of Vora himself—Singh drew large crowds. This sent a jittery Vora rushing to Shukla for consultations—it was the first time the two had met after Vora took over as chief minister in 1985. The pair obviously had a lot to be worried about.

Vora faced attack in another form too. Last fortnight he was harangued by a delegation of ruling party MLAs and MPs from Rewa division who complained that the region had been neglected ever since Singh—who belongs to the area—left the state. The delegation, led by Congress(I) MP Martand Singh and legislator Ajay Singh—Arjun Singh's son—was generally regarded as a demonstration of discontent.

The delegation demanded that the representative of this region in the state Cabinet—the present incumbent, Ram Kishore Shukla, is considered a Vora supporter—be changed to "someone acceptable to everyone". The obvious suggestion was the inclusion of Ajay Singh, who comes closest to fitting that bill. The chief minister reacted with an additional allotment of Rs 1.60 crore to Rewa division for drought relief, much more than the amount allotted to Raipur division whose suffering is greater.

Digvijay Singh also haunts Vora. He keeps shooting off letters to the chief minister complaining of inefficient administration and non-implementation of vital decisions taken during Arjun Singh's time. The Madhya Pradesh Congress(I) Committee came under Arjun Singh's total influence when he was party vice-president and its office-bearers function as parallel power centres, often embarrassing Vora.

One such recent case was the uproar in Raipur following the arrest of Ramgulam Thakur, general secretary of the Congress(I) Raipur (rural) unit. A former fire-eating socialist and trade unionist, Thakur was charged with 33 criminal cases, including six of assaults on public servants, when he joined the ruling party in 1985. In spite of this record, he got his party post through Digvijay Singh when V.C. Shukla's men were being purged.

Recently, Thakur, who swears loyalty to Arjun Singh, was allegedly assaulted by the policemen who came to arrest him, and he had to be hospitalised. They also allegedly misbehaved with his wife and mother. "I've been leading the struggles of tendu leaf workers in the area, who are exploited by traders close to Motilal Vora and V.C. Shukla. Hence they entered into a conspiracy with the police to eliminate me," Thakur fumed in a letter to the Raipur party chief. Indeed, the district units—rural and urban—not only condemned the police action, holding it similar to "police terror during the Raj", but also threatened to launch an agitation if the guilty policemen were not punished.

"The police will take action against anyone involved in criminal activities irrespective of whether or not he is a member of the ruling party," said Vora sternly, but he also ordered a magisterial inquiry into the incident. Clearly, the ghost of Arjun Singh is not about to leave the chief minister for a long time to come.

—N.K. SINGH in Raipur

MOTILAL VORA

Vora's attempts to assert his authority in state politics have only underlined the influence Singh continues to wield.

ARJUN SINGH

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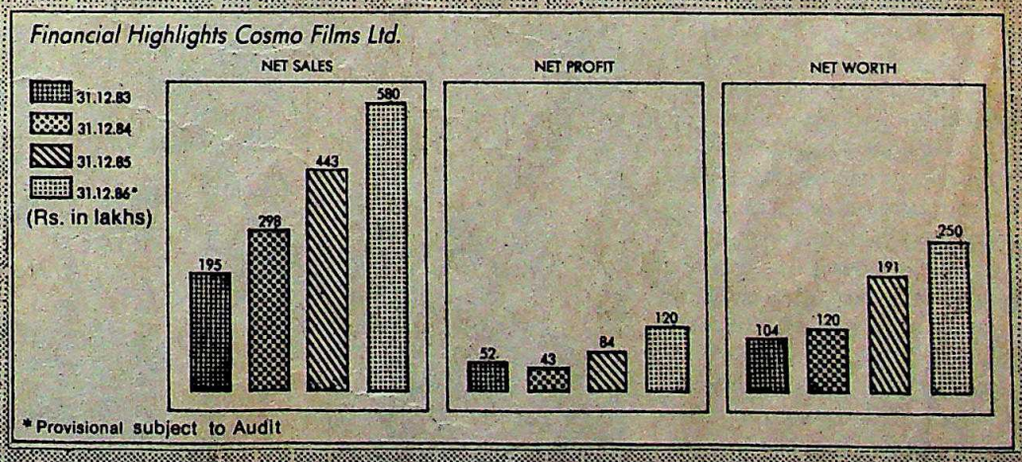

ISSUE OPENS ON 29TH JANUARY, 1987

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GOA

Papering Differences

THE high-powered visitors from Delhi barely needed a day to turn the tide in the surging crisis that had engulfed Goa's Cabinet. But what remained as precariously poised as the broken Mandovi bridge dividing north from south was the fate of the language bill seeking to make Konkani the official language—the cause of the week-long violence in end-December.

Congress(I) General Secretary R.L. Bhatia announced before returning to New Delhi that "the crisis was over" and the four rebel ministers in Chief Minister Pratapsinh Rane's cabinet had withdrawn their resignations. The four—Power Minister Harish Zantye, Law and Revenue Minister Sheikh Hassan Haroon, Tourism Minister Louis Proto Barbosa, and Panchayat Minister Francisco Sardinha—had submitted their resignations arguing that they couldn't work with Rane and had stubbornly refused to change their stand. Even on the eve of the mediators' visit 12 of the 22 Congress(I) legislators in the 33-member Goa Assembly met at the residence of Zantye, an aspirant for the post of chief minister, to once again reassert their loss of faith in Rane's leadership. "Rane will have to go, otherwise the Congress(I) will lose its credibility," a rebel leader asserted.

But the moment Bhatia got off the plane at Dabolim airport and greeted a nonplussed Zantye with, "how are you, chief minister?" it was apparent that the Centre was not willing to back the demand for a change in leadership seriously. By nightfall Zantye had signed a tersely worded letter withdrawing his resignation, while the others held out demanding a face-saving phrase like "at the request of the high command" before they patched up with Rane. Ultimately, they relented and called upon the chief minister at his official residence, and wished him a belated Happy New Year.

But this seems to be only a temporary reprieve for Rane. The Assembly arithmetic is heavily tilted against him. Of the 19 Congress(I) MLAs (excluding three who are nominated) 10 have come out against him. Rane seems to be in minority even in North Goa from where he himself has been elected. Four of the seven MLAs have turned rebels and are likely to vote against him. Despite his decisive minority Rane has been able to retain his chief ministership only due to the Centre's backing. The high command is determined to foil any attempt by the MLAs to dictate terms and force a change in the leadership. As a senior party office bearer put it: "It will have an effect in states like Orissa and Bihar where MLAs have been agitating for a change in the chief ministership."

But dealing with the language tangle will not be as easy as resolving the Cabinet crisis. As Bhatia observed after the rebel ministers withdrew their resignations, the situation in Goa is "back to square one". With the Assembly scheduled to meet on February 4, the ruling party is caught in a dilemma. It can neither risk the wrath of the pro-Marathi lobby by pushing the official language bill, introduced last July through the legislature nor can it go back on its pledge to the Konkani protagonists and agree to give equal status to Marathi. In the Assembly, as outside, the language problem defies solution—everyone speaks Konkani, but when it comes to making it the official language, the legislators and the people, begin to speak in different voices.

Since all the parties involved in the dispute—the pro-Konkani Goa Congress, the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party(MGP), the Konkani Projecho Avaz, besides the Congress(I)—agree that Konkani is acceptable to the people of the Union territory, the whole question

Bhatia (top, second from left) meets rebel ministers; and partymen await outcome

Photographs by NAMAS BHOJANI

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hinges on what status the other language in the territory, which is mainly used as a written language by the older members of the majority Hindu community, should be given. "We are still trying to reach a consensus on Marathi, and maybe we will have to return after consultations with the prime minister for another round of discussions," Bhatia said after talks with leaders of all the different groups.

BUT already Marathi has been given substantial concessions in the existing bill, and with the protagonists of both the languages belligerently sticking to their stand it was not clear what the compromise could be short of.

But the party to lose the most from the delay would be the Congress(I). "Whatever the decision, the high command must move soon," said PCC(I) chief S. Katkar. "The impasse is only helping the regional parties, the MGP and the Goa Congress, and both Marathi and Konkanis are moving away from our party."

In fact, the danger to the Congress(I), which came to power after 17 years of MGP rule in Goa, is that the language issue may split the party, besides dividing the people of the state. The Congress(I) had won the elections in 1980 after factions from both the MGP and the United Goans, a party representing the Catholics of south Goa, came together, finally ending the polarisation of electoral politics on religious lines.

The language issue now threatens to slice through this secular coalition. "It's happening already in the party organisation at the grassroots level," admitted a senior Congress(I) MLA. "Since both sides see us dithering, it is difficult to collect a small group of party workers who seem to be crystallising once again into MGP and United Goan, Hindu and Catholic factions."

But neither the MGP nor the Goa Congress (a breakaway group representing Konkani-supporting Catholics of south Goa) would be over-eager to help the ruling party out of its dilemma. MGP leader Ramakant Khalap made it clear after Bhatia's visit that his party would not compromise on the demand for equal status to Marathi, while Goa Congress chief Wilfred d'Souza stated categorically that the dual language formula was unacceptable. Both, however, are one in their demand for immediate statehood for Goa, and for seeing the elections which follow as a referendum on the language issue. "But it will be foolish for us to go in for statehood immediately since if language is the issue in the next elections our party will be wiped out," said a Congress(I) leader. "As it is if we don't resolve it in the next three years, both the opposition parties are bound to exploit the issue in the assembly elections at the end of 1989."

With Rajiv Gandhi having stated clearly that the people of Goa should resolve the language question before they are granted statehood, the Congress(I) desperately needs a miracle to bail itself out from a sinking official language bill. With the situation becoming increasingly polarised, even a senior Congress(I) legislator and ardent supporter of Konkani admitted: "Now after all this heat and dust if the party does not issue a whip the bill will be defeated. And if it issues a whip and the bill is passed god knows what the future consequences will be to the party."

The only hope some of the older legislators have is that somehow the warring groups would agree to keep the language issue in abeyance. "Most of the youth, whether Hindu or Catholic, is totally for Konkani," said a Congress(I) MLA from north Goa. "Today I will not be able to go home if Marathi is not given equal status but when my son, who knows only English and Konkani, grows up a solution may be possible."

In fact, one solution, reportedly from Eduardo Faleiro, but later denied by the Union minister, was to make both languages official for a period of 15 years while also allowing the use of the Roman script for the benefit of the Catholics. But the Home Ministry has advised that constitutionally the Assembly of Goa can only give official status to one language. It could, though, as in Pondicherry (or even in the Goa bill which stipulates Gujarati for Daman and Diu), allow for the use of a second official language at the *taluka* level. But in Goa this could become a farce, and the centre of another controversy since the Catholic and Hindu population is well dispersed in several *talukas*.

But while the politicians play their games, the administration in Goa is now better prepared to deal with any fresh flare-up. The 14 companies of CRPF and Gujarat SRP personnel are still on duty. "If trouble breaks out again we will take swift action," said an official. Since the Assembly will meet in the first week of February, Goa's famed carnival has been cancelled. But whether the easy going attitude of Goans, both Hindu and Catholics—called *susegad* in Konkani—will ultimately triumph over the deadly passions aroused over the language issue remains to be seen.

—M. RAHMAN

Rane: a temporary reprieve

The Congress(I) cannot ignore the pro-Marathi lobby by pushing the official language bill nor let down Konkani protagonists by giving equal status to Marathi.

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25 Years of Engineering Excellence

Mr. Arun Kirloskar
Chairman

Excerpts from the speech delivered by Mr. Arun Kirloskar, Chairman at the 25th Annual General Meeting held on December 12, 1986.

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This year is a landmark in the life of your Company because it marks 25 years of excellence in the engineering industry.

We did not increase prices to offset the cost increases. On the other hand, we have tried to absorb the increase by improving productivity supplemented by savings from cost reduction efforts.

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"... you will find this government moving faster than you are moving. The problem will not be with the government constraints or government restrictions or the time taken by government but whether you can keep up with what we are doing..."

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I want to clarify at the very outset, that it is senseless to talk only about productivity of workmen and take for granted the white collar and managerial productivity.

I wish to make a fervent appeal to the government that indiscipline and sub-standard productivity must be made grounds for termination of employment.

We have in fact indulged in a sterile quarrel over public and private sector concepts. As is made clear by the Prime Minister, we have only the national sector.

The Prime Minister's concepts of modern technology and strong economy are well supported by his worthy colleague Hon'ble Mr. V.P. Singh, our Finance Minister...one who acts with firm conviction and takes political risks in implementing what he thinks right is a great man indeed and when he succeeds he becomes greater still.

Industry and trade can take initiative in creating employment only if the hurdles to productivity are removed.

There is a law for minimum wages.There is no law for minimum productivity.

Several managements succumb to pressures and buy industrial peace instead of securing the rightful demand for appropriate productivity. The goal should be "buy efforts not just peace".

I say with conviction and three decades of experience that 80% of the parts of diesel engines can be made on simple machines to the highest quality standards by dedicated workers and creative engineers.

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UTTAR PRADESH

Death on the Gomti

DECEMBER 30 will forever remain a memorable day in the lives of the fishermen of Lucknow. On the surface of the Gomti floated countless bodies of dead fish. Abandoning their rods, lines and nets, they waded into the river and picked off from the surface as many fish as they could lay their hands on. But in spite of the large numbers they carted away, by noon a 6 km stretch of the river still remained covered with thousands of dead fish. Little did the fishermen realise that far from being a bounty from the gods, it was in effect a poisonous omen of industrial pollution caused by man.

Reacting swiftly to the crisis, the Uttar Pradesh Jal Sansthan, responsible for the city's water supply, stopped pumping in water from the river. The district administration banned the sale of fish indefinitely. And the barrage gates built downstream was opened in order to speed the river's flow. The Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board (UPPCB) warned the people against bathing in the river or using its water. The board also secured an order from the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court against two manufacturers—Mohan Meakins Ltd upstream in Lucknow, distillers of Indian-made foreign liquor, country liquor and rectified spirit; and Oudh Sugar Mills downstream in Hargaon, Sitapur, manufacturing rectified spirit—stopping the discharge of their effluents into the Gomti till the hearing of a writ petition, filed on December 31. "It was an ecological disaster of the highest order," said Dr M.C. Saxena, scientist-in-charge of the Fetotoxicity Department of the Central Industrial Toxicology Research Centre (ITRC).

Yet Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh, as well as the district and Nagar Mahapalika officials, while admitting that the fish had died because of pollution of the river, ruled out that the water posed any threat to human health. Brushing aside most of the questions at a press conference, Singh said: "The Government is looking into the matter and will try and get the river rid of pollution."

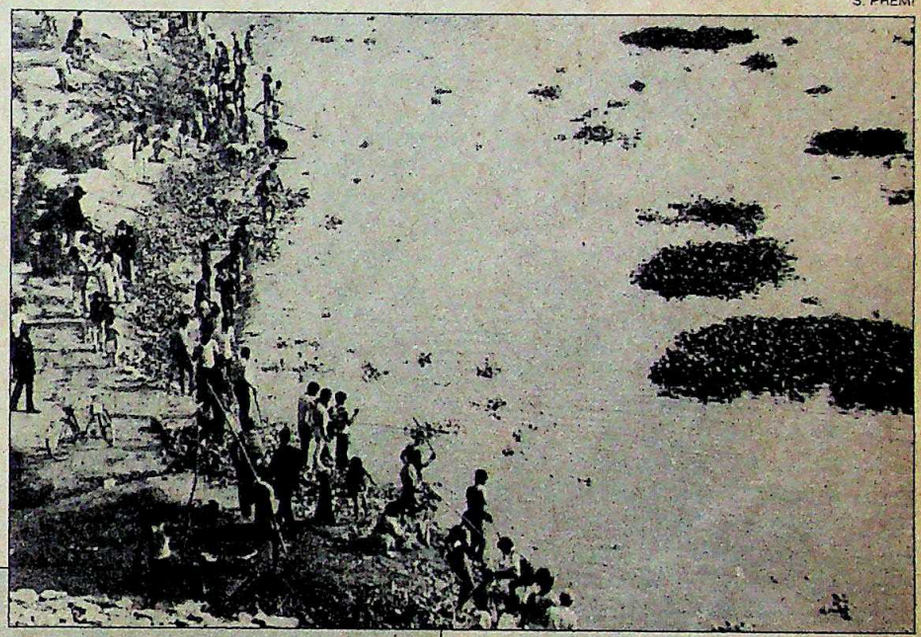
But this is a tall order that the Government might never fulfil. Last month's disaster was not the first. A similar incident as officially recorded took place on March 10, 1981, and it is unofficially claimed that it recurred again on March 7, 1983 and May 3, 1984. Immediately after the first incident, the UPPCB issued a notice to Mohan Meakins and began proceedings in the court of a special magistrate on July 16, 1981. The court issued an order on July 4, 1982, restraining the company from discharging the effluents into the river until it installed an effluent treatment plant. A similar proceeding launched against Oudh Sugar Mills also resulted in an order issued on March 8, 1984. But the court orders have not been implemented. The two concerns are contesting the orders in the high court, on grounds that their effluents do not pose a pollution hazard.

But Dr Saxena points out that the trade effluents of distilleries contain aldehydes which have carcinogenic (cancerous) and mutagenic (compounds which mutate with genes) effects on human and animal bodies. "There is no known procedure in the world to prevent aldehydes from being released in trade effluents of distilleries," he said.

According to an analysis of samples of the river water taken by the ITRC on December 30 and 31, the fish died because of the gradual depletion of dissolved oxygen in the Gomti. "The fish could have died of asphyxia," said an ITRC scientist who analysed the water samples. The dissolved oxygen content in the water samples ranged from 1.2 to 3 mg per litre (mgl), a level insufficient for respiration in any amphibian species. "As against 6 mgl—the normal biological oxygen demand (BOD) of fresh river water—the BOD recorded in the upstream was found to be over 60 mgl and downstream it had risen to 840 mgl," said Surendra Singh, secretary of the UPPCB.

The board believes that the two concerns are the major polluters. Mohan Meakins —working with two distillation plants of 12,000 litres and 6,000 litres capacity—was discharging after partial treatment, an average of 20,000 to 25,000 litres of effluents daily. The Oudh Sugar Mills which has no treatment plant, discharges 5 lakh litres of effluents per day. But both denied these charges. "We are releasing effluents which have a BOD of around 100 mgl, which is the prescribed limit," said Rakesh Mohan, managing director of Mohan Meakins, insisting

S. PREMI



Collecting dead fish: man-made disaster

The UPPCB firmly believes that Mohan Meakins and Oudh Sugar Mills are the major polluters of the Gomti river.

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that the distillery had closed on December 29 by 8.30 p.m. And C.P. Dalmia, proprietor of Oudh Sugar Mills, said that it was impossible that the trade effluent from his plant could pollute the Gomti. He accused the board of "implicating us in order to take the pressure off Lucknow". But sample analyses indicate that there was an excessive discharge of trade effluents into the Gomti on the night of December 29.

Citizens and political parties have rallied to force the Government to take action against the culprits. Students in Lucknow launched an awareness drive on January 5. Mulayam S.Yadav, leader of the Opposition in the Vidhan Sabha called for a "decisive agitation" to control pollution. The Legal Aid Centre—a voluntary organisation—filed a writ petition against the state Government and the UPPCB for its inaction against, the Nagar Mahapalikas of Lucknow, Sultanpur and Jaunpur, the Central Drug Research Institute and the ITRC.

The Gomti has been turned into a sewage drain by both industries and civic bodies of towns on the way. A UPPCB survey in 1981 states that the average flow of the Gomti in Lucknow is 814.5 million litres per day, of which at least 500 million litres comes from industrial effluents or municipal drains. Said R.P.S. Parihar, superintending engineer of the Jal Sansthan: "We draw about 163 million litres of water from the Gomti everyday, and this has to be excessively dechlorinated for three days because of its colour." The river is almost like a lake in Lucknow as the barrage downstream is permanently clamped to maintain a water level of 344.6 feet. In this 15-km stretch, the water is almost stagnant and there is a great possibility of a back-flow of waste water and trade effluents to the river downstream.

Yet Mohan places the blame on the Lucknow Development Authority. He claimed that the "poisonous water" pumped from the Suraj Kund pond into the Gomti was responsible for killing the fish. But P.K. Jain, the executive engineer on the project site, said: "We have been pumping the pond water into the river since December 25. We stopped the work on January 5 and the fish died on December 30. During the operation, the labourers ate fish from the pond but no one complained of a bad stomach." Whatever might be the reasons for the pollution, it is clear that if something is not done soon, Lucknow might be the next victim of a man-made tragedy.

—DILIP AWASTHI

LAST WORD/RAJINDER PURI

All in the Family

Mr Arun Shourie will be joining the Indian Express group from February 1 as Executive Editor of the *Indian Express*. He resigned from *The Times of India* on Friday. Asked how he felt on rejoining the *Express*, he said: "That is where the action is. I am delighted."

—*News report, page one*, Indian Express, *January 3, 1987*.

The editor pushed back his glasses and rubbed his eyes as the staff filed into the room for the morning's editorial conference.

"Well," said the editor. "what goes in the paper today?"

The news editor cleared his throat. "We might have space problems today, chief—there was lots of action yesterday!"

"Action, action, always more action," the editor murmured wearily. "Okay, what should be our lead for page one today?"

"The latest reshuffle is the talk of the town, chief," the news editor said. "We could do an inside story on that!"

The editor frowned. "You mean Rajiv has reshuffled the Cabinet again? Gosh, I didn't even notice it this time...."

"Not Cabinet reshuffle, chief," the political correspondent broke in indulgently. "He means the reshuffle of the editors. You know that Hindustan Crimes, Indian Espresso and Crimes of India have all got new editors recently. We could do an inside story on that!"

The editor nodded approvingly. "The readers will love that," he said. "What angle should we take?"

"There's a lot of public misunderstanding about the reshuffle, chief," the political correspondent said earnestly. "People tend to make fun of Arun Surely for rejoining Ram Nath Going-car after the two had abused each other so violently in public! True, Going-car had called Surely a plagiarist, chief—but that's no reason why a guy can't have a second homecoming to a place where the action is!"

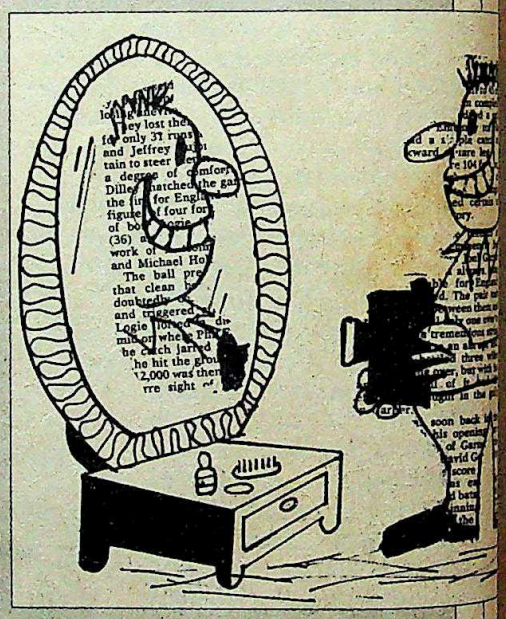
"Right," said the news editor solemnly. "I mean this isn't any cheap defection trick like what Sharad Pawar played, is it fellows?"

"Of course not," everyone in the room said in a chorus.

The editor stroked his jaw thoughtfully.

"But what about the dynastic angle? I mean, does it look okay for Arun Surely and Suman Dubbly to work together in the two top spots in the paper? They are related, aren't they...?"

"Aw c'mon chief," the news editor protested. "They're not even



blood relatives, nothing like Rajiv Gandhi and Arun Nehru!"

"I suppose you're right," the editor said with a sigh. "You're all pretty sure there is nothing messy in the whole affair then?"

"Of course not, chief," they all said together. "Going-car is too much of an idealist for that."

Just then the tea boy intervened. "But who would want to read a news story about editors, sir?"

"The prime minister and the Cabinet of course, who else?" the editor snapped. "They take so much interest in the appointment of editors—surely they would want to read all about it..."

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Head Hunting

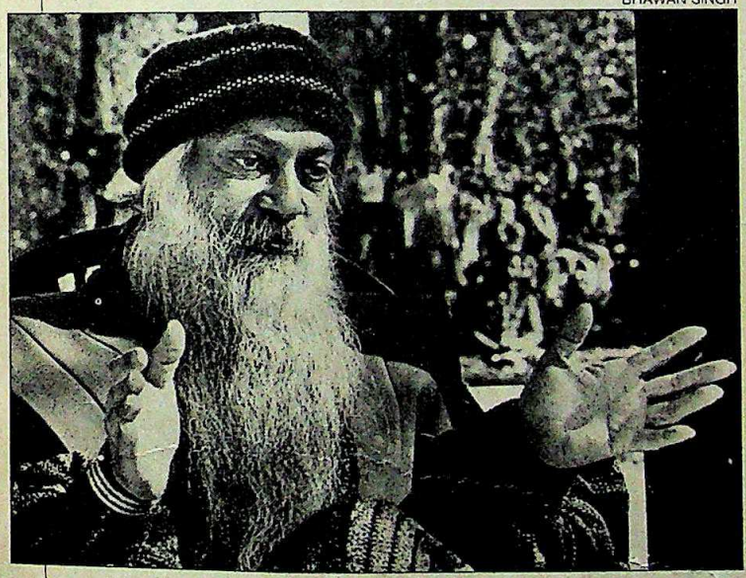
DIRECTOR-generals of police are obviously carefully chosen men. But Uttar Pradesh seems to have a lot more difficulty finding them than do other states. For the second time in three years, the Government is in a quandary over the issue. This time, it was only after DGP D.K. Aggarwal had retired that a committee was set up under Chief Secretary J.A. Kalyankrishnan to recommend a suitable successor. And interim director-general P.C. Kakkar, inspector of police (training), hasn't even been promoted from the post of inspector general (IG).

An official spokesman puts the blame on Central directives which stipulate that police chiefs must have 30 years' experience and should also have worked as IG's for at least four years: there was no candidate in the state who could fulfill these qualifications. The state Government had asked the Centre if it could consider candidates with over 21 years' experience and about four years as IG. Half a dozen officers under consideration possess these qualifications. Meanwhile, the one lakh-strong police force has only interim relief.

Back to Square One

AFTER nearly six years, Rajneesh is back where he began. Last fortnight, when the guru of the guiltless, laid-back lifestyle came home to his Koregaon Park ashram after a futile search for a bungalow in Bombay, Pune Police

BHAWAN SINGH



Rajneesh: full circle

Commissioner B.J. Misar welcomed him with an order to leave the city within 48 hours. The reasoning was that his presence with his disciples could disturb "public tranquility", arising out of drug-trafficking and indecent public behaviour.

His disciples got an interim stay from the Bombay High Court and an understanding was finally reached between the yogi and the commissar. Misar agreed to keep the order "in abeyance" till April after a commitment from Rajneesh that he did not intend to stay in Pune for more than three months. Western devotees were also allegedly told by ashram authorities to observe rituals of Indian public behaviour when outside the ashram. Obviously, Pune's citizens are not going to accept Rajneesh's libertinian philosophy as they have in the past.

Delicate Irony

IN an ironical turn of events, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's (DMK) anti-Hindi agitation was followed by an immensely successful week-long festival put up by the Uttar Pradesh Government. Large crowds thronged the Music Academy auditorium last fortnight in Madras and went into raptures over Bismillah Khan's melodies on the shehnai even though some 20,000 DMK activists were in jails across the state. Indeed, the crowds came in large numbers not only for Khan's performance but for all the festival's shows. Commented Tamil short-story writer R. Kedhar: "It is mostly the political parties who make a hue and cry about Hindi. The middle and upper classes see and enjoy these cultural functions purely from the artistic point of view."

SHYAM TEKWANI

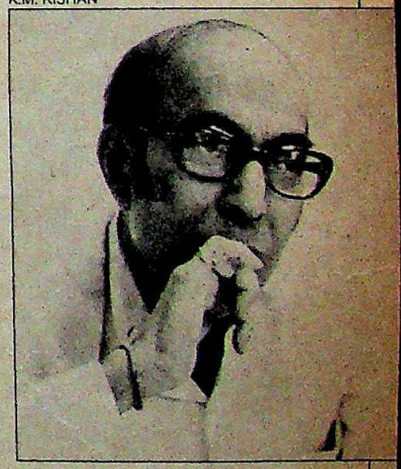
Khan: good response

All the same, nobody was taking chances. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh's inaugural address was translated into Tamil in copies distributed to the audience. And since Tamil Nadu ministers couldn't run the risk of having to make a public speech in praise of Hindi, they preferred to stay away.

Herculean Chore

CLEANING the Augean Stables of the 70,000-strong Bihar police force of rampant corruption, inefficiency and brutalities is the job state Director-General of Police Shashi Bhushan Sahay has set upon himself to accomplish. Sahay began by creating departments of law and order and of personnel. While the first has yet to show results, the second experiment in managing the men on scientific lines has become a pioneering effort. In fact, a national seminar at the National Police Academy at Hyderabad has recommended that all police forces should have a personnel department patterned on the Bihar model.

K.M. KISHAN



Sahay: impressive start

Sahay plans to provide capsule training courses for the men, put constables in charge of villages and make them responsible to maintain "information directories", containing vital village information. Says Sahay: "The idea is to bring an attitudinal change among the men, particularly constables working at the grassroots, to be more useful to the people."

An anti-corruption cell to deal exclusively with complaints against force members has also been set up. Within the first few weeks, 88 complaints were received. Inquiries were

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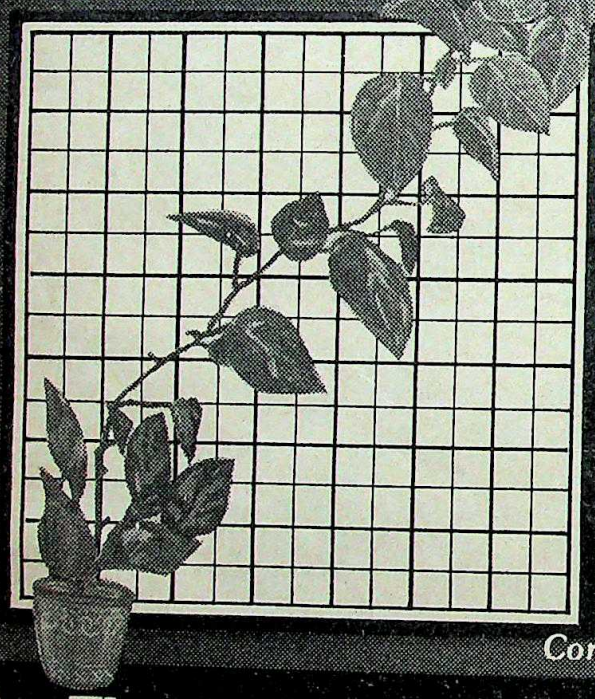

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Vijayawada: 30-22-31, Eluru Road (Near Vijaya Talkies), Vijayawada-520 002

Calicut: Khadija Bldgs., General Hospital – Road, Calicut-673 001 Phone: 64829

Bangalore: 1101, O.T.C. Road (Opp Luciya Hotel), Bangalore-560 002

Coimbatore: 449, 1st Floor, Vivekananda – Road, Ram Nagar, Coimbatore-641 009

Cochin: Padma Junction, M.G. Road, Ernakulam-682 035 Phone: 367995

Thiruvalla: Malliyathu Buildings (Opp. Transport Bus Stand), Thiruvalla-689 001

Trichur: Post Office Road, Trichur-680 001 Phone: 22417

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initiated in 66 cases and, last fortnight, action was taken against 17 policemen. While more results have yet to be discernible, it is clear that the start itself is impressive.

Deadly Journeys

HIMACHAL Pradesh Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh is coming under increasing pressure from his own MLAs to do something—and soon—about making road transportation safer in the hill state. During the last two years or so, a staggering 200 people have lost their lives in road accidents and as many have suffered injuries. On December 20, 1986 an overloaded bus of the Himachal Roadways Transport Corporation (HRTC) plunged down a deep gorge killing 47 passengers. Accidents such as these have given rise to demands for the resignation of Transport Minister Sat Mahajan. Under public pressure, Mahajan submitted his resignation recently but Singh asked him to withdraw it.

Charges levelled against HRTC include corruption, overworked alcoholic drivers, poor maintenance, and the acceptance by top officials of sub-standard spares and machinery in return for kickbacks. During the past nine months, the state spent a whopping Rs.5.46 crores on fuel and repair of government vehicles. But most of this money, it turns out, was spent on vehicles attached to bureaucrats, senior government officials and ministers.

Indira Blitz

THE *son-et-lumiere* programme on the life of Indira Gandhi, *Bharat Ratna Indiramma*, is churning out effective propaganda for the Congress(I) in Andhra Pradesh. After 300,000 people attended 41 successful shows in Hyderabad, beginning on November 19, Mrs Gandhi's birthday,

S.V. RANJAN BASU

Scene from *Bharat Ratna Indiramma*: effective propaganda

programme sponsors decided to take the show to some other towns in the state. The 100-minute show is selective in its portrayal of an eventful career, highlighting decisions like the abolition of privy purses and bank nationalisation while glossing over the Emergency period. Its novelty is the elaborate set—22 platforms in an arc, flooded with lights or kept dark for the 127 sound, dance, dialogue and commentary sequences, the scenes shifting swiftly from one end of the arc to the other. Occasionally, two faces of Mrs Gandhi can be glimpsed by the spellbound audiences.

"The time has come when we have to take Indiraji back to the masses," says state Governor Kumudben Joshi, who heads the National Institute of Social Action, co-sponsor of the programme along with the Song and Drama Division of the Information & Broadcasting Ministry. The only problem the successful sponsors face is explaining why they failed to devise similar shows on Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru.

Kiss and Tell

THE placid world of Malayalam literature is likely to be considerably stirred up by a forthcoming book about the intimate life and times of the late Kesava Dev, Kerala's best-known writer after T. Sivasankara Pillai. Kesava became a controversial figure after his marriage, at the age of 57, to a 17-year-old girl called Seetalekshmi 30 years ago. There were allegations that, towards the end of Kesava's life, his wife ill-treated him, and much speculation over whether they had a marital relationship at all. After Kesava's death in 1983, Seetalekshmi, 47, wrote *Kesavadevinte Nitya Kamuki* (The Evergreen Lover of Kesava Dev), in which she wrote about her child marriage and her son's birth, but remained mum about the sex question.

Seetalekshmi: opening up

Now, three years later, Seetalekshmi, who has a leading publisher backing her, is about to give the critics what they'd wanted in the first place. "I am fed up with people concocting wierd stories about my sexual relationship with my late husband, Kesava Dev," she said, adding: "I do not want to write any pornographic literature but still it will have all the intimate details to silence my critics."

Explosive Situation

THE communal nightmare in Ahmedabad is still a long way from dawn. And with municipal elections round the corner, the situation needs only a spark to flare up again. Many of the independent contestants are rabid fanatics or notorious bootleggers. One of the independent candidates, Latif, for instance, is an underworld kingpin who was allegedly actively involved in the riots and is now cooling his heels under the National Security Act (NSA) in Sabarmati Jail. The Congress(I) has been reportedly requesting him to withdraw from the fray, promising release in return. But that may not work out.

The Congress(I) has other concerns as well. Many well known names have been struck off the Congress(I) list because, as state party president Ahmed Patel says: "We don't mind losing a few seats. But we want clean candidates." Jethalal Parmar, mayor of Ahmedabad, is among those denied tickets. Baroda Deputy Mayor Nissar Bapu, detained recently under the NSA for his alleged involvement in the riots, has also been axed. However, Patel has not remained entirely true to his word. He has given tickets to many newcomers with a not-so-clean image, reportedly under pressure from party MPs and MLAs.

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TRIPURA

Harvest of Hatred

LESS than six years after the shattering tribal-Bengali violence of June 1980 which consumed more than 3,000 lives, the distant state of Tripura is threatened with an equally bloody encore. Guerillas of the Tribal National Volunteers (TNV) are killing Bengali settlers in a calculated way to incite ethnic clashes between the state's 5.50 lakh tribals and 18 lakh Bengalis. The toll was 111 last year, 70 of the killings occurring in November and December alone. An on-the-spot report from Special Correspondent SHEKHAR GUPTA:

THE bend in the road can make it to any manual on the art of laying ambush. A steep stretch uphill, a precipitious drop to the right, and an abrupt turn to the left, overlooked by a cliff covered with thick greenery ideal to camouflage a whole group of guerillas. There is no hope for someone trapped here by ambushers.

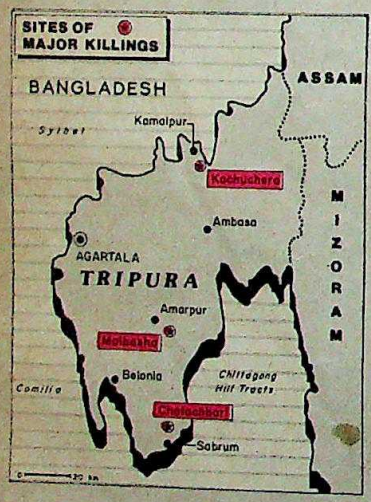
But last fortnight, the gun barrels peeping out of the shrubbery at the TNV's favourite ambush spot belonged to jawans of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). "This, the Gandhari Road, was our Achilles heel. But we'll make sure nothing happens here," says Bhagat Singh, a commandant of the CRPF battalion, recounting with horror the series of killings that have taken place here. The patrol is just one of the many such in Tripura, desperately trying to keep the roads open.

The tension is palpable. And Tripura Inspector-General of Police H.C. Jatav issues a grim warning: "Things are extremely serious and we are faced with an extraordinary situation. If it is not handled properly, we could have a carnage worse than the one we saw in 1980."

In each of the recent attacks, the TNV has deliberately killed Bengalis in tribal-majority areas but bordering Bengali majority habitations. The plan is to invite Bengali retribution, finally create large-scale disturbances, leading to an exchange of populations between tribal and non-tribal areas.

The guerillas are confining violence to areas bordering the state's tribal Autonomous District Council (ADC), which represents two-thirds of Tripura's 10,486 sq km area but less than 30 per cent of its population. Five lakh of the population is tribal and only 95,000 are Bengalis. If these Bengalis flee, the TNV could press for a purely tribal state in the future.

Evidence that the guerillas are suc-



Unless the situation is contained, it can lead to frightening tribal-Bengali violence that will leave countless dead.

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ceeding in their designs lies strewn all over the affected areas. In Amarpur, a small township in southern Tripura, there was immediate communal tension after a TNV hit-squad killed 11 non-tribals. The Bengali backlash was instant and angry hordes lynched Arun Kumar Jamatia and Subhash Jamatia, two former tribal extremists who had settled in Amarpur after surrendering in 1983. The toll would have been much higher if the CRPF had not intervened to save 15 other tribals.

It was again timely CRPF intervention that stalled an attack by hundreds of Bengalis, armed with *daos* (choppers), on a tribal funeral procession. They were reacting to a rumour that the tribals were carrying not a body but a cache of rifles concealed in a funeral wrap.

Amarpur was almost completely destroyed in the 1980 carnage. Tripura's Left Front Chief Minister Nripen Chakrabarty sees continuing danger for Amarpur because of the population pattern. He says that though the town is Bengali dominated, any killing of tribals there would mean a raid by tribals who make up 75 per cent of Amarpur sub division's population. Chakrabarty sees a complete change in guerilla strategy: "They no longer attack either security forces or political opponents. They are just killing the poorest Bengalis in isolated areas to start a migration. Today's situation is most inflammable."

If his government last fortnight held a sober celebration of its ninth year in office, it was for another good reason too. The resurgence of violence, which has come when Assembly elections are less than a year away, has suddenly given a new voice to the state's opposition parties, led by the Congress(I).

The attack was led by Union Home Minister Buta Singh who accused Chakrabarty of refusing to either declare Tripura a disturbed area or ban the TNV. Union Minister of State for Home Affairs P. Chidambaram, who visited the state on a fact-finding mission last fortnight, accused the Government of indulging in 'mere fire-fighting' operations. Taking the cue from him, state Congress(I) leaders and their allies in the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS), a tribal party, too turned vocal.

"The TNV is nothing but part of the Left Front. They want to drive out Bengalis from our state," says Sudhir Majumdar, leader of the 17-member joint Congress(I)-TUJS opposition in the Assembly. Adds Shyama Charan Tripura, TUJS leader: "The Government has failed to protect the lives and property of the people. And to hide its failures, it is indulging in a preposterous hunt for excuses and scapegoats." Such a state of political confrontation will benefit the guerillas who, intelligence officers say, are planning more telling strikes in the days to follow.

These officials feel that the TNV is particularly determined to prove its strength after the surrender last year of the Mizo National Front (MNF) guerillas, with whom they staged joint raids till as late as 1984. According to credible official estimates, the TNV today has at least 200 armed men controlled by its headquarters, called Singlung ("work place"), located in neighbouring Bangladesh. The

Assam Rifles personnel check out a tribal home and; (below right) a Bengali woman widowed during a TNV raid with children: mounting attacks

Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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NRIPEN CHAKRABARTY

Seeking Parity for Tribals

HIS fate has often been likened to that of an able helmsman stranded on a leaky ship with a mutinous clutch of sailors. All the same, at 82, Nripen Chakrabarty, the Marxist stalwart, is remarkably cool and sharp in spite of tremendous pressures. What is more, he is enthusiastic not only about resolving the extremist problem, but also about the development of the tribal population in the state he has ruled for nine years. Last fortnight, he spoke to SHEKHAR GUPTA. *Excerpts:*

Q. *You have taken several political measures in the past to bring the extremists overground. Why then this revival of violence?*

A. Unfortunately, in the recent past the Centre has signed agreements with leaders of extremist organisations. I am referring to Laldenga. Our tribal extremists believe that if they increase the tempo, they too would be given concessions.

Q. *Why are there differences between you and the Centre on solving the extremist problem?*

A. I am solely trying to say that the Centre should try to draw a distinction between Tripura and other north-eastern states. We have a mixed population and the fear of communal backlash after a TNV raid is as dangerous as the raid itself. We are not against the army. But army deployment may not work well for ethnic unity.

Q. *Why are you opposed to banning the* TNV *?*

A. We have said that the Centre is free to impose the ban. The point is that the TNV is not a political organisation with a clear membership.

Q. *Why has the tension between the state and the Centre not lessened with the emergence of Rajiv Gandhi's Government?*

A. Where is the Government in Delhi? Who is the Government? Who do I talk to? There was a cricket tournament here and for 15 days I unsuccessfully tried the civil aviation minister and secretary to ask for a special flight. The Indian Airlines people in Calcutta said they did not have any pilots as all of them had gone with the big pilot (to Andamans). In Delhi, Rajiv Gandhi controls some people and some people control him.

Q. *Many criticise your approach to the problem. You are accused of holding secret talks with* TNV *leader Bejoy Hrangkhawl. Is it true?*

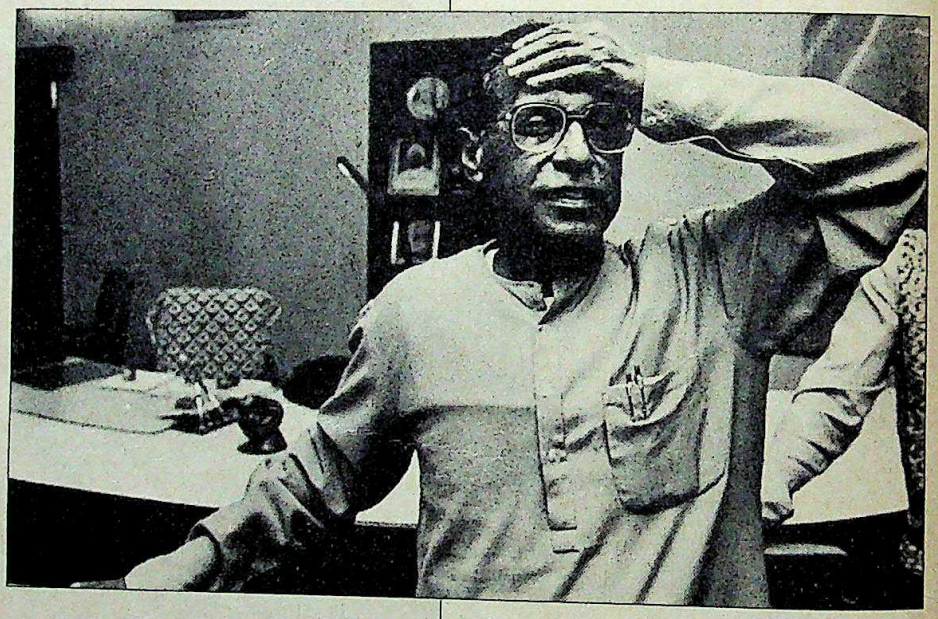
A. He came to me in the past. He said he was fed up of the underground life and wanted to surrender. I would talk to him even today if it was possible.

Q. *You have often talked of an economic solution to the ethnic problem. Can you spell it out?*

A. You cannot solve this problem unless tribals are at par with Bengalis. Today we are trying to reverse the problem of land alienation. But in Tripura, 80 per cent of all cultivators own less than two acres each. Also, only 10 per cent of the land is irrigated. It cannot feed them for more than three months in a year. The first need is to give people work. Even when we take away land from Bengalis and return it to the tribals, we have to help the Bengalis resettle because they are also very poor.

Q. *But several of your critics say that you are pro-tribal....*

A. They sometimes call me Nripendra Jamatiya (laughs). But just look at the way tribals have been exploited. If I were a tribal youth today, I would have joined the TUJS.



Chakrabarty: headaches unlimited

TNV's armoury includes at least three light machine guns, three Sten guns, eight self-loading rifles, one grenade launcher and 33 bolt-action rifles, besides an assortment of grenades, pistols and revolvers. Several of these automatic weapons have been seized from the security forces, including the CRPF and the Border Security Force (BSF), in successful ambushes.

In addition, unconfirmed reports say that the TNV armoury may have been beefed up by arms given to them by their Mizo mentors before their surrender. Intelligence officials feel that the MNF held back at least a hundred automatic weapons, many of which may have been bought by the TNV, the rest probably having been sold in Bangladesh's port city of Cox Bazar.

In any case, intelligence censors and the interrogation reports of captured extremists and sympathisers here confirm yet another disturbing fact: the increasing help for the extremists from the Bangladesh Government. At the recent rounds of flag meetings, Bangladesh officials made no secret of the fact that they were helping the TNV in retaliation for India's alleged backing of the decade-old Chakma rebellion in that country.

But the foreign intervention is just incidental, a factor of aggravation rather than the originating cause of violence. The basic problem is rooted in the poverty and misery of the tribals who are untouched by government welfare agencies, and are among the most awfully placed people in the world. They include 18,000 shifting cultivators who, as Chakrabarty says, 40 years after Independence, haven't so much as a postal address. They are exploited by Bengali money lenders

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and despised by Bengalis in general.

At the time of Independence, the tribal-Bengali population was more or less even. At the time of Tripura state's accession to India the then maharaja had declared the tribal areas restricted for the plainsmen. But following the massive influx of Hindu refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan, these lands were dereserved, resulting in large-scale alienation of all that the tribals had and valued. A 1974 research report on Mohanpur block in west Tripura said that 27 per cent of the tribals there suffered from land alienation and over 81 per cent of them were indebted to Bengali money lenders.

After the simmering tribal hatred against the Bengalis erupted in June 1980, the state's Left Front Government took several significant steps to reverse the situation. This included restoration of land alienated in the past 15 years, and most significantly, creation of the ADC, a highly unpopular step with the Bengalis. In the election to the ADC last year, the ruling Left Front secured a two-seat majority against the TUJS-Congress(I) combine. "If only we were able to fulfil the expectations raised by us, the tribals would have got what they had fought for," says Narayan Rupini, the diminutive chairman of the ADC.

A bulk of the council's Rs 28 crore budget this year will be spent on development programmes in the tribal areas. "Our first priority is education and a lot has been done in this field," says Benod Kumar, chief executive officer of the ADC. But complains Rupini: "Whenever our people or party workers go out to work, they are attacked by extremists in league with TUJS workers. Of the 456 political murders in Tripura since the 1980 carnage, 375 have been of our partymen. How can we do our jobs?"

IN that grievance lies an analysis of what makes the Tripura countryside so dangerously rife for trouble. With battle lines sharply drawn between tribals and Bengalis, both political groups are campaigning for support. The ruling Left Front operates in tribal areas through its well-organised Upajati Gana Mukti Parishad which has been locked in a conflict with the TUJS, which emerged in 1967. The conflict often turns violent, but as these two outfits battle it out for tribal loyalties, the Congress(I) tries to win back the support of the state's 71 per cent Bengalis. A shortcut to this is by constantly playing on their anti-tribal feelings.

With the first round of mutual recrimination now over, both the Centre and the state Government are now trying to find a way to curb violence. Last fortnight, as Chakrabarty returned following a series of discussions in New Delhi, there was a constant traffic of officials between Agartala and Delhi. Under persistent pressure from the Centre, it was apparent that the state Government had decided to declare certain areas bordering Bangladesh as disturbed, to give special powers to the security forces operating there. At the same time, the Centre had conceded the state's demand to release in phases five battalions of the Assam Rifles to gradually replace the six CRPF battalions and one Rajasthan Armed Constabulary battalion. Explains Jatav: "We insisted on having the Assam Rifles because it knows jungle warfare." It has also been decided to set up unified operational command at Agartala under the control of the Tripura Government. But the Congress(I) and the TUJS assert that it is a case of too little, too late, and claim that only an army operation can improve things now.

The Left Front thinking, on the other hand, is that the use of any more force would be counter-productive as it would alienate the bulk of the tribal population which does not back the TNV. Chakrabarty still insists that the best approach to the problem is political. But he is also wisened by his experience of the past. Bejoy Kumar Hrangkhawl, now the self-styled 'Supremo' of the TNV, had once surrendered to Chakrabarty to return to his village, Kamala Cherra, 100 km north of Agartala. However, in August 1982, he returned to the jungle to revive the insurgency in an even bigger manner.

A political initiative also seemed to succeed in July 1983 when Binanda Jamatiya, another major extremist leader, came overground with 319 supporters, many of whom later joined the Marxists' tribal wing. But Jamatiya was later assassinated by the TNV hit-men who have by now accounted for 46 surrendered extremists.

A tribal at work: land alienation

Though Chakrabarty claims that his door is still open for a political settlement, he has to tread warily. A mistake at this stage could wreck his party's chances in the next election besides giving the communal Bengali opinion new strength. The painful fact of life for him now is that, much sense though his political approach makes, he just does not have the time for it. It can only follow a large-scale paramilitary operation to first control the TNV and restore the Government's credibility. The bloodied ethnic battlefields of the North-east brook no complacence for with trouble already erupting all over, the last thing India needs is another Nellie in its most imperilled border lands.

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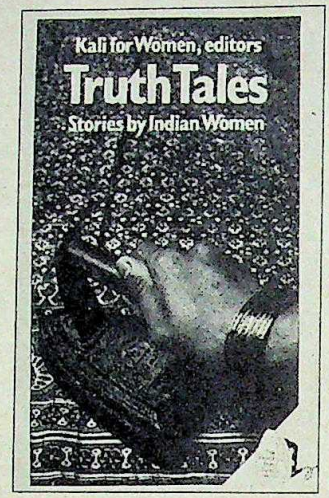
Sisters in Arms

THE feminist press in Britain and India have joined hands to come out with a unique publishing project that will gladden the hearts of all sisters in the cause. Based in Delhi, Kali for Women is India's first feminist book publishing house. Much to its credit, it has already got several path-breaking titles on its catalogue. And across the seas, the London-based Women's Press Ltd has made a name for itself for its revolutionary ventures in promoting lively and provocative writing by and on women.

The two sisterly concerns have recently come together and produced an unusual anthology of short stories from India under the candid title of *Truth Tales—Stories by Indian Women*. The collection comes from a whole tradition of modern Indian writing which is outside the familiar Indo-Anglian framework and is for all practical purposes almost unknown to the common reader in Britain. And the Women's Press acknowledges that it is a tradition that represents some of the most "dynamic trends" in contemporary Indian literature in general and feminist fiction in particular. The anthology has stories from seven major Indian languages—Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi, Urdu and Tamil, besides English. Each of these languages has a vigorous literary tradition, and as such, the collection represents seven distinct sensibilities. Among the authors included in this representative collection are two very senior and renowned litterateurs, Mahasveta Devi (*The Wet Nurse*) and Ismat Chughtai (*Tiny's Granny*). The other authors and stories featured in the anthology include both the new and old: Ila Mehta (*Smoke*), Suniti Aphaie (*The Dolls*), Mrinal Pande (*Tragedy, in a Minor Key*), Lakshmi Kannan (*Muniyakka*) and Vishwapriya Iyengar (*Midnight Soldiers*).



The book: feminist fiction

The book is scheduled to be released later this month. But the Women's Press is already very optimistic that this unusual collection will capture the imagination of fiction lovers—as well as feminists—all over the country. What remains to be seen now is whether the sales of the book will come up to the ambitious and upbeat estimates of its editors and publishers.

Maths Wizard

SHEKHAR Sharma, 53, a mathematician educated first in Patna University and then in Oxford and now based in Britain, has suddenly come into the limelight for cracking a complex mathematical code that has kept the experts baffled for nearly 75 years. With his English wife Anthea Grubb and a colleague George Nicholson, Sharma has simplified the 'Minimax Theory', presenting a complete decoding and declassifying of the minimax and maximin procedures.

Sharma

Sharma, who is currently professor of mathematics at Birkbeck College, University of London, explains that for any human endeavour to succeed, an optimum strategy is needed. This involves minimising the weak aspects and maximising the strong ones, and the Minimax Theory is what helps attain this. Their combined effort was acknowledged only recently, by the celebrated mathematician E.R. Lorch, in the prestigious *Mathematical Review*. Sharma, confides that there are distinct advantages in being married to a mathematician: "If we have any mathematical problems, we can discuss them in bed."

New Alignment

IT is now the turn of Britain's Labour Party to get enticed by the concept of non-alignment. The campaign group of Labour MPs, backed by youth and Labour campaigns for peace and nuclear disarmament, are planning to hold a conference on non-alignment on January 24. According to the agenda planned, the meet will discuss, among other things, the "adoption of a non-aligned foreign and defence policy for Britain", besides a national campaign to win public support for such a policy. All the ambassadors and high commissioners of non-aligned governments in London have been invited to send their countries' representatives.

Organisers say that the programme will include "workshops" on several important issues related to the Middle East, Central America, South Africa, Ireland, the Indian Ocean, the Pacific US bases, Europe and disengagement from NATO. The participants include trade unions, anti-nuclear and peace organisations, solidarity groups and those concerned with the re-direction of resources from arms expenditure towards development in the Third World. Likely speakers include Michael Manly, Anthony Wedgewood Benn, Eric Heffer, Jeremy Corbyn, and representatives from the African National Congress and the Greens from West Germany.

Tenacious Tycoon

ABDUL Shamji—the Ugandan Asian business tycoon who dominated media headlines here a year ago, in the spectacular Johnson Matthey Bank (JMB) collapse—has staged a remarkable come-back. Even as the enterprises of other Asian millionaires like the Sethias and the Sipras have fallen apart at the seams, Shamji has tenaciously clawed his way back to regain control of the Gomba Group and its Ritzy Park Lane headquarters. Gomba, one of JMB's biggest debtors, repaid more than £ 20 million (Rs 38 crore) enabling the receivers, Price Waterhouse, to pay the remaining money owed to the Bank of England. Shamji's Gomba had control over such quintessentially British institutions like the Wembley Stadium and the Duchess and Garrick theatres. These substantial assets have been sold by the receiver. But Shamji has managed to retain several million pounds of assets including the Mermaid theatre and the Skindles Hotel. Shamji, who had consistently defended his companies, has now shown the way to other Asian magnates in dire straits.

Shamji

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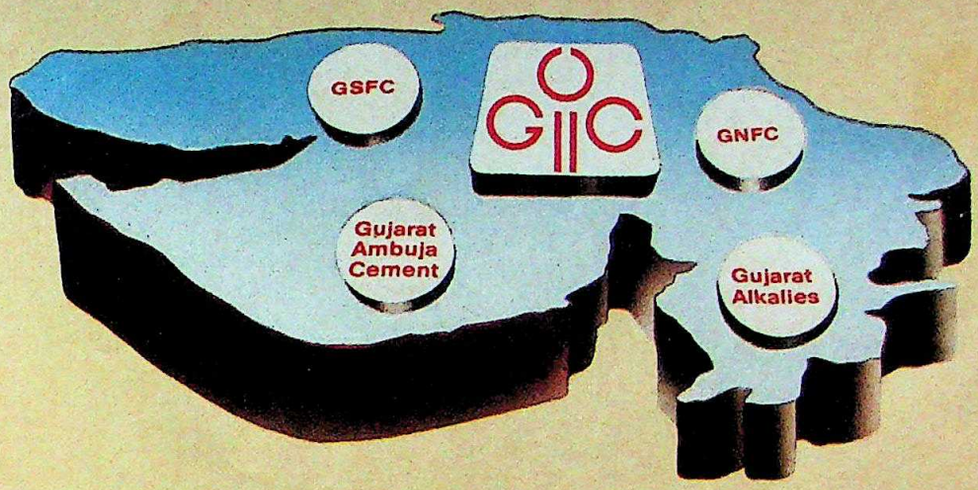

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THE FASHION BUSINESS

LOOKING GOOD

HIGH fashion is finally out of the closets. In need of a new outfit for tonight's party? Don't panic. It's just down the road at your friendly neighbourhood boutique. Or rather, boutiques. Suddenly, fashion is no longer cocooned in five-star hotel arcades as the private preserve of perfumed socialites. It's now rioting in the streets in dozens of boutiques flourishing hip-to-hip in almost every big city.

Instant fashion, off the rack and ready-to-wear, now sports the labels of a bewildering range of purveyors with a mushrooming string of city outlets: Inter Shoppe, Ravissant, Burlingtons, Benzer, In Style, Ritu's, Wearhouse, International News, Vibes, Saks, Guys'n'Dolls. There's a new label being added almost every second day. Whether occupying prime space at the neighbourhood market-place or even the garage next door, high fashion is exploding—right at the doorstep.

And, despite new boutiques opening at the drop of a shirt, the boom seems to be just starting. Initially, it was the garment exporters feeding fashion outside the shores of the country who looked inwards to recognise the explosive potential of this market. Today, even large business houses like the Modis have decided to cash in with their new boutique, Obsession, in Delhi's posh New Friends Colony. "There is space for everyone," says Bibin Hara, manager of the Calcutta branch of Ritu's Boutique, one of the first boutique chains in the country.

Vijay Mehta, the fashion magnate who heads the largest boutique chain in the country, Inter Shoppe, estimates: "There has been at least a 500 to 1,000 per cent increase in the market over the last five years."

"Ready-to-wear has caught on like never before," feels Rama Sood of Burlingtons. And this craze is not just restricted to the fashion cities of Delhi and Bombay only. In Madras, says Sabita Radhakrish-

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Instant fashion, off the rack and ready-to-wear, now sports the labels of a bewildering range of purveyors.

Today's woman does not have the time to buy the fabric, choose a style, find a tailor and then chase him. She wants it all together.

It's a revolution in life-styles. Everybody is getting into the act.

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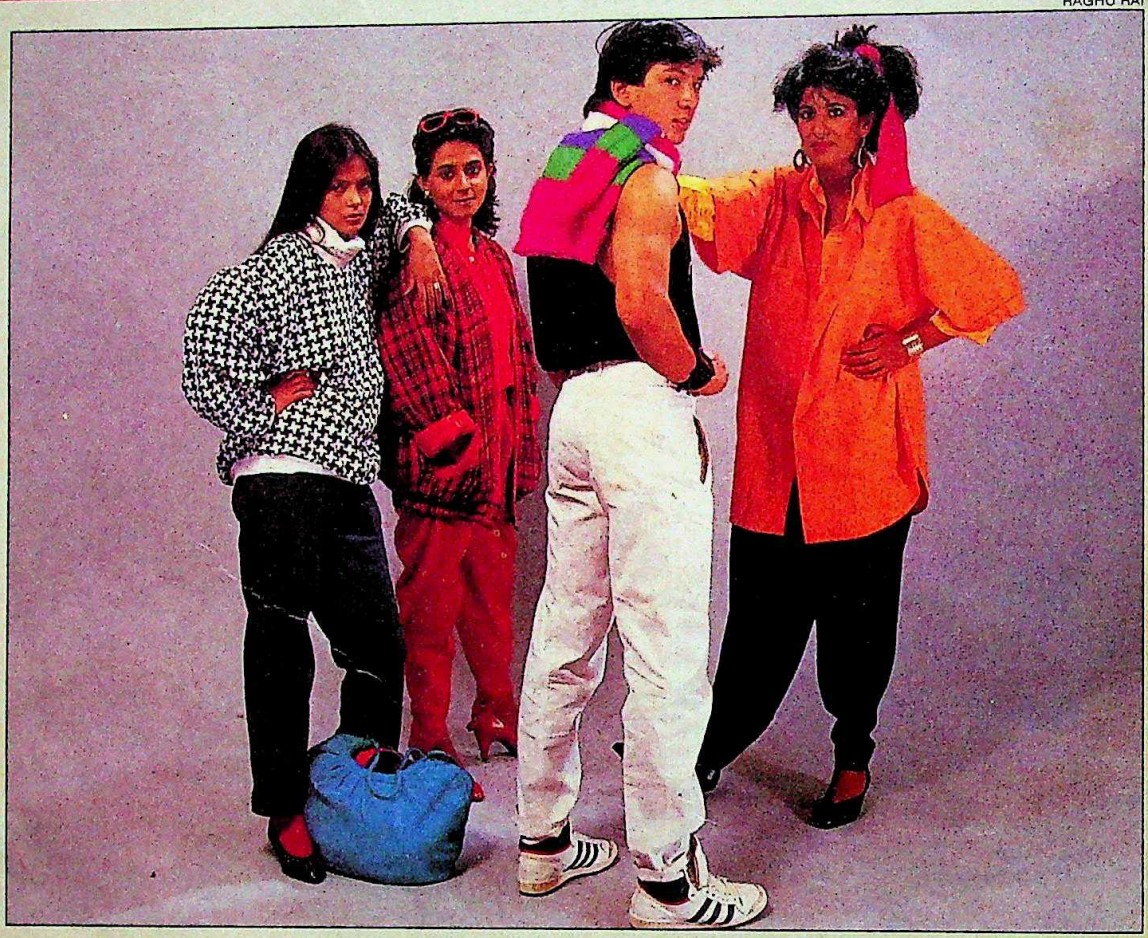
Ready-to-wear fashions are exploding. High fashion is no longer an exclusive preserve.

RAGHU RAI



na of Amrapalli, one of the oldest boutiques in the city: "There has been such a boutique boom that every other road now has one."

In Calcutta every second week, city newspapers advertise the entry of a new boutique on the fashion scene. In conservative Bhopal, ready-made garments stores (they are yet to adopt the fancy name of "boutiques") have mushroomed with sales growing four times in the last two years. Any evening in New Market—Bhopal's main shopping centre—will show that more and more women are discarding their *burqas* and sarees and opting for the more convenient and fashionable ready-to-wear. In Cochin, last year alone 17 new posh ready-made garments stores opened and all of them are doing well. In Kottayam, several *paan* shops on M.G. Road have been converted into air-conditioned ready-made garments shops. Last month in Trichur, three new ready-made clothes stores opened the same day. Ready-to-wear casuals are the rage with youngsters in Ahmedabad though most of the fashion-conscious prefer to do their shopping in Bombay; just as those in Lucknow shop in Delhi. Even in Patna, which would appear to be immune to the fashion virus, more and more people are demanding "Delhi-type clothes", according to Surendra Gogia who runs a popular ready-made garments shop in Hira Palace market.

Fashion-consciousness has grown tremendously over the last few years and has spread to almost every corner of the country. "Teenagers in our days had no dress sense. They were just lost somewhere in between children and adults," recalls Bina Ramani, 43, who opened her new boutique, Once Upon a Time, in Delhi last month. Adds Parmeshwar Godrej, who began the Dancing Silks boutique in the Oberoi Towers, Bombay years ago: "The younger generation is becoming increasingly aware about being well turned out." The surfacing of the fashion rage among women can also be explained by its economics: the rising disposable income with the increasing number of young working women. Not only is the woman aware of what would look good on her now, but she also has the money to buy it. "This has made fashion monetarily more realistic," says Godrej.

Feeding this fashion epidemic is the growing number of boutiques and the reasons for their increasing popularity are not far to seek. "It's so much easier: they think for you," says Savita Jasra, 20, browsing through the latest boutique on Linking Road in Bombay. "They give you better designs, combinations and variety," feels Sharmishta Law, systems analyst at Calcutta. Argues Aditya Dhala of Good Shepherds, Madras; "You can make instant decisions since you know what it looks like on the spot." In Ahmedabad, Shiraz Cambatta prefers boutique-wear as "good tailors are so hard to come by nowadays". And Reema Dhawan, a young marketing executive in Bombay, sums it all up: "If you want something

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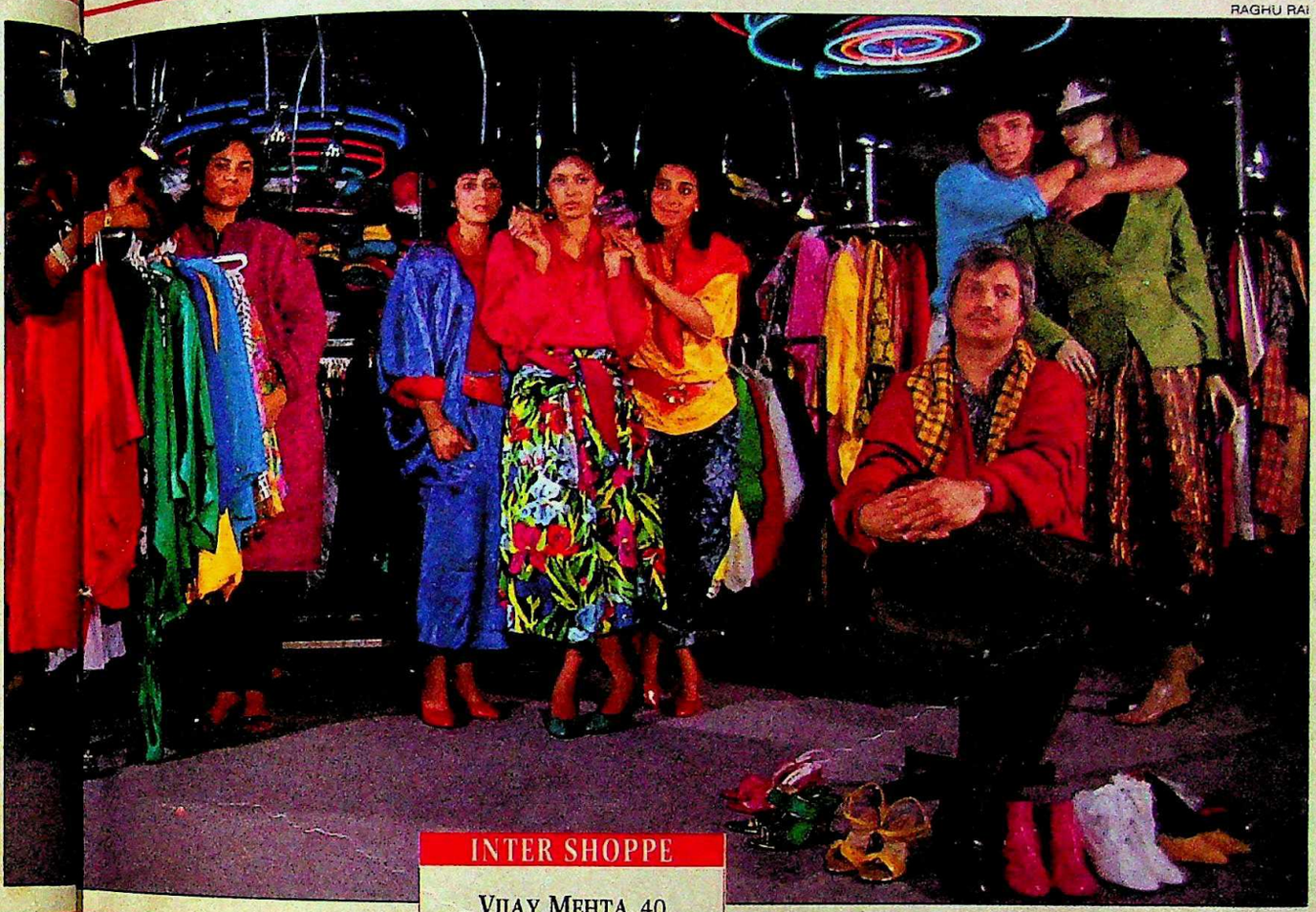
An astonishing variety of boutiques is flourishing hip-to-hip in every big city.

RAGHU RAI



razzmatazz, that's the only place."

Neither is the craze confined to the fairer sex. "I don't remember when I went to a tailor last," says Selvan, 24, an engineer in Bangalore. Adds Sanjay Dodeja, manager at Amigo boutique for men on Brigade Road, Bangalore: "The ready-to-wear fever is catching up with all classes at all ages." Even in the backwaters of Kerala in Idukki "Chirag Din shirts have become a status symbol," says Thomas George, a middle class cardamom dealer who had come to Kottayam last fortnight just to buy himself a Chirag Din shirt. (This, despite the manufacturers' claim that their shirts are sold only in Bombay.)

And being drawn into the fold of the fashion fever are millions, as helpless tailors watch them go, attracted by the convenience and variety of ready-to-wear.

INTER SHOPPE

VIJAY MEHTA, 40

SALES

Rs 5 crore a year

LINE OF SPECIALITY

Young, trendy ready-to-wear

"There has been a 500 to 1,000 per cent increase in the market over the last five years."

"I can duplicate a pant or shirt of any leading manufacturer and it would be better than the original. But still, in the last few months my business has come down because my customers are preferring expensive ready-mades," grumbles Kocha Annan of Flaming Tailors, once Trivandrum's leading tailor.

Bangalore's Pisey Tailors are more realistic and have shifted their tailoring operation to the interior of their shop, renting out the front portion for ready-to-wear sales. The situation is not so bad in towns like Lucknow and Patna where tailors still retain a good clientele despite the clear trend towards ready-mades.

But in Delhi and Bombay, many tailors have realised that the days of personalised tailor-made outfits are fast coming to an end and have come together to begin fabrication units for ready-to-wear units. "It's easier for the tailors also," says Abdul Sattar, who stitches most of the ready-to-wear range at Memsaab boutique on Hill Road in Bandra, Bombay.

Boutiques with exclusive labels, once worn only by ritzy stores selling high fashion which only the elite could afford, are now throwing open their doors to the common man. "The awe of boutiques has gone," says Nalini Sharma, one of the pioneers in the business with Nalini Sarees. "Today, they cater to people right across the board," she adds.

If the up-market is looking for exclusive designer-wear, they pick it off-the-shelf at boutiques like Ravissant or Ritu's Zardozi collection. Here an outfit can cost anywhere from Rs 1,500 to Rs 10,000 or more. "There used to be a price range above which ready-made garments were not acceptable. Now that barrier has been broken," says Ritu Kumar, who has more demand for her Zardozi than she can

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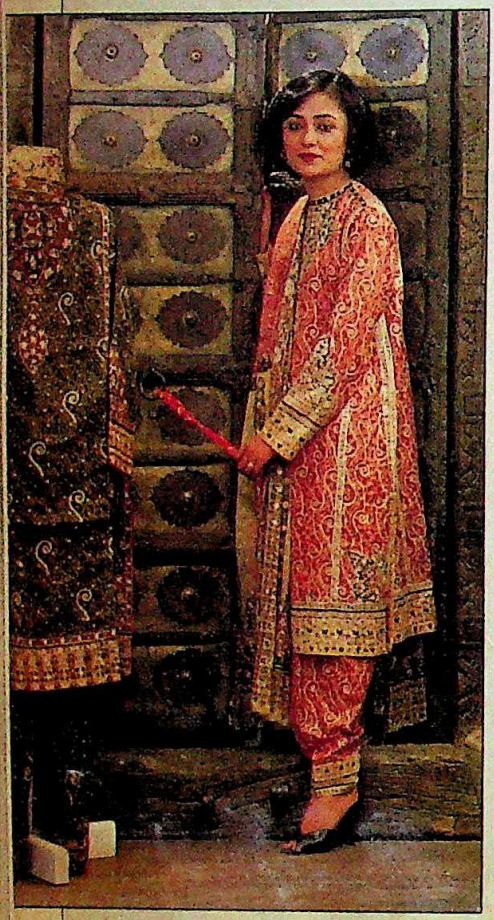
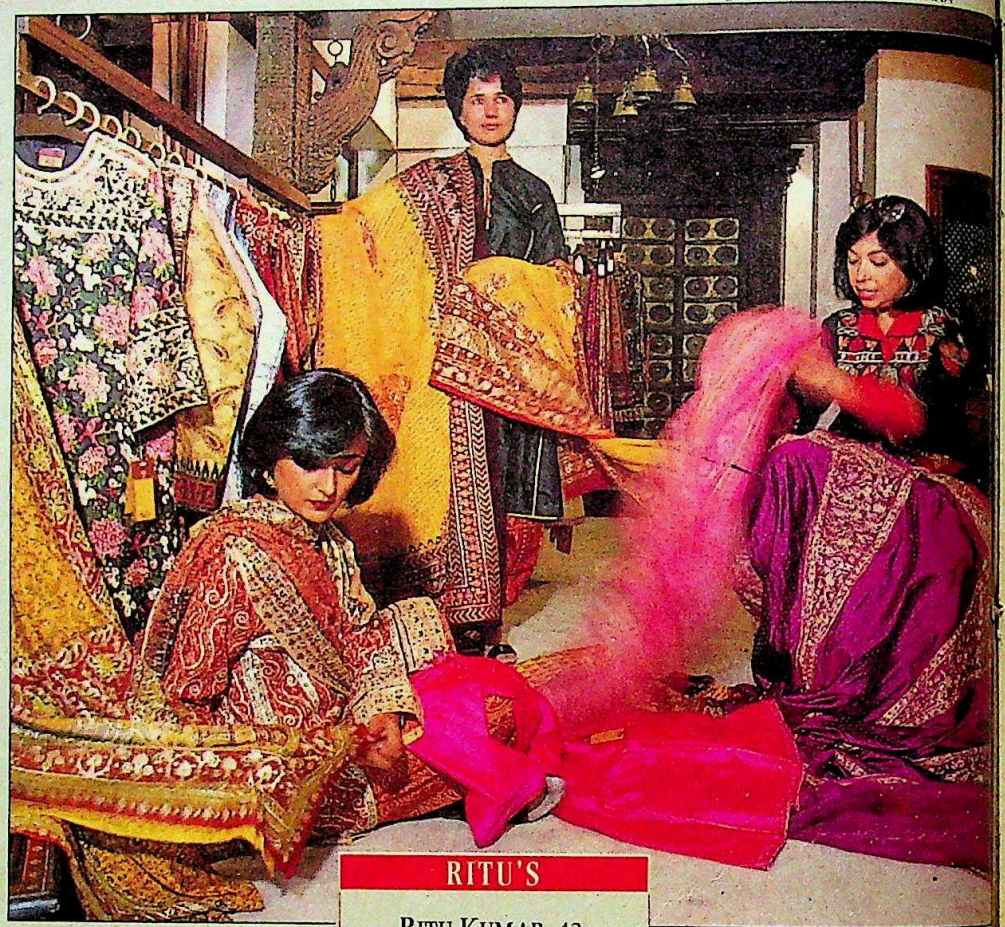
Fashion-consciousness has grown tremendously among the middle class over the last few years.

Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA





handle. But down the fashion spiral, there is a boutique for every pocket. At Nalini's, the price ranges between Rs 150 and Rs 3,500, at Inter Shoppe between Rs 100 and Rs 1,000, and they dip sharply at the garage boutiques in the colonies where the quality would be as good but the overheads much lower. And for those who want to be in fashion and for whom the budget doesn't stretch to boutiques, there is always the pavement bazaar selling you surplus from garment exporters at throwaway prices and making fashion a reality on the streets. "If you've got the eye you find everything here," says Ambica Kuthiala, an executive at OBM Advertising and a long-time regular at the bazaar. "You find things at the footpath which you wouldn't ever find in the shops," adds her twin Amba.

Boutique owners also acknowledge the importance and impact of the pavement bazaar on the Indian fashion scene. "These pavement shops are playing a very important role in changing apparel habits," says Vijay Mehta of Inter Shoppe. "The first ripple of change starts here and the next time, they come to the boutiques to get better quality."

Whether it is the pavement bazaar or designer-wear the buyers are there, clamouring for more. And each one finds a price bracket to settle into—or squeeze into. Being in fashion is becoming increasingly important. "I'll take a bus instead of an autorickshaw to work to save enough to buy the clothes I like," says Meena Jain, a young stenographer in Delhi. "You can't be popular in college if you're out of fashion," says Aarti, a first year student.

So, accompanying the constant whirr of electric sewing-machines at the ready-to-wear manufacturers is the loud ringing of cash registers. The Inter Shoppe chain grosses Rs 5 crore a year and sales are growing at 50 per cent per annum. Mehta intends to open another 10 shops next year in semi-metro towns like Pune, Baroda, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad, apart from new ones in Bombay, Delhi and Bangalore.

At Benzer, the departmental store in Bombay, ready-to-wear contributes as much as 60 per cent of the gross revenue of Rs 4 crore to Rs 5 crore each year. "Day by day, it's growing," says Chiman Savla, one of the partners. In Style, which opened in November 1983, has doubled its sales over the last three years. Ravissant grosses Rs 1.5 crore from three outlets. Ritu's rakes in nothing short of Rs 1 crore a year. Shilpi's sales in Madras have grown ten times in the last seven years. Chiragh Din, 'the shirt's people', admit to a growth of 40 per cent in sales over last year and is opening a new outlet selling only

RITU'S

RITU KUMAR, 42

SALES
Over Rs 1 crore a year

LINE OF SPECIALITY
Zardozi

"There used to be a price range above which ready-to-wear was not acceptable. Now, that barrier has been broken."

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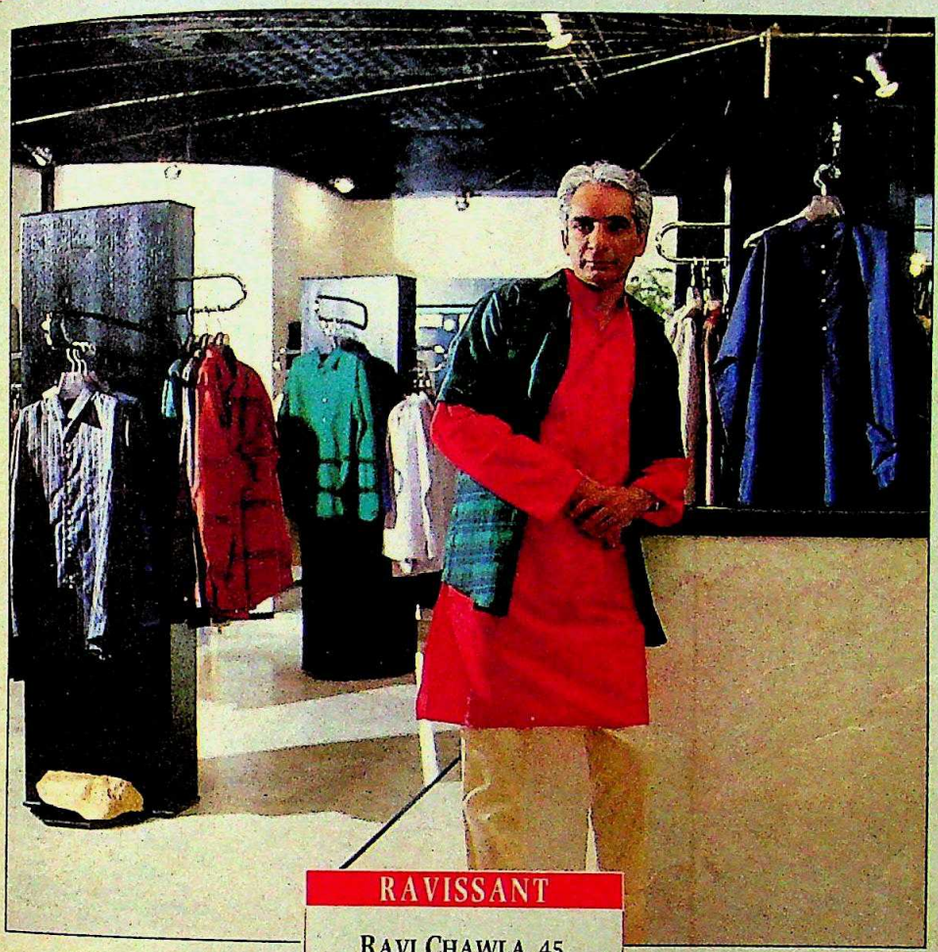
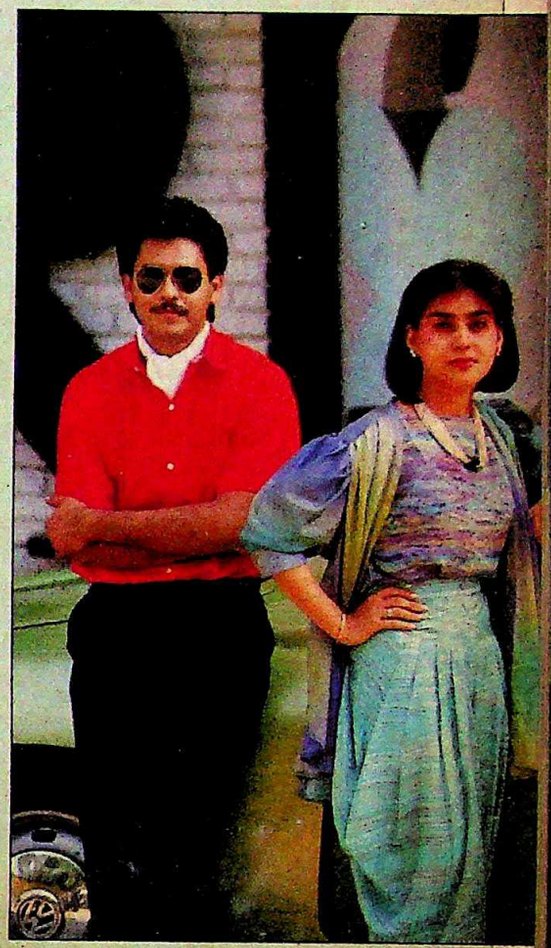
Crores are being spent on advertising for image-building and creating loyalty to designer labels.





RAVISSANT

RAVI CHAWLA, 45

SALES
Rs 1.5 crore a year

LINE OF SPECIALITY
High fashion ready-to-wear

"Indian styles are chic in the cut but less revealing than designer wear in the West."

ready-to-wear trousers. Newman shirts in Delhi have been growing at 100 per cent a year and have reached an annual turnover of Rs 2 crore. Equus shirts in Madras have almost doubled their turnover in eight months. Raymonds, with their new Park Avenue Collection, recorded a 50 per cent hike in sales in their fashionable Warden Road showroom in Bombay. Even a new boutique like Obsession already has a whopping turnover of Rs 25,000 a day in its very first month, and Ramani opened Once Upon a Time with sales of Rs 10,000 a day in the first fortnight. And profit margins in this business hover around a meaty 50 per cent.

At smaller boutiques too, sales are rising faster than hemlines. At Saks and Part-2 on Bombay's Linking Road, sales have upped seven times since they opened in 1982-83. A chain like Bangalore's Wearhouse, which deals in only export surplus—and was opened only because warehouse rents for stocking export surplus were becoming too high—reported a sales increase of one-and-a-half times in the last year. "What started as a stepchild has begun to beat the other children," confesses Dinesh Hinduja, partner in Wearhouse.

The fashion boom, however, is no accident. The bigger fashion houses, which have grabbed a lion's share of the market, have stitched together careful marketing strategies. For some, image-building and exclusiveness are the pegs on which to hang their marketing hats. In Style labels itself "The most fashionable address in India", Benzer calls its shoppers "A class apart", Inter Shoppe pushes its "Futuristic Fashions" image and the Raymonds Park Avenue Collection "Says style. Unmistakably."

And most of them buttress their claims with hefty advertising budgets. Chiragh Din spends Rs 17 lakh to 18 lakh a year, Benzer Rs 10 lakh to 12 lakh and Inter Shoppe Rs 18 lakh. "Today they buy labels, not clothes," says Nasser Latif of Sunyanavt boutique and ready-mades in Cochin. Noticing the craze for Chiragh Din and Double Bull shirts, Latif started his own range of Godfather shirts which were manufactured in the same units that were supplying shirts to these popular brands in Bombay. But he had spent more time on designing his shirts than an image for their label, and his shirts flopped. "Ultimately I had to remove my label from the shirts pockets to sell my products," recounts a bitter Latif. Kannan of Seemati, one of Kerala's biggest ready-mades shop owners recognised this "brand-consciousness" early in the day and carefully launched his Monsier-Gent's Exclusive.

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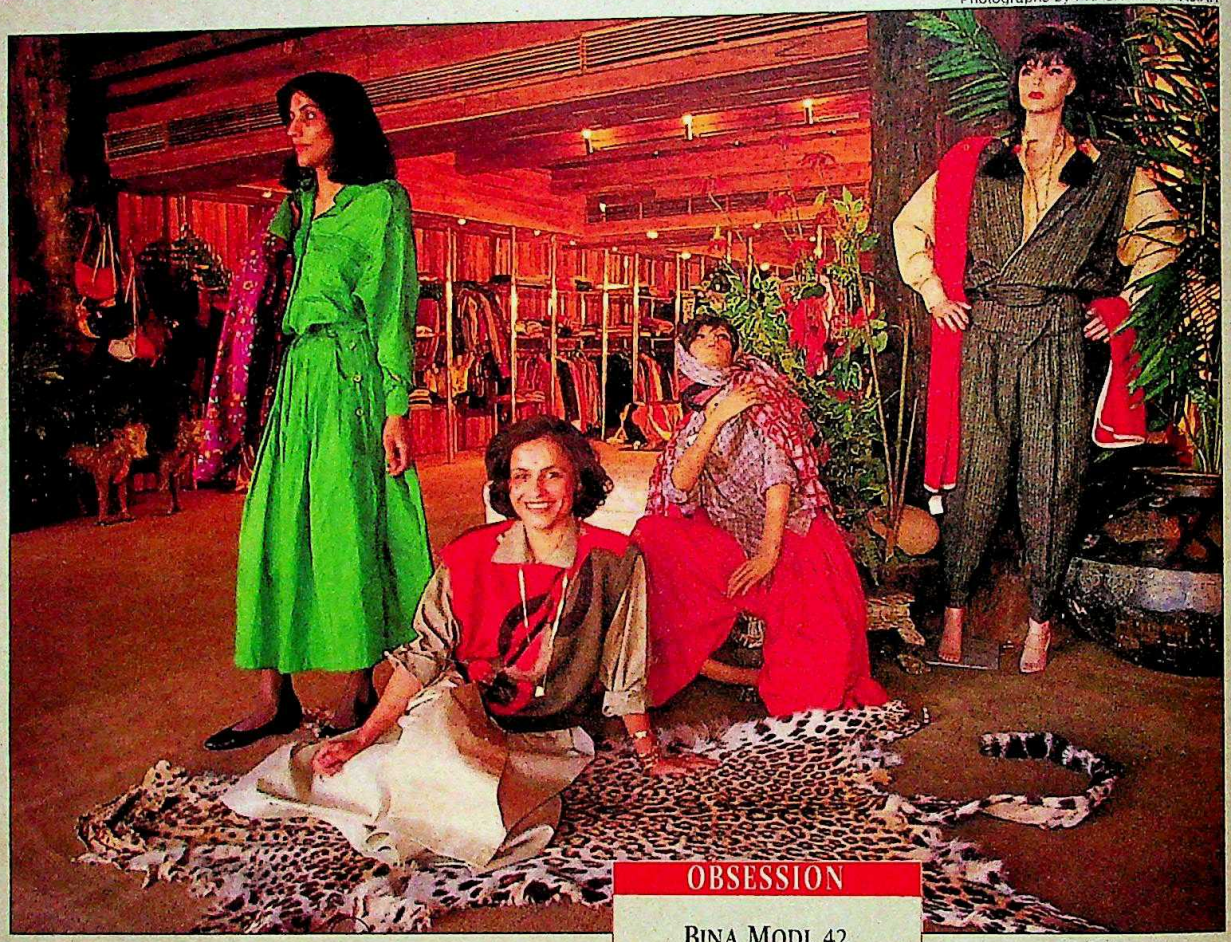
The *darzis* have realised that the days of made-to-measure clothes are over.

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR



His sales zoomed from five shirts to 45-50 shirts a day. "We try and sell a look, not a garment," says Sadhana Sabharwal, a member of the Inter Shoppe designing team. And the success of that look hinges just as much on the image portrayed in the ad campaigns and the interior decor of the shop as on the clothes. For each price bracket, the look is different. The high-fashion merchants as Ravissant like to emphasise the exclusivity of belonging to this bracket. Ads flaunting only the label as a status symbol, invitation cards by name to the target audience, personalised birthday and anniversary greetings to customers. To complement it in the shop, they have studio lights and a hushed effect suggesting restricted entry. Boutiques catering to the young crowd flaunt the slick look of the West—breathless action-packed ads, dazzling neons beckoning outside the shop, and loud English music inviting you in.

The fashion explosion is, in the Indian context, an idea whose time has come. More people are switching from tailored to ready-to-wear garments for the simple reason that time is at a premium. "Today's woman does not have the time to first buy fabric, choose a style, find a tailor and then chase him. She wants it all together," says Bina Pandit, in-charge of production at Ritu's Boutique in Delhi. "We provide instant ideas to the busy executive for whom time is money," says T.R. Ranay, one of the partners of In Style, which boasts of a display of over 300 styles in men's shirts. There is, of course, another reason. More and more Indians are shedding inhibitions—and the traditional saree and suit ensemble—in favour of fashion. "Initially, our clientele used to be only from the few rich business families," says Ravi Chawla of Ravissant. "But now we also have wives of senior executives and lady executives coming in."

And, he could well add, bringing with them a new dress sense and awareness. Just a few years ago, Chawla recalls, he could tell his customers on the phone that a new style had come in and they would say: Keep it for us. But today his customer has very definite ideas about what she would feel comfortable in. "It's a drastic change," says he. "They know exactly what they want."

Today's woman is not only more definite about her dress sense but wants outfits to suit a variety of occasions, even to go to the office. Which explains why one of the biggest alterations in the fashion market has been the dazzling variety of salwars on display. Inter Shoppe has at least 30 to 40 variations of the salwar at any time—the dhoti salwar, Patiala sal-

OBSESSION

BINA MODI, 42

SALES
Rs 25,000 a day in first month

LINE OF SPECIALITY
Trousers and Skirts

"Indian designers may be good but very few are exposed to western styles."

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The increase in young working women has meant that they have more money for clothes.

ONCE UPON A TIME

BINA RAMANI, 43

SALES
Rs 10,000 a day in first month

LINE OF SPECIALITY
Brocade and Sequins Work

"A tremendous fashion awareness is coming in. There is an excitement in the air today."

war, combination salwar, tapered salwar, ankle salwar, and the pintucked salwar. The kurtas, loose and flouncy until recently, are tapering off to a narrow silhouette. Padded shoulders and narrow hems combine to give a square look. The young collegiates have discarded the dupattas for scarves and short jackets. But feels Alka Kapoor, design and production manager at Ravissant: "The dupatta is an essential part of the Indian woman's psychology." But that doesn't rule out fascinating innovations—it could be caught on one end with long flowing tassles, it could be merging into a sleeve at one end, it could be a short fabric stitched into the kurta at the shoulders to provide just a fall at the neck, it could be an improvised collar extended and flung over one shoulder. Loose baggy trousers with lots and lots of pleats are stubbornly dominating trouser fashions although for girls, ankle-length leotards have made a daring entry with long and loose T-shirts. Bright sashes and broad belts complete the ensemble with co-ordinated shoes. Long gathered skirts to the ankles are swirling in to join narrow, figure-hugging midis with suggestive slits and oversized shirts and jackets.

The bold prints and stark contrasts in winter colours are now making way for fresh sunflower yellows, emerald greens, flaming oranges with cheerful floral prints. Most fashion houses are already splashing in whites for the summer along with lilacs, mints, lemon yellows and baby pinks.

The image in vogue appears to be that of the complete woman—smart, independent-minded and elegant. A lot of boutiques have recognised this and have introduced a range of handbags, footwear and accessories to go with their dresses. Vama in Bombay, best known for its sarees, is also into the ready-to-wear business in a big way. It has also started a new range of shoes and bags. "Today's woman wants the total look," says Jaya Patel, the younger of the two sisters managing the shop.

As for the smartening up of the men, says Sanjeev Anand, 25, browsing through show windows at Connaught Place in Delhi: "Men have always been fashion conscious. It's just that we have better designs available today with the increase in competition." But Raju Daswani, partner, Chiragh Din, senses a change: "Men seem to have polished their tastes now. Fancy is out, sober is in." But not too sober. The hottest selling colours in shirts for men at Ravissant are turquoise blue, purple, pink and red.

The young men on the campus wear a

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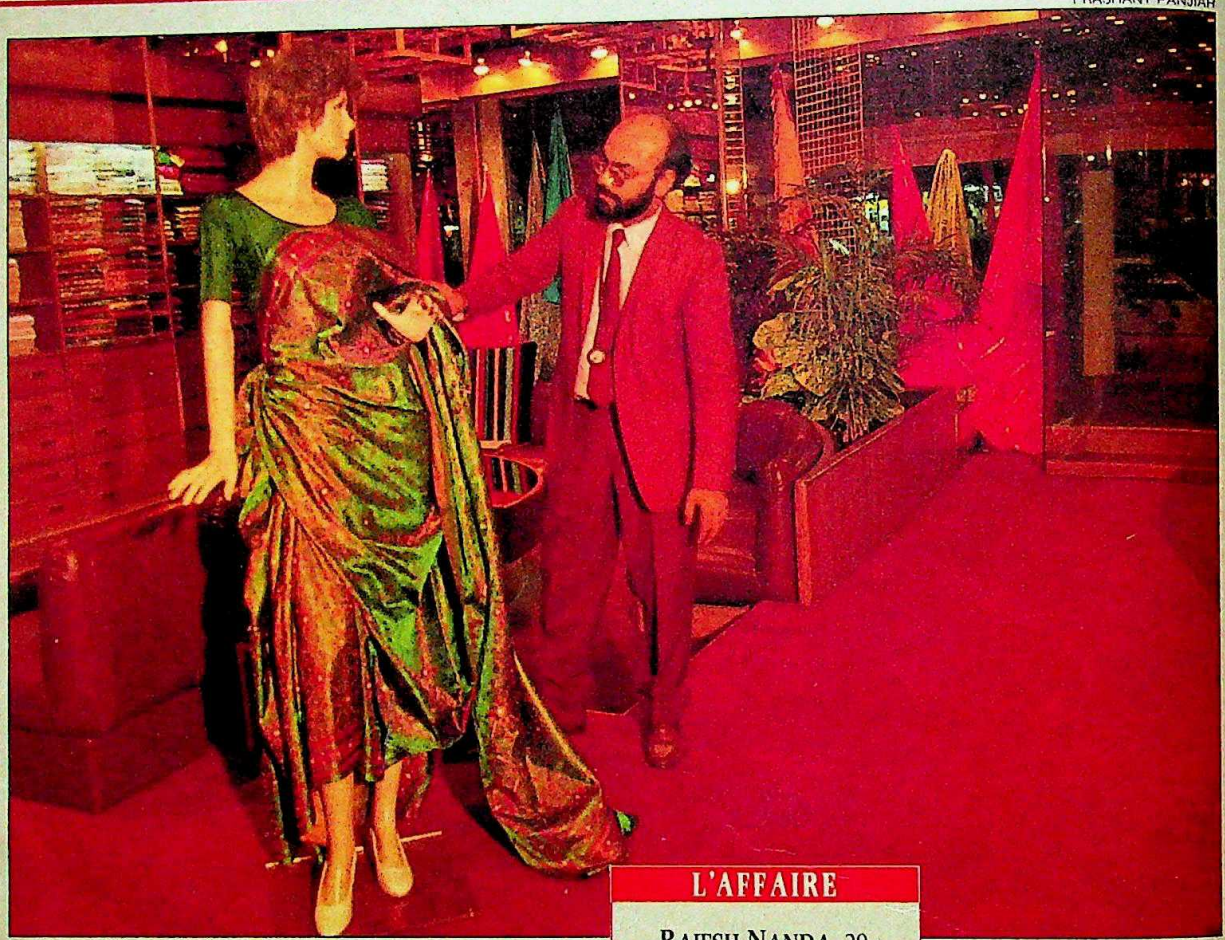
Even the traditional saree market has changed with the introduction of designer sarees.

PRASHANT PANJIAR



L'AFFAIRE

RAJESH NANDA, 29

SALES (From one outlet)

Over Rs 1 crore

LINE OF SPECIALITY

Designer Sarees

"With the advent of the designer saree, everybody is trying to establish a label in sarees."

new look. They wear a riot of colours too but gone are the shaggy manes and hirsute faces of male students. The emphasis is now on the "clean look". Conservatism is making a come-back. Crew-cuts, clean-shaves, well-cut trousers—or "clean" jeans.

Among the most rapidly expanding markets today is designer-wear for men. After the astonishing array of labels in men's shirts (Park Avenue, Chiragh Din, Double Bull, Liberty, Four Seasons, Newman, Equus, Monsier...). "The big market potential now is ready-to-wear suits for men," says Sunil Arora of Impulse, one of the leading buying houses in garments exports. And not just designer suits. So enthused is Raymonds with the response to its Park Avenue designer range, that it is now contemplating introducing a designer range of underwear for men. And Appearances in Delhi, which began modestly four years ago in a side lane in South Extension, has now decided to cater to the "complete appearance" of a man with shirts, trousers, suits, ties, designer shoes and even a beauty parlour for men.

It's a revolution in life-styles. Everybody's getting into the act. So, enter "The Designer Saree". The craze for "signature sarees" began in pockets—city pockets, that is: Ananda in Calcutta, Vama in Bombay, Maheshwaris in Madras. "Today, it has become a status symbol. The tag is more important than the saree itself," says Nalini Sharma of Nalini's. Signature sarees are the rage today—L'affaire, Vichitra, Ravissant, are all scrambling for what was once considered an essentially traditional market. "Everybody is trying to establish a label in sarees. That is why you suddenly see so many saree advertisements in the newspapers today," says Rajesh Nanda, who started L'affaire as an exclusive designer saree showroom distinct from the Handloom Emporium, also owned by his family and dealing in sarees. Today he has a turnover of more than Rs 1 crore from only one shop and has nine designers working full-time in his studios trying to reproduce on sarees, traditional prints from old folk art, like the Mithila paintings. "Designer sarees have changed the old culture of sarees being sold by *lalas* sitting on *gaddis*," says Nanda. "The Festival of India and Vishwakarma sales have made the handloom saree chic," says Vama's Patel, whose boutique specialises in handloom sarees and whose regular clientele includes Shabana Azmi and, until recently, Smita Patil. "The designer sarees are drawing a much younger crowd," says Panna Kamdar of Vichitra. They used to run after French chiffons once, but today

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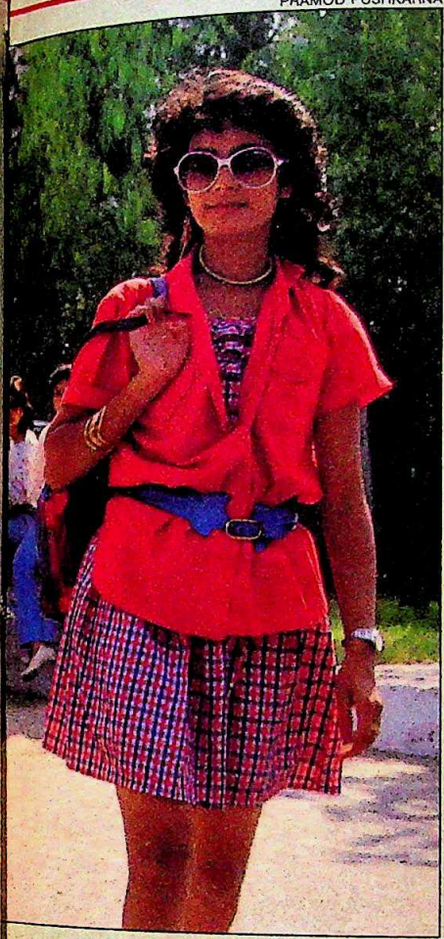
Boutiques provide style with convenience and offer prices to fit every pocket.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

VAMA

JAYA PATEL, 25

SALES (Refuses to divulge)

LINE OF SPECIALITY

Sarees and Salwar Kameez

"Today's woman has no time to waste. She wants the total look and ready-to-wear is convenient."

the rage is traditional cottons. "Even Sonia Gandhi wears them," says Kamdar. In less than two years, sales at Vichitra sarees, an offshoot of the well-known Uttam saree house, have already caught up with and are racing beyond the levels reached in the last 40 years.

In fact, it is surprising just how much is being—and can be—done to the saree. Ravissant sarees have loud prints splashing across the entire saree, and no pallav. The favourite colours at the moment—orange and green. Ananda sarees are trying to revive old traditional prints. "Nothing can be more beautiful than a traditional Indian saree beautifully worn," says Ghostho Kumar, designing for Ananda. Vichitra is following the colours coming in the West in sarees too. Instead of the gold-yellow which dominated this season, the colours for the coming season will be mauve, violet and indigo. The latest in saree fashions are identical shawls to match them. While L'affaire goes so far as to weave shawls in identical patterns as the saree, Nalini has introduced bold and bright prints in shawls to match the sarees. Besides, to match with identical sarees and shawls are co-ordinated blouses. Specialising in this is Isha Chopra in her latest boutique, Razzle Dazzle. Chopra offers cholis in zardozi work designed to match with the print of your saree.

Professional designers in India so far have all had their eyes trained on the export market, and that is reflected in much of the fashions available in the domestic market. Inter Shoppe's Mehta says his designing team travels abroad to absorb the styles of the West and bring them in. Chimes in Chawla: "I do have separate designers, fabricators and manufacturing personnel, but when I finally get down to decide the Ravissant shapes for the season, subconsciously I must be following the styles of the West."

Others are still more forthright: "As the dress hemlines go higher in the West, our kurta hemlines follow the same style; as the skirts go tighter there, our kurtas do the same," says Patel, who designs outfits for Vama. Yet, they all admit that the kind of clothes an Indian woman would be able to carry off are very different from the West. "They are chic in the cut but less revealing," says Chawla. "There is still a resistance to the outrageous," says Percy Rehman of International News in Bangalore. So there are modifications in western styles to suit the Indian climate, but very little original designing. "The pathetic part about the Indian fashion boom is that designers still don't get their due," says Ritika Chopra of

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Designer-wear for men is one of the most rapidly expanding markets today.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

BENZER

CHIMAN SAVLA, 35

SALES (In ready-to-wear)
Rs 2.5 crore a year

LINE OF SPECIALITY
Men's Wear

"Earlier the middle class stayed away. Now even they are buying exclusive ready-to-wear."

Guys 'n' Dolls. "Boutiques want the designs but they don't want to pay professional designers for them," complains Sandeep Anand, a free-lance designer trying to make a dent into the domestic market. Besides, the bias in favour of designers from the West is yet to be erased. Says Bina Modi, who prefers to design the Obsession dresses herself: "If I do take on a professional designer I will take someone from abroad. Indian designers may have a good sense of designing, but very few are exposed to the western world." For her men's range, Obsession for Men, to be launched shortly, she has appointed Italian designer Albert Benitsky.

But there are hopes of this changing with the new National Institute of Fashion Technology, the first-ever institute for fashion designing in India, scheduled to open its doors to aspiring designers in New Delhi next month. "For the first time we have formal training in pattern cutting available in India—a must for any designer," says Anand, who plans to enrol at the institute. "We may finally have genuine home-bred designers with this," says Mehta. But even on borrowed ideas, the up-market fashion is not doing badly. Against the four distinct seasons in the West, India has five—with collections just as distinct—to cater to a wider variation in the temperature.

The most elaborate collection, as in the West, is the Winter Collection, introduced just before Christmas and the New Year. It is European in its look and the colours are a combination of the bright and the dark. The Ravissant collection this season displayed stark, eye-catching contrasts of bright blue with dark green, blood red with fuchsia pink, purple with bright yellow.

Spring ushers in a light carefree look—off with the cumbersome woollens. The colours are still bright, but they are combined with pastels. Then comes the Holiday Collection in May, which has pastels and whites for those unable to escape the heat of the plains, but also concentrates on a distinct range for those off to the hills, and a separate range of beachwear. The monsoons bring in a change once more with the wet look and the trousers inching above the ankles, and finally come September and the Ethnic Collection for that traditional festive look over Puja, Dussehra and Diwali. But whatever the season, as far as the Indian fashion industry is concerned, it looks like being a long and fruitful summer.

—TANIA MIDHA with bureau reports

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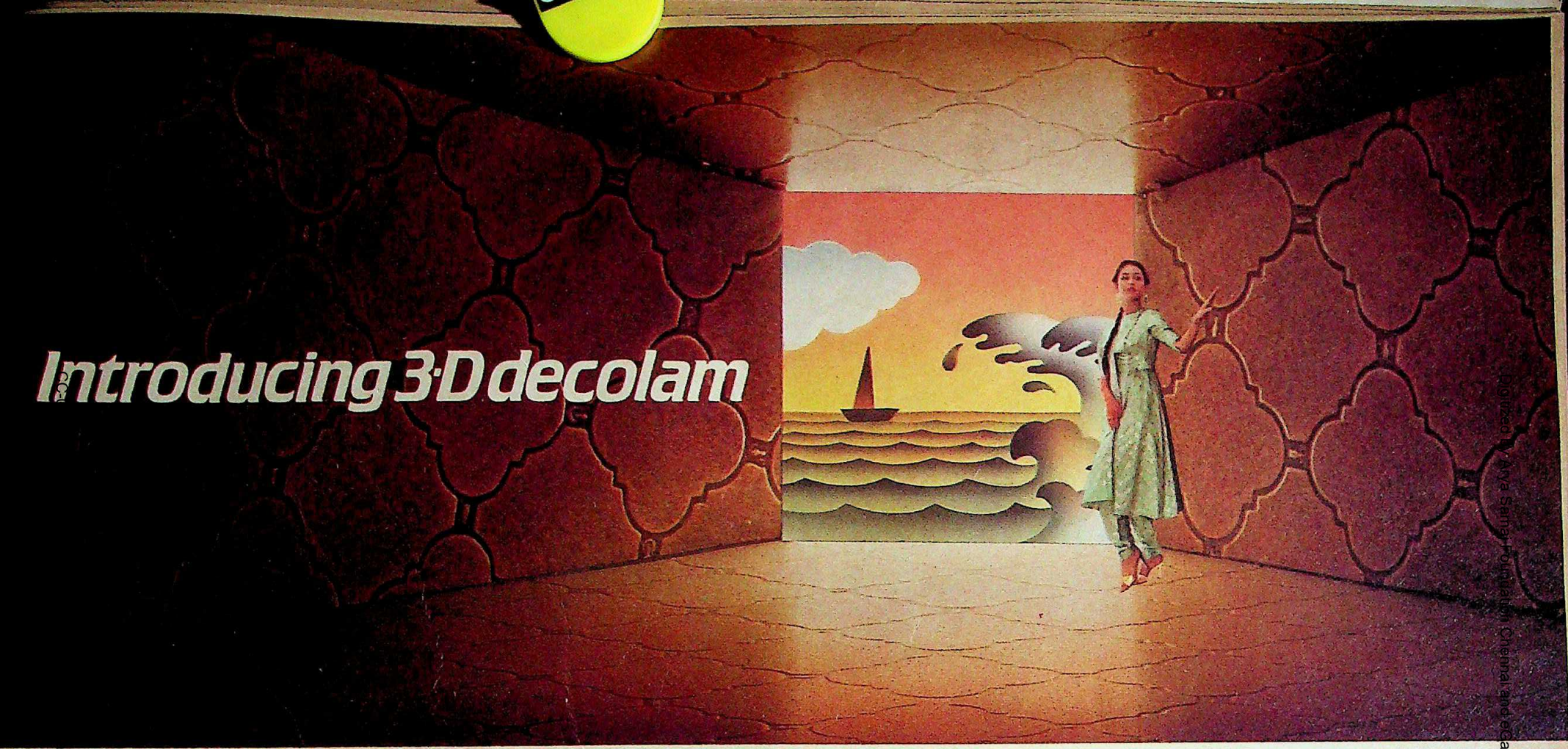

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MADHYA PRADESH

The Runaway Nun

CONSIDERING it was an abduction that wasn't and an elopement that was, it created extraordinary tension, and brought Madhya Pradesh close to the brink of a major law and order breakdown. It all began on January 4 when a first information report was lodged with the police about the abduction of Induprabha, a 20-year-old Jain *sadhvi*, by two motorcycle-borne youths. The incident apparently occurred near Simrole village, 10 km from Indore, when she and five other Jain nuns were on a pilgrimage.

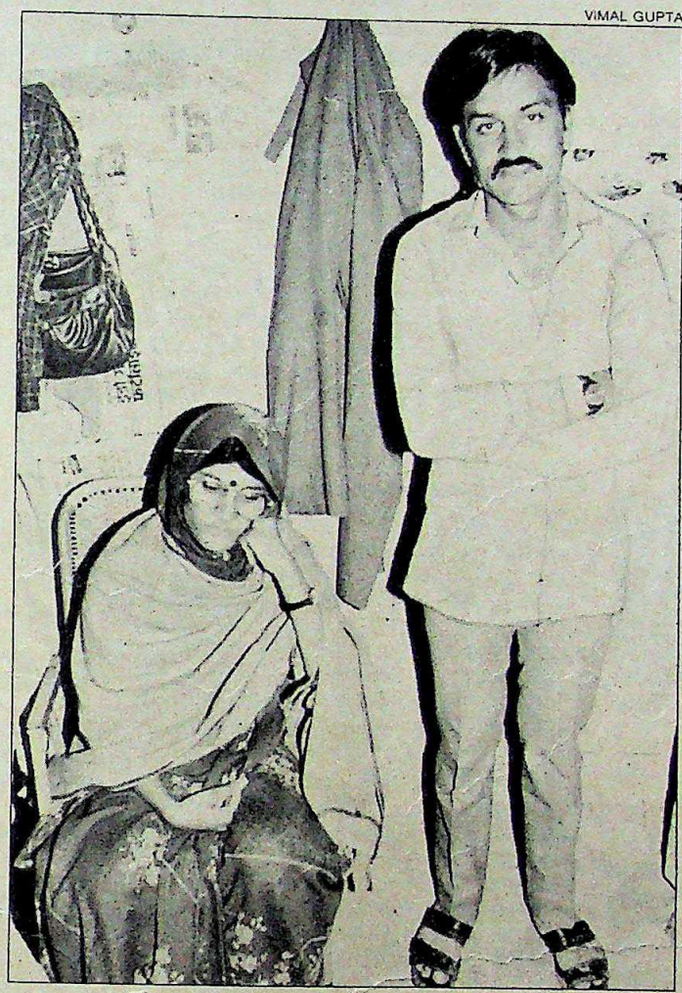
News of the abduction spread like wildfire with the popular Hindi daily *Nai Duniya* carrying the item on its front page the next day. The political fall-out soon made itself felt, for though there are only four lakh Jains in the state, it is a wealthy and influential community.

Chief Minister Motilal Vora, who happened to be in Indore that day, was gheraoed by angry crowds and had to be whisked away to safety. The city observed a total bandh and the district administration ordered the closure of all educational institutions. Shops downed shutters, and thousands of people staged a black flag march demanding action against the kidnappers.

Even as state Director-General of Police, M. Natarajan rushed to the city and a massive combing operation of the surrounding jungles got underway, the agitation spread to Dewas, Vidisha, Dhar, Khargone, Burhanpur, Ratlam and Neemuch. And just when it seemed the situation was getting out of control, Induprabha herself came to the rescue.

Wearing a colourful nylon saree, complete with *bindi*, bangles and wig over her close-cropped pate, she walked into an Indore police station with her lover, milk supplier Radheshyam, 31, and a lawyer, to say that the kidnapping report lodged by the nuns was untrue. She said she had renounced the religious order she had followed for seven years. She told a magistrate that she wanted to live with Radheshyam, who is married and a father of three children. The police, closed the investigation, announcing her return over loudspeakers.

VIMAL GUPTA



Induprabha with Radheshyam: making a new beginning

Life for Induprabha was not easy. Sitting in Radheshyam's home in Dudhia village, 20 km from Indore, she said she was initiated into the puritanical life of a Jain nun at 13, "because my parents desired it". Hers is a poor family from Rajasthan's Pali district and the younger sister followed her footsteps.

The tenets of their order dictated every aspect of their life. They could only move around in a group, always on foot and had to subsist entirely on alms. "Sometimes, during the rains, we could not move out for alms and had to go without food for days," she recalled. No water or medicine was permitted during illness and every three months was the *keshlochan*—the process by which a *sadhvi*'s hair is pulled out after applying a little ash on the hands. "It was very painful and I used to bleed often," she said.

It was not very surprising that she was attracted to the milkman at Jain Bhawan. His visits to the hospital after she underwent an appendicitis operation also cemented the bonds. After her recovery, the 'abduction' operation was staged with the help of Radheshyam's two friends.

But the past is over for Induprabha. Radheshyam's family has welcomed her. She plans to study further—having passed her Sahityaratna Examination from the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan—and "if possible, get a job".

But orthodox elements in the Jain community are still trying for Induprabha's release "from the clutches of her kidnappers". Advocate Manohar Dalal has filed a habeas corpus petition in the Indore High Court alleging that her statement to the magistrate was made "under duress" and the Jain Mahamandal Secretary Fakirchand Mehta has demanded a judicial inquiry.

The affair has ignited a fierce debate within the Jain community over the advisability of initiating girls at a tender age into a life of self-denial. Dalal said that "mostly poor girls take to this life", because their parents cannot afford to meet the exorbitant dowry demands to get them married. But he also admitted: "A small child if trained properly can easily adapt to a life of celibacy. It will be very difficult to ask a girl of 18 to renounce the world—she can elope with anyone!"

Others were more discerning. Many organisations within the community have given a call for "introspection". Jain writer Pyarelal Shreemal blamed the whole system of initiation at an early age and in a statement demanded that "the Jain Sadhu Sammelan not allow anyone to become a nun before the age of 30". Going a step further, state Jain Yuva Sangh General Secretary Virendra Kothari urged a serious look at the evil of dowry. Women belonging to various social organisations echoed his call and lent their full support for Induprabha. But the number of listeners within the community were limited.

—N.K. SINGH in Indore

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DCM LIMITED

Speech by Shri Bansi Dhar, Chairman, at the Annual General Meeting of the Company held on December 26, 1986 at New Delhi.

Shri Bansi Dhar

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I extend a warm and cordial welcome to you on the occasion of the 98th Annual General Meeting of the Company. The Directors' Report and the Audited Accounts of the Company have been with you for some time and, with your permission, I will take them as read.

I speak to you today after my first full year in office. During this period, there have been significant changes in direction both at the national level as well as within your Company. In a rapidly transforming socio-economic and business environment, changes are inevitable. In such a situation, what is necessary is Management of Change to ensure a smooth transition.

National Scenario

In the last couple of years that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has been at the helm of affairs, he has initiated several directional changes to eliminate stagnation and to accelerate growth in our economy. Apart from introducing liberalisation in key areas affecting the economy, the biggest change the Govt. has introduced is to give a long term perspective to the new policies. This approach will enable adequate time to the economy to respond to the new policy initiatives, and is most welcome indeed.

During the last few years, our country has moved towards self sufficiency in food grains thanks to the green revolution and the forward looking policies of the Govt.. There is now a surplus of wheat and paddy in spite of two years of drought. However, India continues to import large quantities of sugar, edible oils and pulses to meet domestic needs. Whilst emphasis is being given to increasing the production of these commodities in our country to avoid scarce foreign exchange outgo, a much greater thrust is required in this direction.

At a time when the country is faced with a mounting trade deficit, erosion in the value of the rupee, and large impending repayments of IMF loans, continued import of products indigenously available is disturbing. This is not only an unnecessary strain on foreign exchange resources but leads to poor utilisation of valuable industrial facilities already installed in the country at enormous costs.

If India has to overcome the balance of payment crisis, conditions have to be created to make indigenous goods cost competitive. This will not only provide that much needed impetus to exports, but will also enable imports to be curbed. However, it has been seen that Indian products suffer a considerable cost disadvantage due to labour-intensive methods, poor labour productivity, over protective labour legislation and the high cost economy that has built up over the years. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has, very rightly, placed great emphasis on increasing productivity and enhancing quality at every level, and this is perhaps the prime task for all of us. In this context, some of the laws need to be reviewed to make them more relevant to the national objective of increasing productivity.

The availability, quality and cost of infrastructural inputs like power, fuel, transportation, etc. is also a matter of considerable anxiety. The Govt's. approach in evolving a long term policy on administered prices is a step in the right direction. Along with this, a serious effort will have to be made to cut back non-plan expenditure, which ultimately affects the entire cost structure of the economy.

Indian industry is also constrained by high Capital Costs, amongst other factors. Like to like, manufacturing facilities set up in India entail a much greater investment than in developed countries. The problem is further aggravated by the high cost of capital. All these tend to push up product prices. Measures need to be evolved to improve Capital Input/Output ratio to make Indian industry more competitive.

It is gratifying to see that the measures taken are beginning to show results on various fronts. I am, therefore, confident that with the dynamic and pragmatic steps being taken by the Govt., the Indian economy will respond and vital break-throughs will be attained to enable Indian products stand up in a competitive environment.

The deteriorating environmental situation and the need to curtail pollution has been an issue of great national concern. The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, recently brought into force, is a measure that has our fullest support and cooperation. I would urge the Govt. to take the initiative in working out a coordinated approach and a package of measures to encourage industry in meeting the exacting standards required, specially for the older plants.

Challenges and Perspective for the Company

Your Company, too, has faced the challenge of change and I am happy to state that we are set to improve the working with a more unified and cohesive approach. There were, however, two unexpected factors last year which have had a serious impact on the working results for the year under review. It is the internal strength of the organisation which has enabled us to surmount the difficulties and given us the confidence to look at the future with optimism.

Last year, I had referred to the unfortunate accident at the SFFI unit, which has consistently been one of our more profitable units. The incident took place in the sulphuric acid plant but the Delhi Admn. ordered closure of other plants also. I am happy to inform you that apart from the acids group, which still remains closed pending direction from the Court, all other plants of the unit have been given permission to restart and are now operating. In the current financial year, it is expected that the unit will perform satisfactorily.

The Supreme Court ruling in our case against the Rajasthan State Govt.

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in regard to concessional power tariff was the other tremendous set-back. This dispute, pertaining to years prior to 1980, had been adjudged in our favour in the lower courts but was lost due to a retrospective amendment in legislation. Such actions affect the credibility of various fiscal incentives offered by a Govt., and in the long term, will inevitably reflect on decisions for further industrial investments.

Whilst we take pride in the Company's ability to face unprecedented challenges, it is important for us to plan for the future to keep pace with ever-changing business priorities. This will call for the best of professional competence, business acumen and maturity in deciding the path to be followed.

To this end, we have commenced the task of revamping DCM Limited. A fresh look is being given to the organisational set-up in the Company to help us in planning for future growth. We are also endeavouring to make existing investments more productive, competitive and profitable because these are ultimately the foundations on which we have to build our organisation in future.

We expect the liquidity position of your Company to show an improvement in the next few years and are accordingly undertaking programmes for modernisation, expansion and diversification.

Priority is being given to modernise and upgrade existing investments. Thus, the textile operations are proposed to be modernised, and efforts are being made to increase capacity utilisation of the chemicals unit at Kota. It is also proposed to technologically update the Vanaspati Plant at Delhi to improve the yields and consequently profits.

The rayon tyre cord industry has been subject to a demand recession due to consumer preference for nylon tyre cord, and we are examining possibilities of changing the product mix to better utilise the installed infrastructure.

Information technology and electronics today are sectors with a great potential for future growth and development. Your Company is already well positioned in the field of computers and electronic data processing systems, and efforts are continuously being made to identify new applications. The Company is also looking at the possibility of manufacturing Colour Television Picture Tubes. A technology tie-up with NEC of Japan has already been signed, and the Company is hoping to get the necessary clearances for the project soon.

You are already aware that the Company is setting up a Cement Plant at Kota. The Plant is based on state-of-the-art technology from M/s Lafarge of France and is scheduled to start up within this financial year.

Besides, the Company has entered the field of bio-technology, another high-tech area, in a modest way, and plans to enlarge this aspect of the business are being reviewed.

Your Company has always believed that human resources are also as important as tangible assets. It is the commitment and contribution of its people which is the determining factor in corporate excellence of any Company, and efforts are being made to harness the inherent strengths of our colleagues at all levels.

Two years ago, Dr. Bharat Ram had informed you of the proposal to close the oldest unit of the Company at Delhi. This was in conformity with the Master Plan of Delhi. To finance the shifting, and setting up modern facilities, it was decided to convert the land for housing development and into flatted factories. It is always a painful decision to close down any unit, especially so as the emotions and aspirations of our employees are of the utmost importance to us. It is with the same sense of responsibility to our employees that we made a separation offer that is unparalleled in the country, and a vast number of workers responded favourably to the offer. However, we are still awaiting the judgement of the Hon'ble High Court and the sanction of other statutory bodies before proceeding further in the matter.

Our commitment to our shareholders has always been of priority to us. Thus, earlier this year, when Shriram Fibres Limited, a company promoted by DCM, offered rights convertible debentures, DCM Limited offered its allotment to you in turn. The response has been overwhelming, and I hope that all of you will have benefited from this.

Changes in the Board

During the year, Mr. H.T. Parekh resigned from the Board of Directors for reasons of health. Mr. Parekh, with his background in finance and his experience in ICICI was of immense help to the Company and we shall always cherish his association with DCM Limited.

The passing away of Lala Jagan Nathji, the oldest director of the Company, is a matter of great sorrow and grief to us. He lent his vast experience and maturity to the operations of the Company, and we shall miss his wise counsel and advice.

Dr. S.S. Baijal, Chairman, IEL Limited has consented to join the Board of your Company, and I extend a very warm welcome to him. Dr. Baijal has a distinguished and eminent record in the chemical industry and his contribution will be valuable to us in the management of the Company.

It also gives me pleasure to welcome Mr. Mantosh Sondhi, Chairman, Ashok Leyland Limited to the Board of Directors of your Company. Mr. Sondhi has a very rich administrative experience and has held several important positions in the Govt. and industry. We look forward to his active participation in guiding the affairs of your Company.

Acknowledgements

DCM Limited, which started with a textile mill in Delhi ninety seven years ago, has grown upwards and outwards into a large conglomerate of diverse units. This has largely been possible through the enterprise of my predecessors, commitment of our managers, loyalty of our thousands of employees, the cooperation of the Financial Institutions and our Bankers, the support and encouragement of the Govt. of India and various State Governments and — most of all — the unstinting support of our Shareholders. To all of you, my most sincere thanks and gratitude.

Note: This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the annual general meeting.

DCM

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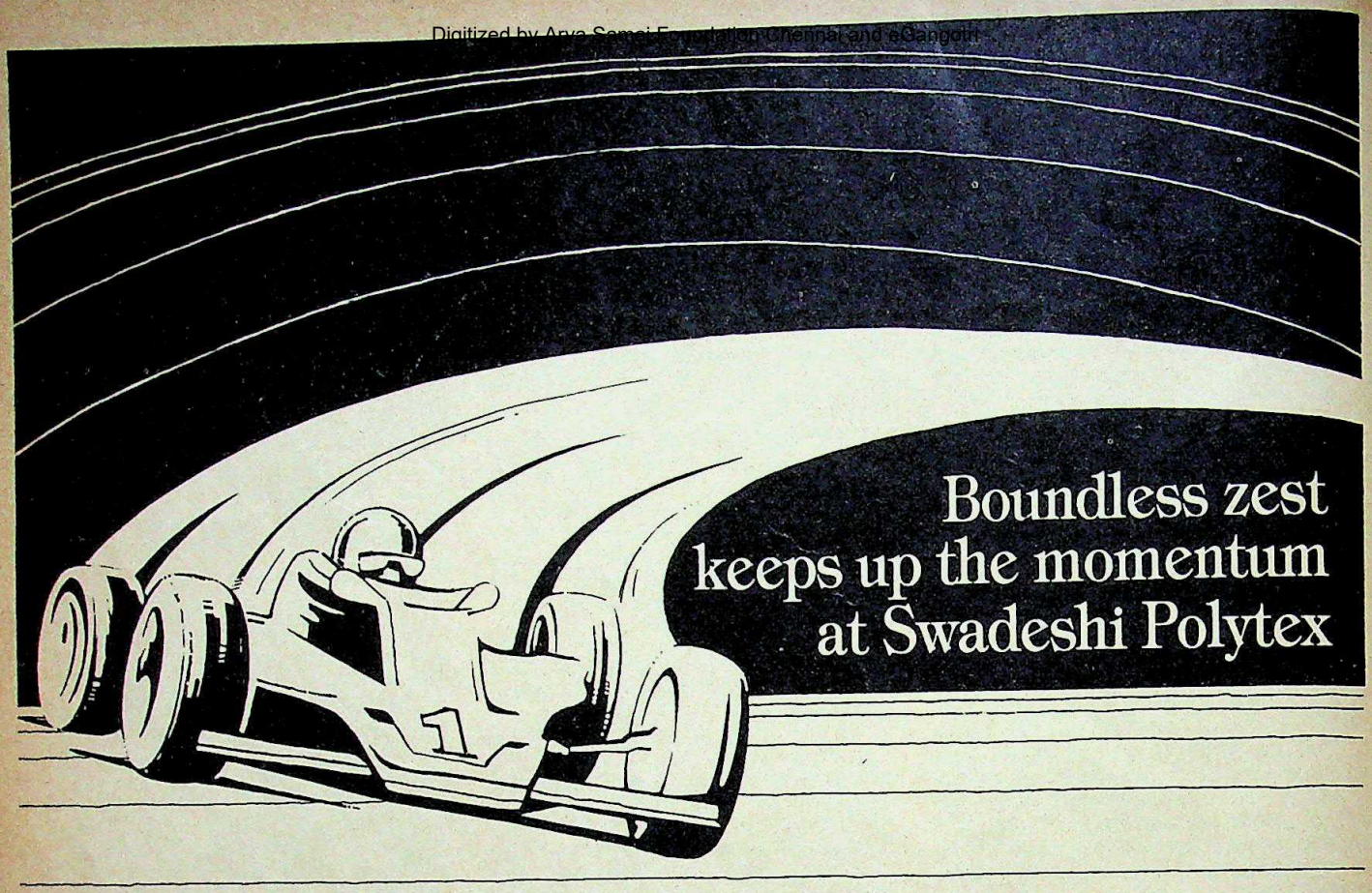

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COMMON CAUSE

FOR the first time in recent corporate history, sworn enemies in the textile world have decided to don the raiment of friendship. After fighting and back-stabbing each other for decades, Orkay's Kapal Mehra and Reliance's Dhirubhai Ambani on the one hand and JK Synthetics' Govind Hari Singhania and Swadeshi Polytex's Raja Ram Jaipuria on the other have decided to come on a common platform, battered by plummeting profits and a shrinking domestic market. The textile industry's top 10 manufacturers have, in a joint memorandum, demanded adequate protection against imports from abroad and rationalisation of excise structure. Industry circles, however, feel that the new cartel has been formed just before the budget to cut into Bombay Dyeing's clout with the Government.

OIL HUNT

PRIVATE parties (multinational oil companies) have again submitted bids for exploration of offshore oil. This is the fourth round of bids. During the third round there were no takers (a real embarrassment to the Indian Government). This is not because there was no prospect of oil but because the Government's terms vis-a-vis repatriation and profit sharing were very strict. These terms have been liberalised again and companies will be allowed to explore almost on a turnkey basis with liberal royalty allowances. ONGC will only share in the profits and overall management. This is being done because of the upcoming oil crunch. The oil bill for exports is expected to cost India close to Rs 1,500 crore this year. Some of the companies bidding include Shell, Exxon, Chevron and Amoco. And there's more to come. The construction of a Rs 1,500-crore hi-tech refinery in Karnal is under consideration. The prime minister is personally examining proposals for the project and the Government is believed to be leaning heavily in the direction of letting a multinational undertake the scheme.

SHARPENING SKILLS

THE Tata group is sharpening its technological edge by going in for a whole spate of foreign collaborations. Heading the list is Nelco with as many as nine tie-ups on the anvil, some of which, like Mitsubishi for televisions and General Electric for a Tisco project, have already come through. Tisco is meanwhile, tapping Korf technology and is negotiating with Timken, 295th on the *Fortune 500* list, for a ball bearing project. Aside from the Telco Honda accord which is still hanging fire, Tital watches (another Tata company) has hitched itself to Casio to manufacture quartz watches. The grape-vine has it that more than 20 other applications are awaiting government clearance.

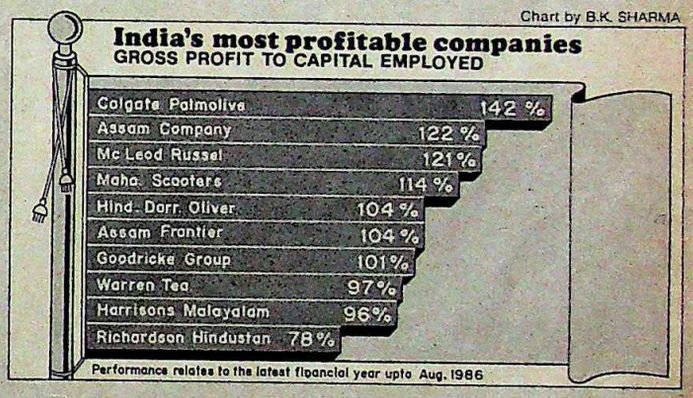
BOOMING BUSINESS

DESPITE pressure on the corporate sector, the number of new companies floated has almost doubled during the last five years. According to a recently published government report, the corporate sector registered an increase of over 88 per cent between 1980-1985 from 58,000 in 1980 to about 1.10 lakh in 1985. Not only have more companies sprung up, more money has gone into big business. The report states the paid up capital of public limited companies rose by 87 per cent from Rs 14,500 crore to Rs 27,500 crore.

RECORD HOLDERS

THE front-runners of the Indian corporate sector can be defined by more yardsticks than one. Reliance maintains its supremacy in the market capitalisation stakes and Tata Steel tops in sales, gross and net profits. A comprehensive study by Aridhi Investment Consultants of the performance of the 500 top companies over the past six years has an interesting list of corporate record holders.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Colgate, for instance, has paid the maximum cumulative dividend per share. In maximum cumulative earnings per share, however, it has been edged to third place by Bajaj Auto and Century Enka. The three top foreign exchange earners are Brooke Bond, Hindustan Lever and Lipton while the biggest exchange spending splurge of Rs 202 crore was by Reliance.

GOING PLACES

THE Rs 61.6-crore turnover Blow Plast Ltd, which saw a 20 per cent growth in net profits in 1985-86 is set for another diversification spree. Its earlier ventures had largely stuck to the moulding machines—a phase which came to an end with its Jalgaon processed foods unit launched in August. The next project is for marketing various types of writing instruments. There has, however, been a temporary hitch—the four brand names the company wanted are already registered. The choice is now likely to be "Magna". The company also hopes to get into sale of computer software from the middle of this year. It is also keeping its option open on going in for manufacture of a whole range of electronic products and marketing management consultancy services. While the other projects have a longer maturation period, the writing instruments and software sorties are expected to add Rs 6 crore to the company's sales in the first year itself. Blow Plast has packed its VIP suitcases with plans to go places.

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INDO-FRENCH TRADE

Impressive Gains

SIX years ago, the French had barely a presence on the economic map of India. But starting in 1980, when the then president Valery Giscard d'Estaing became the first French head of state to visit India, they have more than made up for the earlier passivity. French collaboration—notably in the public sector—now straddles power stations and nuclear plants, fighter aircraft and helicopters, space research and telecommunications, oil exploration and environmental control. The signing of a "letter of intent" for the Rs 820-crore Dulhasti hydel project in Jammu & Kashmir last month with the French firm CGE Alsthom is only the latest in a series of French coups.

Increasingly, France is being seen as a serious contender to the country's traditional partners—the Soviet Union, the US and Britain. India's quest for sophisticated technology and the French capability to provide it, backed with innovative financial arrangements, has resulted in establishing a hardy base to Indo-French economic ties. This relationship has even withstood political squalls, like the involvement of key French Embassy officials in the Coomar Narain affair, and disagreements on such sensitive needs as the supply of enriched uranium for the Tarapur nuclear plant. Many Indian experts felt that the French were intractable, even rather perverse, in insisting on numerous sub-clauses to the transfer of uranium.

Although d'Estaing's visit marked a watershed—it was following that the National Aluminium Company (NALCO) signed a technical collaboration contract with Aluminium Pechiney for its Rs 1,600-crore complex in Orissa—it was the perception and initiative of the erstwhile French socialist government which cemented the bonds. Francois Mitterrand and his colleagues were attracted by the beguiling facade of Rajiv Gandhi as a "Third World leader". They descended on New Delhi in droves—ministers, bureaucrats, industrialists and most of them accompanied by their wives. Mitterrand's first Asian stop was India: "Along with Algeria and Mexico, India is one of the three pillars of the Third World," he proclaimed.

France's interest in the Indian market was not so much a case of a sudden outbreak of Indophilia among the French as of a calculated weighing of international trade and economic options that lured the French into the subcontinent. France's export industries, notably defence, were finding it hard to discover new markets. South America with its balance of payment problems had ceased to be attractive. With shrinking oil revenues, the Gulf was no more an irresistible target area. While the Iran-Iraq war came as a boon to the country's arms peddlers, the glitter soon faded as Iraq's defence debts to France went through the roof. Areas of Africa still under French influence are virtually broke. And the earlier promise of the billion-man Chinese market proved to be illusory because of China's relative inability to cope with quick economic expansion or absorb large doses of western high technology.

The Indian market was becoming increasingly tempting. Especially so under Rajiv Gandhi. When he revealed his 1985-86 budget, seasoned businessmen

Rajiv with French Prime Minister Chirac

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in Paris habituated to negotiating complex deals with India couldn't believe their eyes. As one veteran said with pleasure: "It is still not wild capitalism *(capitalisme impeteux)* but it is beginning to look like economic liberalism." Particularly attractive was India's new liberal outlook on foreign technology. While the Indian market is not of any real bread-and-butter importance to France since it still lags behind others in the private sector, government to government cooperation has taken off impressively.

The signing of a flurry of "memos of understanding" were summed up by a French official: "India and France have a special relationship." Prominent examples of the hefty contracts won by French firms in the last six years include: Cit-Alcatel's huge contract to construct the first integrated digital switching factory in Gonda; Marcel Dassault-Breguet Aviation's contract to produce 40 Mirage 2000 aircraft (36 fighters and 4 trainers) valued at Rs 17 crore each; Aerospatiale's contract to supply 27 Dauphin helicopters at an estimated cost of Rs 82 crore; the Hazira-Bijaipur-Jagdishpur (HBJ) pipeline contract to the French-Japanese consortium led by Spie-Capag (total cost: Rs 720 crore); Airbus Industrie's contract to supply six Airbuses to Air-India to replace its existing fleet of Boeing 737s with a loan of US $ 393 million.

During the last few years, several French heavyweights were responsible for influencing the French Government favourably towards India. The single most important personality was the late Jean Riboud, boss of the giant Schlumberger group and long an India lover—perhaps because of his Indian wife Krishna—and a personal friend of Mitterrand. Others include Jacques Atali, the President's one-man think-tank at the Elysee Palace, the former foreign minister Claude Cheysson, industrialist Patrice Pelat, and designer Jean Louis Dumas of the Hermes group.

***LEADING INDO-FRENCH COLLABORATIONS**

NALCO- ALUMINIUM PECHINEY	Rs	1,600	Crore
40 MIRAGE 2000- MARCEL DASSAULT-BREGUET	Rs	680	Crore
27 DAUPHIN HELICOPTERS- AEROSPATIALE'S	Rs	82	Crore
HBJ PIPELINE - SPIE-CAPAG	Rs	720	Crore
6 AIRBUSES - AIRBUS INDUSTRIE	Rs	1,800	Crore
DULHASTI HYDEL PROJECT- CGE ALSTHOM	Rs	820	Crore
TOTAL	Rs	5,702	Crore

* Over the past three years

India's quest for sophisticated technology and the French capability to provide it, backed with innovative financial arrangements, has strengthened economic ties. But all is not wine and roses. Indian exporters have encountered a wall of protectionist legislation and private sector trade continues to be feeble.

Indo-French organisations like the "Association France-Union Indienne" steered by former ambassador Jean Daridan and Monique Moraz, and backed by an influential group of senators like Alain Poher, constantly keep India in public focus through organising high-profile seminars. The economic effort is coordinated by Francis Dore's Indo-French Economic Association, which has considerable clout with the current right-wing government and has amongst its members influential French industrialists with wide business interests in Asia. The French foreign office, until recently, was virtually run by old India hands such as Andre Ross and Serge Boidevaix, both former ambassadors in Delhi. And most French companies, with blessings from their government, station their own agents and lobbyists in Delhi.

AND the lobbying often gets hot, heavy, and controversial. While the aluminium complex in Orissa was fairly straightforward—a path-breaking accord signed by d'Estaing to signal the elevation of Indo-French economic collaboration—other contracts evoked considerable controversy. The Mirage deal provoked the Soviets and the British lobbies to knock the aircraft's "suitability" for the subcontinent, as well as its price; the telecommunications project at Gonda ran into heavy fire after critics said its hybrid E-10 B system was not as modern as made out to be. But French sources admit that it was favoured by India only after the French Government quietly offered to intervene with soft loans and grants as part of a broader package that included the Mirage as well as enriched uranium for Tarapur.

Similar controversies engulfed the sale of planes to Air-India and Indian Airlines by Airbus Industrie, and the HBJ pipeline project. According to sources here, what clinched the deal was when the French Government stepped in with an agreement that broke new ground in the field of soft loan export credits. For the first time, France extended a so-called single "monobloc loan" instead of the traditional mix involving a package comprising of treasury soft loan and commercial bank credits at consensus rates. It involves 1.2 billion francs.

In another typical move, French Foreign Trade Minister Michel Noir, during a visit to Delhi last month, proposed a credit package of Rs 700 crore to cover the foreign exchange component of three projects: HBJ, purchase of French helicopters and the Dulhasti Hydel Project. He also gave considerable publicity to France's keenness to participate in the manufacture of the prestigious Light Combat Aircraft for the Indian Air Force. He has weighty support from India's Ambassador in Paris I.H. Latif.

Said Latif: "You just have to look around you. Europe is saturated. Latin America has its debt problems. Our debt repayment record is excellent. Besides whatever internal strife there may be, we are still perceived as a country with political stability. Our effort here has been to really convince them that they need to hurry. The world is not waiting for them."

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Part of this effort was made via the year-long Festival of India in France, the result of an agreement between Mrs Gandhi and Mitterrand, which helped dispel deeply-etched Louis Malle images of damning squalor and deprivation, of mysticism and maharajas. The French also hoped that such extensive contacts would help India, in its own self-interest, recognise what it could gain economically and technologically from their country.

In defence, the French had built up a legendary reputation and were amongst the foremost arms salesmen competing with the two superpowers. They were amongst the leaders in telecommunications, computers, nuclear energy, space research, automobiles and rail transport. The socialists were eagerly scouring for new markets and India was potentially a prime partner. But there were voices of caution, on how not to deal with the Indians. The highly-respected confidential *International Letter* published by Danielle Hunebelle in Paris, acknowledged as one of the most expensive in the world, warned in a recent analysis: "India's obsession is to modernise its industry... using new technology... to export goods and earn foreign exchange. Don't think of going into India with second-rate equipment....The Indians already have enough of that... Your profits will lie in bringing in the best...India's highest priority is in electronics. Its people are skilled in designing software....I see excellent prospects in food processing, desperately needed... Bring in capital goods for servicing the power and telecommunications industries. Make machine tools and metal working equipment, medical instruments, road building and mining machinery." The newsletter went on: "If you are not among the hundreds of western companies now there, get your foot in the door."

Mrs Gandhi with Mitterrand in '82

The agreement on the Festival of India between Mrs Gandhi and Mitterrand helped dispel wrong notions about this country besides awakening India to what it could gain from France.

Despite this upbeat scenario and talk of a "special relationship", analysts like Francis Dore and many specialists warn that the impression of a "booming Indo-French trade" is illusory. Compared with Britain, the US and other West European nations, France still lags behind. The share of French technical collaborations accounted for only 6 per cent of the total Indian market and French investments represented only 2 per cent of the total foreign investments in India. All is not wine and roses in this relationship. India continues to encounter major problems in dealing with the French. Indian exporters have time and again come against a wall of protectionist legislation. Even as public sector cooperation has zoomed, private sector trade continues to be feeble. Harish Mahindra, the Indian industrialist, once leading a delegation of the Indo-French Chamber of Commerce and Industry, complained it was unacceptable that year after year the fourth industrial power in the world should have an inconsequential share of foreign collaborations entered into by India.

India continues to export "traditional items" to France: leather, garments, and jewellery, seafood and few heavy engineering items. There has been no hard-nosed follow-up to numerous seminars as to how Indian exports could be augmented and even moved away from these few areas. French financing continues to be notoriously unattractive. Says Ambassador Latif: "I do not want easier or softer loans. What I tell them is make your packages more competitive. Otherwise you miss the bus." While many French industrialists tend to agree that their credits are not "exciting", they caution that France does not have "unlimited funds".

While Indian officials are concerned about the balance of trade being consistently tilted in favour of France, they no doubt wish to keep up the momentum of Indo-French industrial cooperation. Viewed from Paris, that does not seem so easy. The socialist President and his conservative prime minister have been making rough weather of their now famous "cohabitation". Jacques Chirac, who visited India as prime minister in 1976, has been lurching from crisis to crisis: terrorism, student demonstrations and now bushy-tailed trade unions in a confrontationist mood. His attention has been rivetted on domestic strife, whereas President Mitterrand, perhaps the foxiest politician in the West with one eye fixed firmly on the next presidential elections, has adopted a posture of cool disdain and hauteur for the "incompetence" of the right-wing Government. However, officials of the Chirac Government insist that they are as anxious as their socialist predecessors to enhance ties and industrial cooperation with India. So no doubt, are its eager arms peddlers and corporate executives. They realise—as does New Delhi presumably—that these resounding proclamations of "special relationship" are firmly anchored in the continuing series of economic and technical agreements.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN in Paris

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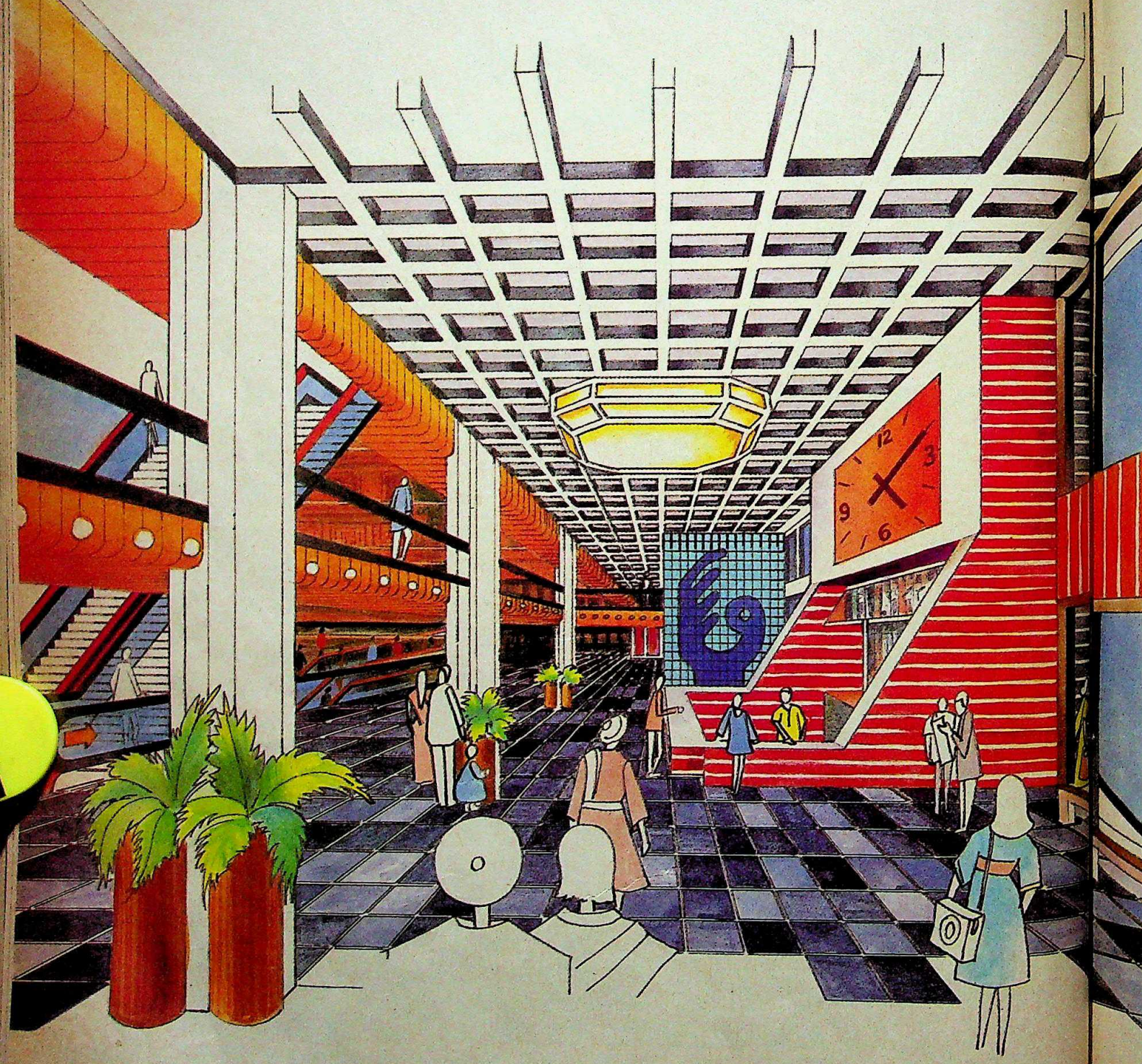
Announcing the Plaza Nav Bharat, Hyderabad



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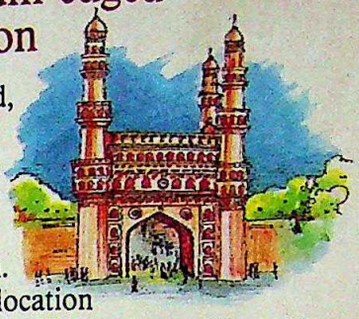

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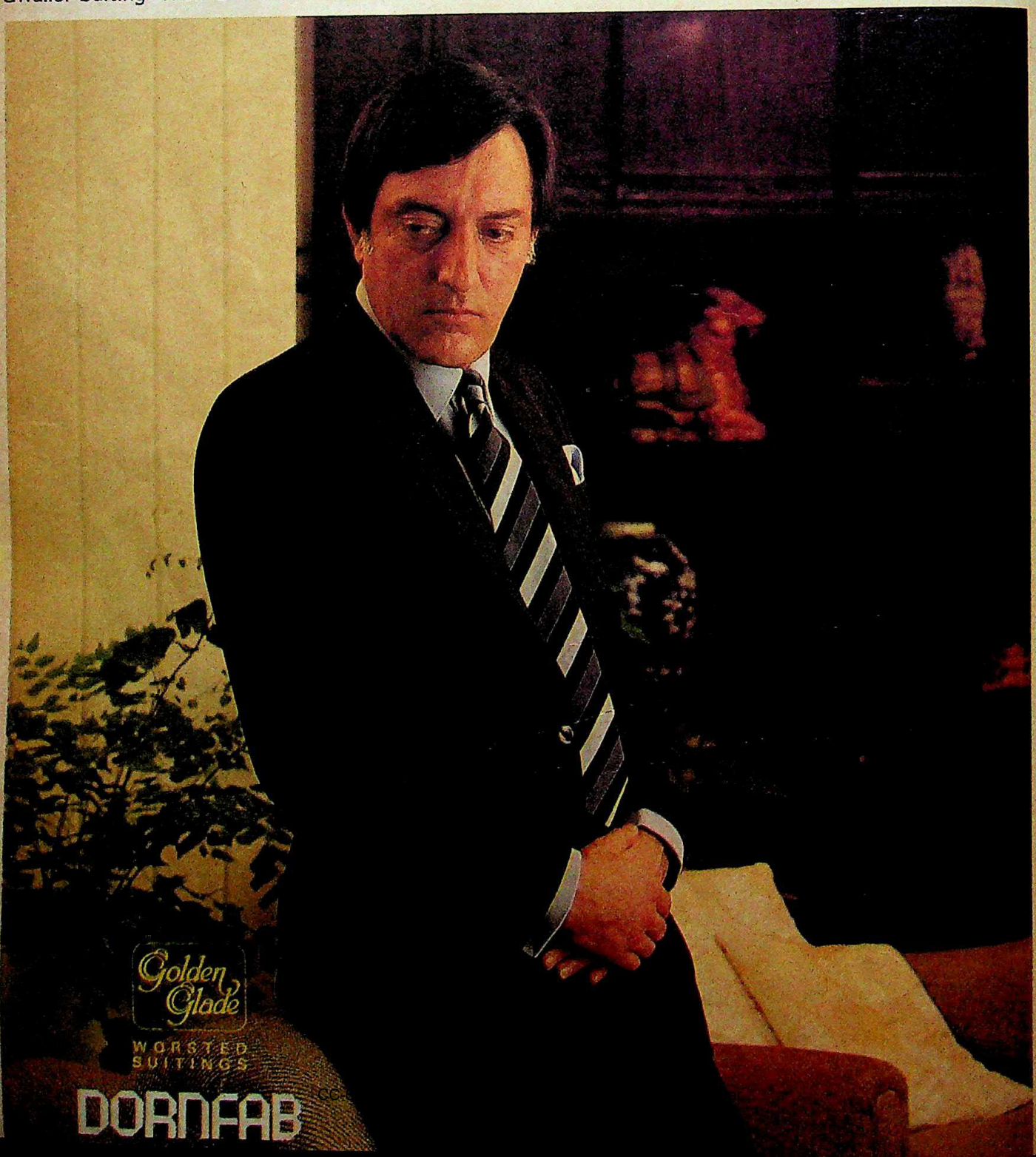

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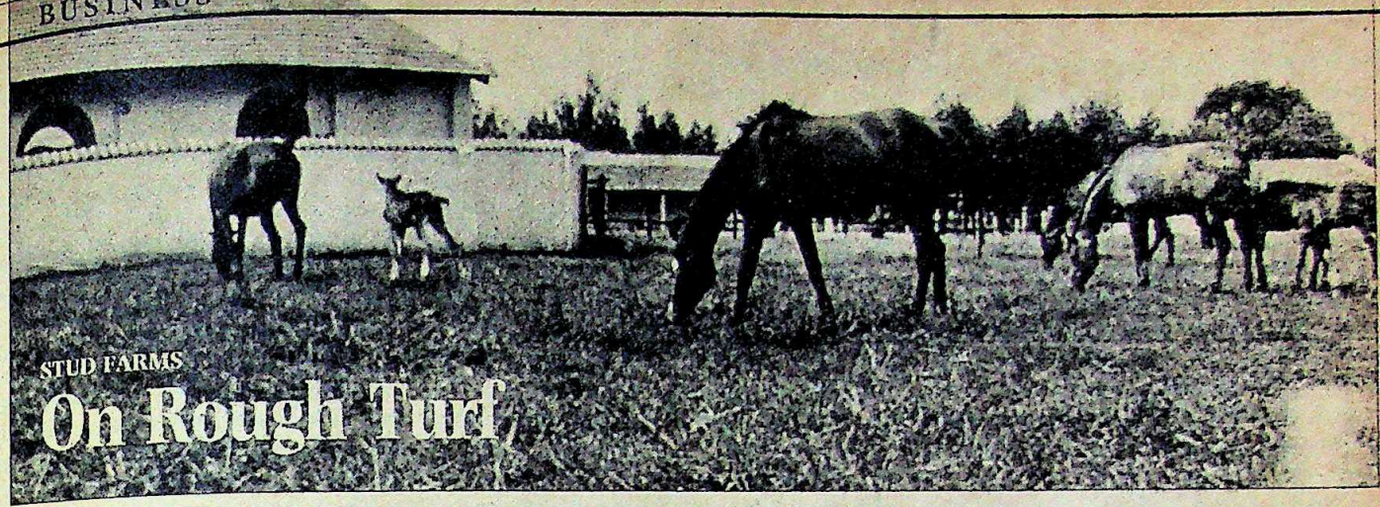

STUD FARMS

On Rough Turf

JUST two years ago, the thunder of hooves over the Indian turf had seemed deafening. With horse-racing turnover registering an average growth of over 35 per cent every year, the animals were in short supply and horse breeders couldn't count their money fast enough. Everybody who could rein in a stallion opened a stud farm and made a killing. And then suddenly the bandwagon gave way. There were too many taking a ride.

A mere 30 stud farms at the beginning of the '70s grew to 100 by the mid-'80s and the number of horses parading the auction ring shot up from 365 to 915. Only, the demand couldn't keep pace and the yearlings galloping in suddenly found no takers. There has been no increase in the number of racing venues. The ban on horse-racing by the Tamil Nadu Government has only worsened the situation. The closure of the Madras Race Club has blocked out an annual demand of nearly 200 new horses.

The industry in India has never seen such a glut. In fact, it has been a sellers' market with an acute shortage of horses ever since Partition, when the scalpel ran through the industry, leaving the racing venues in India and the stud farms in Pakistan.

Until this recession, the average price for a colt or filly was over Rs 1 lakh. It dipped to as low as Rs 44,000 at last fortnight's auction in Madras. Understandably, there is panic among the breeders. This price not only chews away at the once handsome profits but even implies considerable losses for the medium-sized stud farms. "Private breeders who have been in the business for more than 30 years are slowly getting out," says Dr Farokh Wadia, secretary of the National Horse Breeding Society of India. "We are in a very tough situation and do not quite know where we are heading," admits Farooq Rattonsey, owner of the Kehelan Stud Farm in Bangalore.

"The prices will not look up for another five years at least," predicts Major Pradeep Mehra, former national polo player and commandant of the President's Bodyguard who now owns Usha Stud Farm, one of the largest in the country. Mehra is watching the market anxiously with nearly 20 young horses to sell this season.

Though the industry is reeling, those in the top bracket, producing thoroughbreds, have less to worry about. Although prices have come down across the board, the depression has been less for the more expensive horses. "Good horses can still be sold, it's the trash which remains unsold," says Rajendra Singhji, former maharaja of Idar, who runs a large stud farm on his estate north of Ahmedabad. The bigger and more established breeders like Singhji and Mehra feel that this recession may turn out to be a blessing in disguise for the industry. They feel that only the best will survive, making for better breed and quality.

"Breeders have so far lived sheltered lives and have not been interested in attracting new owners," points out S.C. Jain, chairman of the Royal Western India Turf Club, the country's premier racing club. "They have made no real effort to promote the sport," adds A.K.S.(Sonny) Brar, owner of the Dashmesh Stud Farm in Faridkot. Until now, with horses in short supply, the various turf clubs were vying with each other to attract them by advancing attractive interest-free loans, subsidised stabling and free maintenance of horses. It is no longer so, as the clubs have realised that there are far too many horses peering over their fences in any case.

Having now become acutely aware of the need to do something urgently about increasing the demand for their horses, around 20 breeders have come together to form a public limited company, the Thoroughbred Racing and Breeding Ltd (TRBL). This step is

"Private breeders who have been in the business for more than 30 years are slowly getting out."

FAROKH WADIA
secretary, National Horse Breeding Society of India.

"Breeders have so far lived sheltered lives and have not been interested in attracting new owners."

S.C. JAIN
chairman, Royal Western India Turf Club

Horse breeding: an uncertain future

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designed to promote racing and open new race courses in India. TRBL has taken up Meerut and Lucknow, but is facing problems in the capital city of Uttar Pradesh as the local Gymkhana Committee does not want to relinquish control.

Breeders feel that they are being given a raw deal. Cash continues to flow in through the betting counters, clubs continue to make money, and the Government makes over Rs 25 crore every year through tax on racing. And yet their own share in the industry's annual turnover—estimated at well over Rs 200 crore—is declining rapidly.

They say the recession is only partly explained by the simple mechanics of demand and supply. According to them, the other major factor depressing the market is bad management of horse racing by turf clubs.

"People are getting fed up of owning horses because racing is not straight," asserts General Wadalia of the Qutb Stud Farm in New Delhi, who has been in the breeding business for nearly two decades. "Lack of control over the organisation of racing is leading to this recession," he feels. Other breeders agree and cite the case of Bangalore where the state Government had to take over the management of the Turf Club as stewards reportedly had an interest in some horses and were blatantly manipulating the results to fill their pockets.

By and large, the Centre shows very little interest in the sport since it is a state subject. And with almost all major racing centres—Bangalore, Hyderabad, Calcutta, Madras—falling in non-Congress(I) states, there is virtually no coordination in policies.

Breeders have made repeated representations to the respective state governments about their problems but the passive response has made them throw up their hands. "I don't think people in the Central Government are really worried. They would've been worried if they didn't get their revenue," remarks Major B.P.Singh, of the Guru Hari Stud Farm in Delhi echoing the sentiments of most disgruntled breeders.

With the states neither showing interest in opening new racing centres nor offering any incentives to prospective owners for the purchase of horses, breeders are getting increasingly worried as the February auction in Bombay draws near. Over 600 horses will be up for sale and nobody dares to predict how low the price will dip—or how many breeders will be forced to close shop this season.

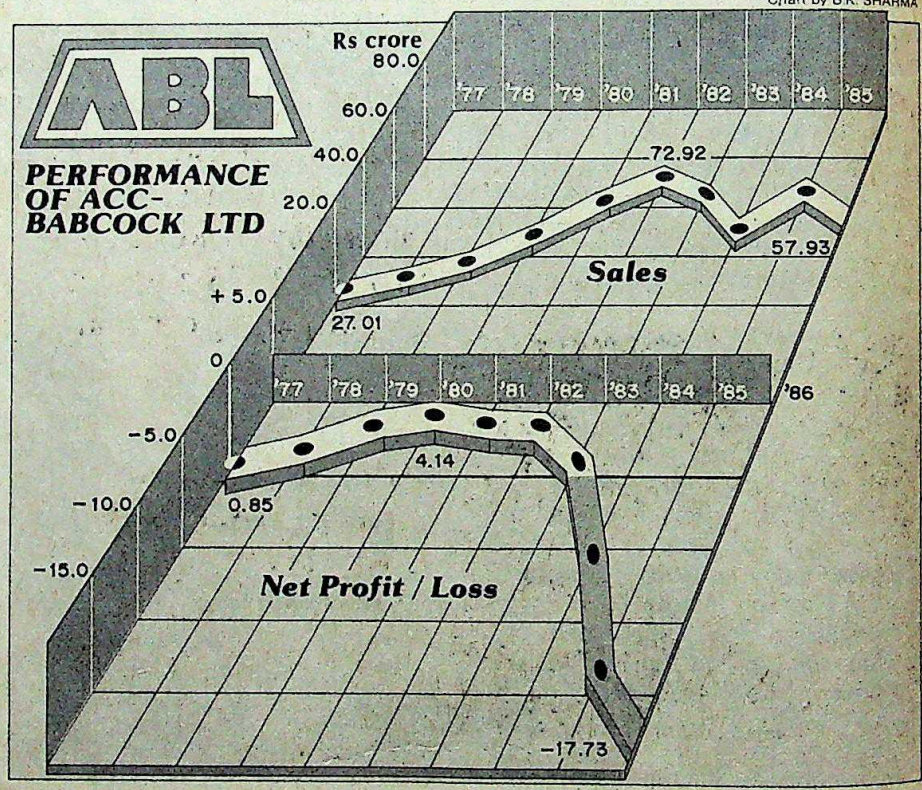
—TANIA MIDHA with M. RAHMAN

ACC-BABCOCK

In Boiling Water

WHEN a *Fortune 500* public sector giant takes on a comparatively puny private sector company, no one need guess who the gods will favour. When the behemoth has also the Government rooting for it, all that will probably be left is to pick up the pieces. And this is precisely what has happened to ACC-Babcock Ltd (ABL) after Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) decided to lock horns with it in the market.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Today ABL, a Rs 57-crore company, has filed a winding up petition in the Bombay High Court: its 6,000 workers have been paid a paltry Rs 500 apiece since October. Accumulated losses have mounted to Rs 26.71 crore. The immediate order book is blank and emergency meetings are on in Delhi to decide on how to dispose of the remains. "We have gone to the Government and told them, do what you will," says a senior ABL executive. "Take us over if you want. We just can't carry on any longer."

ABL's tale of woe began in 1981. Primarily a boiler manufacturer, its sole competitor in the country was the Rs 1,700-crore public sector giant BHEL. Under long-standing arrangement, ABL was traditionally given a quota from all the available orders: mainly from state electricity boards and other power generation units. But 1981 ushered in an order famine and BHEL grabbed for itself orders for more than 10,000 MW leaving a meagre 210 MW for its rival partner. Under Industry Ministry's patronage, BHEL resisted all the Energy Ministry's appeals to give ABL a slice of the cake.

Early last year, threatening to wind up, ABL approached the Government with its woes suggesting, among other options for the problem, a take-over or even a merger. And on February 24 last year, Vasant Sathe, energy minister presided over a meeting in his office which was attended by then industry minister N.D. Tiwari and officials of the ministries of energy, industry and the Planning Commission. Together they worked out a compromise, agreeing that ABL should be given its rightful share.

But such was not to be. The argument given this time around for back-tracking was that BHEL itself has no orders. Minister of State for Public Enterprises K.K. Tewary told INDIA TODAY that he was worried about the depleting orders and would not entertain any "tinkering around in such a core sector". Dismissing ABL's petition for

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a take-over if there was no other solution, the minister of state, said categorically: "Under no circumstances am I going to consider taking over ACC-Babcock or merging it with BHEL."

Caught in the cross-fire with no solution in sight, ABL officials were nonplussed. "We are stuck in a squeeze play," says an ABL official. "They tell us we must compete for orders. But when it is a government body supplying to a government body how do we get an edge in."

In 1982 ABL had got a letter of intent for supply of three 210 MW boilers from the West Bengal State Electricity Board (WBSEB). However, these were snatched away by BHEL after the electricity board was reshuffled. After much persuasion, the public sector company agreed to hand back one of the boilers.

ABL blames its problems on the Government. They say that it was at the Government's request in 1976-77 that it enhanced boiler manufacturing capacity from 500 MW to 1,000 MW. But now when the Government's ambitious power programme has gone awry and orders are not so easily forthcoming, BHEL promptly grabs whatever is available while its smaller rival is left stranded.

There is, of course, another side to the story. BHEL contends that it has been getting orders simply because it maintains a finer quality. They accuse ABL of producing inferior products, priced so high that it cannot compete in the open market. They also claim that the company's after sales servicing is poor.

However, given the fact that users have expressed dissatisfaction with both BHEL and ABL boilers such charges are difficult to prove. Besides, BHEL has been accused of undercutting its boiler price and making up on turbines (it is the only turbine manufacturer in the country) in order to edge out ABL.

All this unofficial mud slinging notwithstanding, the Government has set up a five-man committee to decide ABL's future. The company at present is constructing boilers for various projects worth Rs 2,000 crore. But as the WBSEB and the Department of Atomic Energy who have placed orders with ABL have testified before the Bombay High Court, their projects will get indefinitely delayed if the company shuts down as BHEL and ABL technology are poles apart. The boilers are still in various stages of construction and, worried officials say, it will not be possible for the public sector giant to immediately step into the breach.

As things stand, ABL's future is gloomy. Yet another idea aired as a possible solution—a proposal reportedly backed by Vasant Sathe—is a plan to pump in an estimated Rs 25 crore to revive the company. But concerned officials admit that this can only be successful if the order bottleneck is cleared. The plan is not being taken very seriously, because with resources still scarce to finance the power programme, most see it as yet another possible instance of promises that will not be kept.

Energy Minister Sathe, keen to save ABL, has reportedly backed a plan to pump Rs 25 crore into the ailing company.

"We cannot get led away by Vasant Sathe's bohemianism."

K.K. TEWARY
minister of state for public enterprises

But all efforts to bail out the company are stalled. Tewary, remains a formidable stumbling block in the plans to save the company. The minister of state emphasised that in spite of Sathe's being in favour of helping out ABL, "we cannot get led away by the bohemianism of Vasant Sathe." He admitted that considering the fact that thousands of workers are involved, there is "tremendous amount of pressure. But I will never agree and the Industry Ministry is also against the take-over." Tewary said angrily: "They are literally threatening us, presenting us with a *fait accompli* with their Bombay High Court petition saying, 'take us over or we'll go in for liquidation'."

"There are apologists in their favour saying we must save the investment in the company by financial institutions. But we are not going to take over any sick industry or any industry likely to go sick in the near future," stressed Tewary, pointing out that "had the company been serious about keeping good health, they would have jolly well used the various licenses they have stacked away for diversification."

The minister of state says he has had "enough of taking over companies after

they have been squeezed white by the private sector". He argued that any such step would only negate all the measures they have been taking to restore the profitability of the public sector. Proclaiming that he was refusing permission on principle, he asked: "What do we do about the hundreds of other such companies—Rohtas for instance—waiting to be taken over? Whom would we say no to?"

In the meantime the State Bank of India has frozen ABL's accounts leaving it with not even enough money to make a second token payment to its workers (Rs 500 for each person was put together by scraping the bottom of the barrel from another account). The Industrial Development Bank of India which had been approached for a loan of Rs 21-crore to finance projects has rejected the application. All work, hence has ground to a standstill.

Resigned to their fate, an ABL executive said: "Right now the ball is no longer in our court. Let the court decide what we should do and tell the Government. We shall accept whatever they say." Apathy it seems breeds in boilers too.

—PARTHASARATHI SWAMI

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TOURISM

Busting Records

FOR the country's tourism industry, 1986 turned out to be a dream year. Right from January foreign tourists flocked to the country's varied holiday resorts and by Christmas their number had crossed the magical million mark—a figure that had eluded the country for more than five years. The result was a 26 per cent increase in foreign tourist arrivals, the highest ever. It quickly dispelled the gloom cast by the previous two years, that had seen arrivals drop by 5 per cent, and raised hopes of India emerging as a major tourist centre.

And even as foreign tourists searched for hotel rooms and contended with overbooked flights, the Union Tourism Ministry was busy making new year resolutions. The first: never get caught napping when a boom really booms. The ministry is finding it difficult to explain why India really clicked. Tourism Secretary, S.K. Misra thinks it was the Festival of India (FOI) celebrations in the US, UK and France that had made "a very significant change in India's image abroad".

While, admittedly, the FOI did have an impact, other factors seemed to have helped as well. For instance, Bob Garner,34, an American salesman from Minnesota and his wife, Janet, came to India to "discover spirituality and values". He says that the film, *Gandhi* by Richard Attenborough had moved them considerably. In fact, the spate of films and television serials on India have had much to do with creating awareness.

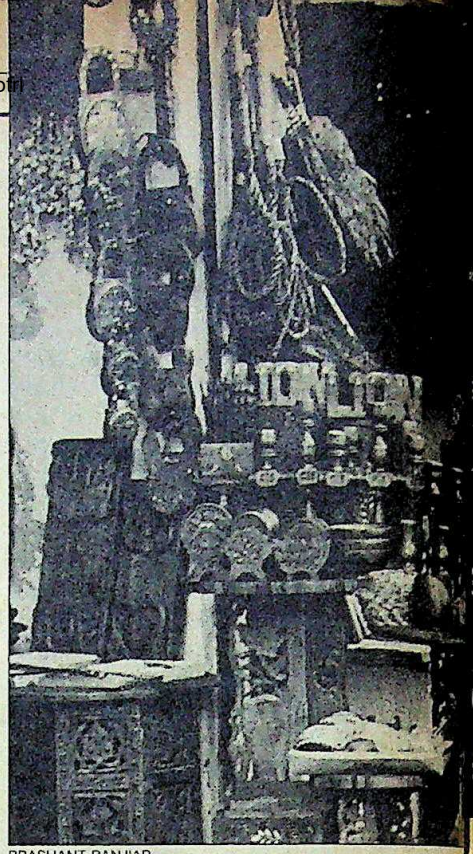
But in an industry, which depends on the prevailing political climate as much as it does on the weather, several indirect factors could have spurred the Indian boom on. The Chernobyl nuclear disaster and the fear of radiation spreading into Europe, as well as the rise of terrorism in that region scared large numbers of American tourists away from the continent. Also, with Sri Lanka still a troubled paradise, many of the sun worshippers shifted their umbrellas to Indian beaches.

Surprisingly, India's continuing troubled political situation didn't seem to dissuade foreign tourists as in the previous years. Many in the travel business believe that the prime minister's positive image abroad has had much to do with this. As Inder Sharma, chairman, Sita Travels, one of the largest travel agents in the country, said: "The general perception of India seems to have improved and those who cancelled their holidays to India in 1985 took them in 1986."

Unlike the Tourism Ministry, not everyone in the business is dazzled by the million figure. Gautam Khanna, senior vice-president of the Oberoi chain of hotels, points out: "A million isn't a hell of a lot when you consider that a small Asian country like Singapore has more than five million tourists. And its about time we crossed it anyway."

And for travel agents the boom is worrying. C.S. Welinkar, president, Travel Agents Association of India, says: "Hotel rooms and airlines seats are already overbooked and unless tourist facilities increase dramatically we might end up with a debacle soon." But with most of the travel agents having recorded a healthy growth rate of 25 per cent they aren't complaining too much.

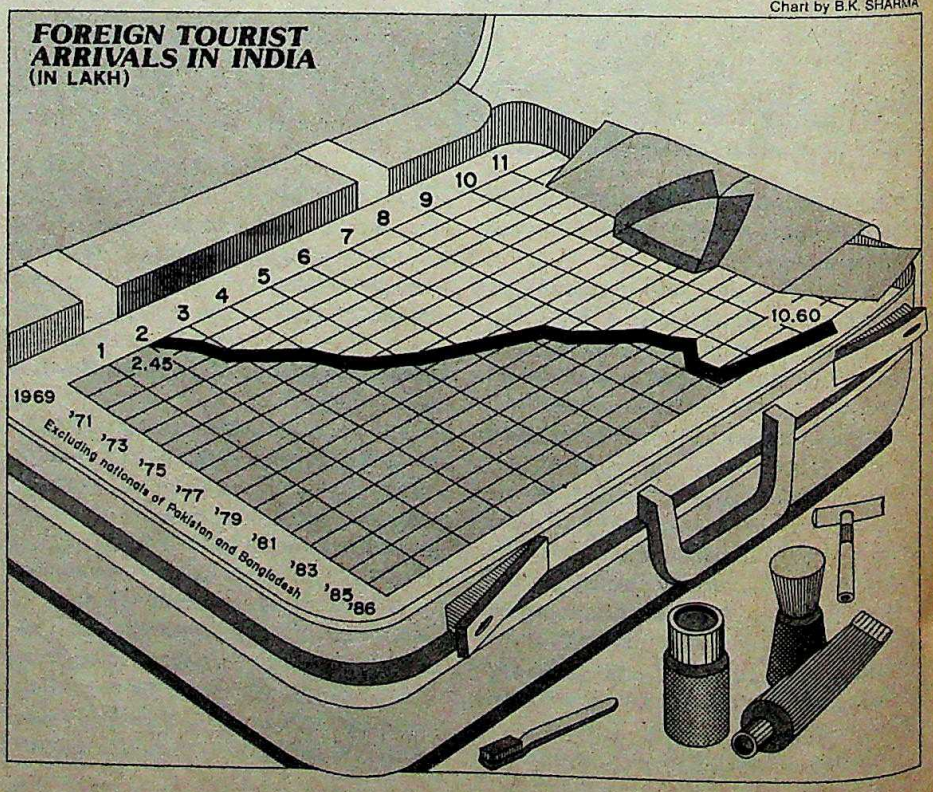
The hotel industry too has been booming. The Government-owned India Tourism Development Corporation, the largest hotel group in the country, recorded a 15 per cent increase in occupancy rates in most of its hotels and a happy R.S. Jolly, senior vice-president, says: "Our profits have more than doubled." The Taj group of hotels not only found occupancy rates shooting up by 5 per cent but Rabindra Seth, special advisor, public relations, says: "Our lean season for foreign tourists had shrunk from six months to just two—June and July."



PRASHANT PANJIAR

That seems to be a national trend. While previously most foreigners visited the country during the more "civilised" months from October to March, of late arrivals between April and August have been rising rapidly and are now almost equal that of other months. For instance,

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



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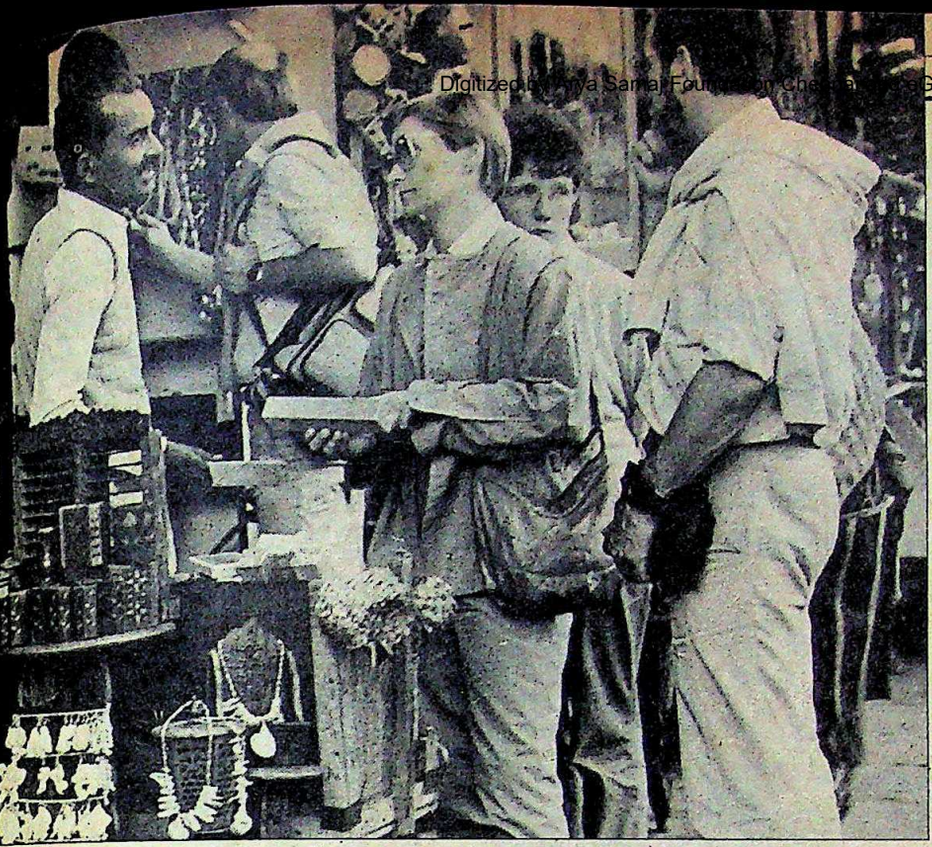

Bargaining at New Delhi's Janpath; (right) lounging by a hotel pool

while November 1986 brought the maximum tourists, 1.05 lakh, August wasn't really far behind with 86,921 and wet June drew 76,145 foreign tourists.

INITIAL estimates indicate that British tourist traffic, which forms the largest single chunk, jumpedup by 21 per cent last year. Tourists from the US, the second largest group, increased by 14 per cent. But the real surprises came from Soviet Union, Italy, Spain and France with tourists to India showing a 50 per cent increase. Bloating the boom was a healthy rise in tourist traffic from Germany, Belgium, Canada and the Middle East.

Tourists on a repeat visit formed a high 42 per cent of the arrivals to India last year. But there has been a definite shift in the type of foreign tourists. While cultural tourism still forms the largest motivating factor, there is an increasing number who come to spend time at Indian beaches and mountain resorts. But the fastest growing segment is business tourism. With India playing host to several international conferences—apart from entering into many more foreign collaborations than before—there has been a 25 per cent increase in the movement of executives to the country.

Last year, foreign exchange earnings from tourism were estimated to be around Rs 1,800 crore making it possibly the largest net foreign exchange earner in the country, outstripping export earnings from such varied merchandise as handicrafts, gems, precious stones and readymade garments.

ITDC

The Union Government, which had for long regarded tourism as a "luxury industry", has only now begun to realise its vast economic potential. As a first step it has persuaded most states to declare tourism as an industry. This may help the hotel sector with much-needed subsidies for land and investment costs and should do much for developing the niggardly infrastructure facilities that currently exist in the country.

But with the Tourism Ministry setting an ambitious target of wooing 2.5 million tourists by 1990, the challenge is even greater. Hotel facilities will have to increase substantially to meet the demand. Currently there are 500 approved hotels having around 31,600 rooms and the ministry estimates that another 250 hotels with about 25,000 rooms have to be added in the next three years. At the moment this seems an uphill task.

Meanwhile, in a bid to boost publicity abroad, it approved of an additional Rs 5 crore for 1987. By next month, Americans and Europeans are going to be subjected to a massive publicity blitz. The Tourism Ministry has lined up 200 advertising films of 30 seconds each to be put into every major television programme in these countries apart from backing them up with similar spots on the radio. Other than projecting adventure tourism and its beach resorts, the overriding message will be "India is a land of all seasons", and for all reasons too.

And realising that there is a big potential for adventure tourism, the Centre is now apportioning a large part of its tourism budget for its development. Jammu & Kashmir has been the major beneficiary with Rs 14 crore being sanctioned for making Gulmarg an international ski-resort and Rs 1.4 crore towards the development of an international golf course. All this has left other states unhappy. Himachal Pradesh, for instance, complains that its major projects like an airfield at Shimla and cable car projects in its mountain resorts have been languishing for a lack of funds.

Another major area of complaint, which the ministry would find hard to resolve, are the inadequate airlines services. The flights are invariably overbooked and delays have become inevitable, leaving tourists sore. Enzo Pera, an Italian sales manager, who combines his business trip with tourism, complains: "I have never been to Kashmir because I could never get a seat on the flight to Srinagar." While the domestic airlines problem is going to be difficult to resolve in a bid to boost foreign charter tours, the cabinet has finally taken a decision to allow them to operate at a lower air fare. Till now Air-India insisted that the fare charged by charters should be similar to its rate but the new decision would certainly boost group travel.

But the most crucial aspect is the rapid development of infrastructure facilities within the country. A survey done by the Tourism Ministry indicated that as many as 42 per cent of the tourists came by what is called "word of mouth" publicity. And while Misra hopes that "Indian tourism would take off by 1990" it may as well take a nosedive if tourists go back complaining of the raw deal they received in the country.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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TELECOMMUNCA
ONLY THE PRINCIPLE

Present day telecommunications means not just two persons out of earshot talking to each other, but also people communicating with machines and machines with each other.

In the 100 years since Alexander Graham Bell first invented the telephone, technologies and equipment have grown infinitely more complex, more specialized to match growing communication needs.

In India, the first telephone was cranked into activity in 1881 in Calcutta. Since then, the Indian telephone network has grown in size, sophistication and in strength

Today, there are over 8,000 telephone exchanges with a total capacity of approx. 3.7 million lines in the country. All cities and towns in India have access to a telephone network. Over 8,000 villages are served by exchanges and nearly 22,000 by long distance public call offices.

The country is now switching over to electronic and digital exchanges. The first digital transmission route between Kanpur and Lucknow is operational. Optical fibre cables too, have been used on a test route.

AT&T and Philips Telecommunications (APT), formed by AT&T (USA), the largest

AT&T AND PHILIPS TELECOMMUNICATIONS

AT&T

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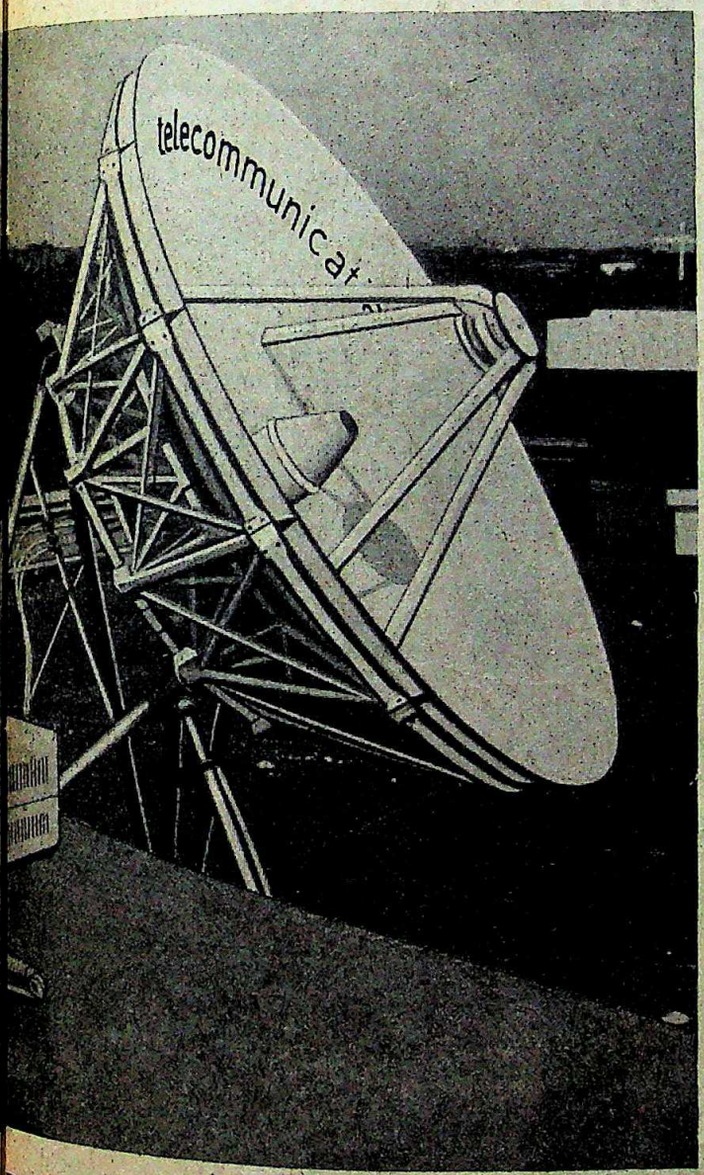
UNCATIONS TODAY: PLE REMAINS SIMPLE

telecommunications company in the world and Philips (Holland), Europe's premier multi-technology electronics organisation, is not a new presence in India. The country has trusted the Philips name for over 50 years. Since 1984, APT has had the privilege of supplying 25 containerized electronic telephone exchanges suited for both urban and rural areas. An additional two are being currently installed at Delhi and Bombay.



In transmission too, Philips has been closely associated with the Indian telecommunications network for over 12 years. Today, APT is supplying India with advanced digital transmission systems which can carry 140 million signals per second (the equivalent of 1,920 simultaneous telephone conversations).

Our access to the best of American and European research and our experience worldwide make us an ideal partner for designing and building truly advanced and continually updated telecommunications networks to keep pace with India's programmes.

Where new needs are surfacing and where technologies have grown so advanced and so complex that today only the principle has anything in common with yesterday.

AT&T and Philips Telecommunications
India Liaison Office: Prakash Deep
Ist Floor, 7 Tolstoy Marg,
New Delhi 110 001.

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IONS YOUR CONNECTION WITH THE FUTURE

PHILIPS

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DUPLICATOR INDUSTRY

Tough Times

THE price war bug seems to have bitten the duplicator industry. Even as prices continue to plunge in the personal computers sector, the duplicator industry seems to be undergoing a similar experience.

Yet market leader Modi Xerox is succeeding with a high priced product. "But then," says President B.K. Modi, "we are in a different league." It is Modi Xerox which has sent the others searching for storm shelters. In an industry composed of screwdriver units, importing kits and assembling them here, the entry of a large-scale manufacturer with both muscle and name is bringing about a sea change.

Efficiency Equipments, which was hawking the Sharp copier, closed shop three years ago. Says Rajiv Talwar who headed the outfit: "There were so many indigenous manufacturers coming in, it did not make sense to carry on."

Others left the decision far too late and are now finding it tough with all the manufacturers on a price cutting spree. Nelco, which has a tie-up with the Japanese MITA, was selling its 9122 model at Rs 80,000 in October 1983. Today it costs just Rs 68,000. "The market has become more competitive," says Rajendra Bhinge, divisional manager Office Products.

IBEL, priced its BM 121 at Rs 58,000 in May 1985, while now an equivalent model is priced at Rs 56,000. Even Modi Xerox while raising the price of its copiers by some 6 to 10 per cent, has reduced servicing charges, making the overall package a relatively cheaper proposition. "That is not a price cut. We are just passing on some benefits to the consumers," Operations Manager Mahesh Mani clarifies. He feels that the present price war is born out of a sense of panic. Many of the small-timers have been paying lower import duty through under-invoicing and have thus much larger margins to play with.

Others feel that the fall in prices is not due to competition. J.K. Malhotra Holdings, which markets the Nashua model, saw a 15 per cent drop in prices. "But that is due to the fall in the prices of kits," says Chairman Jayant Malhotra.

Many deny of any fall. Both Hindustan Reprographics Limited (HRL), which has a tie-up with Toshiba, and the Chowgules, who market the Canon machine are "maintaining levels". Incidentally, Gestetner, has a manufacturing arrangement for a Canon copier.

The Rs 60-crore industry with a growth rate of 25 per cent has only the haziest ideas about market share. "We have 35 per cent," says Modi Xerox. HRL claims another 35, J.K. Holdings says 20, Chowgules 20, Nelco 15....add them all up and you are closer to 250 than 100.

The confusion is apparent in the copier consumables market which is also witnessing a price war. Traditionally, the seller is supposed to provide all the necessary supplies of the key consumable—the toner. But toner prices had long been pegged at very high levels. Chowgules markets an 880 gm packet for Rs 2,075. But smuggled toners were available for Rs 1,600.

The situation has now been compounded with the entry of IBEL Chemicals, a company set up to manufacture toners for all copiers. When IBEL launched its Canon toner in mid-August last year at a price of Rs 1,350 there was a price crash. Open market levels were ruling at Rs 1,200. Copier companies are now finding one of their lucrative sources of income slipping away.

Says Mani: "We are not really bothered. Aside from IBEL, Modi Xerox has the only other toner manufacturing unit in the country. We just tell the customer that we are no longer responsible for the machine. After people see a few discards, they will stick to us."

Sales Manager Raj Unni of IBEL Chemicals is confident that they will soon capture a big chunk of the Rs 20 crore consumables market. With a tie-up with Olin Hunt of the US, technology will not be a problem.

Unni considers the high price of consumables as typical of Japanese marketing technique. "Sell the core product cheap and make a killing on the accessories and replacements. Just take a look at Maruti. We are out to break that cycle," he said quite confidently.

With the price of everything connected with the industry falling, it is the men lower down who will be effected. Jobbers who charged Rs 2 for a single copy, now charge 50 to 75 paise. It is a big segment now, but as offices increasingly install copiers, they will be out of business.

"It is a very fast changing scenario," says Mani. "We are on the threshold of a cultural change. The trouble is that in India we went in for computers before copiers. You go to a chairman's office and you will find a PC. It probably does not work or he does not know how to use it. But ask him for a copy of a document and he will set his typist at work."

What the copier crusade means is the demise of the cyclostyling machine. But that, is years a coming. It takes India long time to copy the ways of the West no matter how hard the copiers try.

—PARTHASARATHI SWAMI

With everyone on a price-cutting spree, manufacturers find the going difficult.

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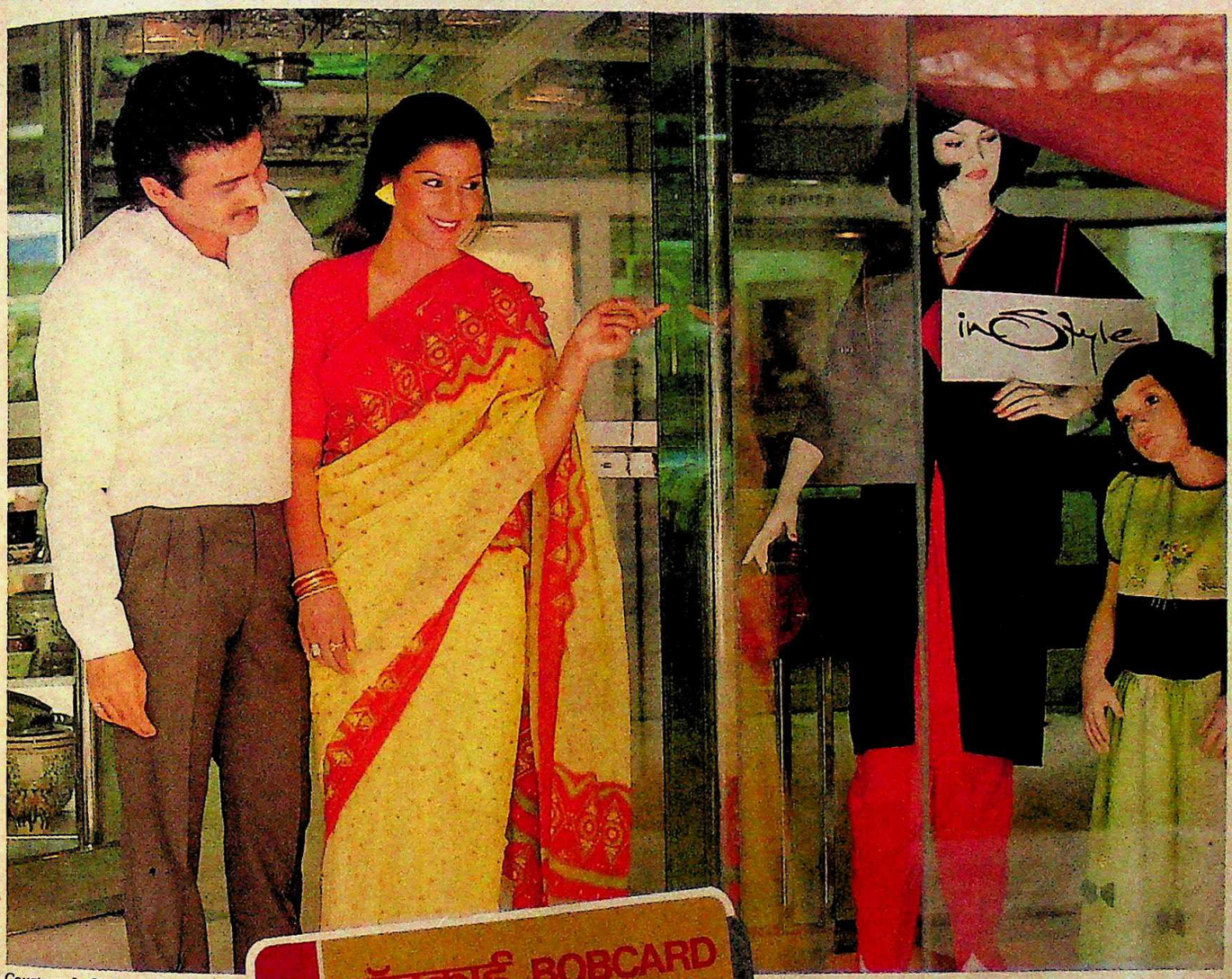
Instamoney



Courtesy: In Style

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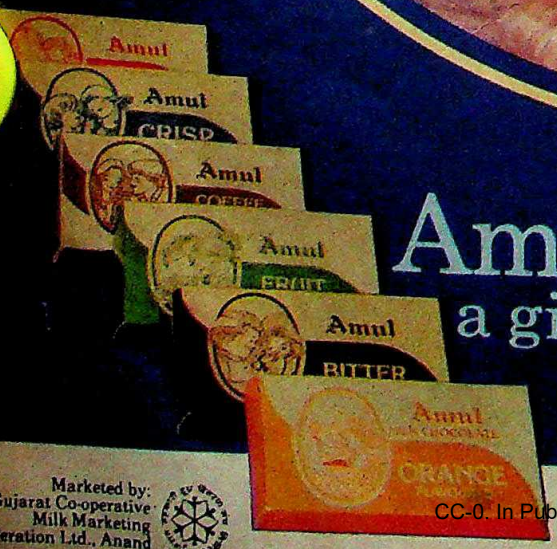

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Six delicious varieties...
Amul Milk Chocolate, Amul Crisp, Amul Coffee,
Amul Fruit & Nut, Amul Bitter, Amul Orange

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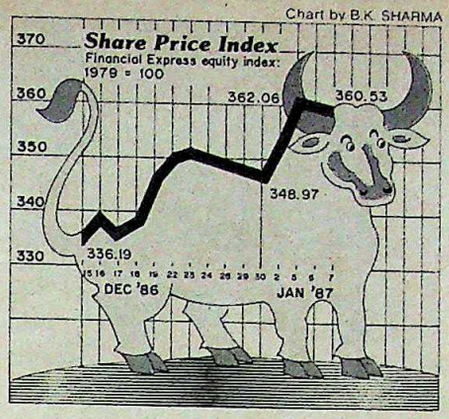
THE MARKETS

Cheery Start

THE New Year has brought cheer. The bulls, so long battered by the bears, have begun sharpening their horns once more. The financial institutions, thanks to belated government instructions, returned as buyers at a time when the market had practically collapsed. Since December 8, therefore, they have been picking up nearly all the listed scrips that matter. This has resulted in the *Financial Express*' equity index (Base 1979 = 100) looking distinctly more chirpy, with a gain of more than 11 points from 349 at the close of last year.

The market has apparently rung out the old. But ringing in the new is a totally different matter altogether. Share values did perk up at the Calcutta Stock Exchange settlement on December 30. The bulls had to pay up just 12 per cent contango against 18 to 24 per cent a fortnight before. At the Bombay settlement six days later, it was the bears who had to bear the burden. Short of shares to

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



deliver against the speculative sales they had made in the hope of values falling further, they had to instead pay up the interest on the difference in prices. But this is not really a sign of renewal of public confidence. The lay speculator has been once bitten and will think twice before he decides to take a shot at the markets again.

Scrips were up, thanks to the fund-flushed institutions (and many marketmen feel they were deliberately waiting for values to drop before getting into a lucrative rescue act). TELCO closed at Rs 640 on January 5, up from the Rs 582.50 at the close of 1986. TISCO also gained a welcome Rs 52.50 on rumours of a steel price hike. The bull operations were particularly noticeable in Reliance which moved up from a low Rs 182 to close at Rs 216. On the whole, however, listed scrips were devoid of common support.

The reasons are legion: a drug policy which still remains undefined, a software policy which after the initial bouquets is drawing its share of brickbats, and the anticipated deficit of a shocking Rs 5,000 crore in the next budget.

This is why even the year-end reserve forecast of an improvement in the economy during the next financial year did not have much impact on the trading sentiment. The people who had sold short have squared up but there is still a dearth of buyers.

Marketmen will look back at the year that went by as the year best forgotten. There were crises aplenty which inspired many an unscheduled closure. There were the raids, rampant inside trading and finally the promise that the much-needed reforms were on the anvil. The reforms were Rajiv Gandhi's guarantee and the markets are hoping he will deliver very soon.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1986 HIGH	1986 LOW	CLOSE 7.1.87	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	45.00	23.00	32.00	0.50 +
Associated Cement	389.00	186.00	226.50	7.50 −
Atlas Copco	138.00	64.00	122.00	6.00 +
Asian Paints	280.00	130.00	220.00	8.75 +
Avery India	164.00	100.00	159.00	9.00 +
Bajaj Auto	4800.00	1950.00	4350.00	100.00 +
Baroda Rayon	490.00	205.00	232.50	nil
Bata India	131.50	54.00	136.00	7.50 +
Bayer	680.00	445.00	640.00	10.00 +
Bharat Forge	86.00	48.00	71.00	8.00 +
Britannia Ind	186.00	85.00	170.00	4.50 +
Blue Star	120.50	75.00	97.50	nil
Bombay Dyeing	49.20	30.80	43.00	5.00 +
Brooke Bond	96.75	56.00	84.00	4.00 +
Ceat Tyres	560.00	240.00	510.00	20.00 +
Century Spinning	1690.00	710.00	775.00	10.00 +
Chloride India	146.00	86.00	140.00	5.00 +
Colgate	385.00	200.00	357.50	10.00 +
DCM	58.50	26.25	37.50	1.00 −
Dunlop	75.50	49.75	73.25	0.25 +
Elecon	127.00	80.00	105.00	5.00 +
Escorts	117.00	69.00	81.00	2.00 −
Finolex Cables	125.00	36.00	118.00	3.00 +
Food Specialities	375.00	161.00	184.00	11.00 +
Garware Nylon	61.50	24.00	28.00	2.00 −
G.E. Shipping	36.00	13.00	19.25	1.00 +
Gujarat St Fertilisers	182.00	92.50	165.00	28.50 +
Grasim Ind	102.00	59.00	87.00	3.00 +
Hind Cocoa	265.00	97.50	256.25	10.75 +
Hindustan Lever	192.00	124.00	185.00	12.00 +
Hindustan Motors	128.50	29.25	33.75	3.00 −
Hind Dorr	660.00	255.00	327.50	17.50 +
IEL	84.50	48.00	60.50	0.50 −
Indian Hotels	157.00	75.00	97.50	7.50 +
Indian Organic	97.00	61.50	75.50	0.50 +
Indian Rayon	151.00	70.00	74.00	1.00 +
Indrol	515.00	200.00	490.00	30.00 +
Ingersoll-Rand	505.00	220.00	287.50	2.50 +
ITC	86.50	53.00	76.25	1.50 +
J.K. Synthetics	132.00	72.00	77.50	3.50 −
Kinetic Engineering	385.00	220.00	295.00	15.00 −
Kirloskar Cummins	775.00	505.00	740.00	7.50 +
Lakme	195.00	105.00	106.25	3.75 −
Larson & Toubro	204.00	82.50	96.00	1.00 −
Lipton	69.00	46.50	64.50	3.50 +
Lohia Machines	70.00	21.00	24.00	0.50 −
Madura Coats	92.00	51.00	70.00	1.00 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	86.00	36.50	46.00	1.00 −
Motor Industries	1000.00	352.50	385.00	10.00 +
National Organic	840.00	500.00	570.00	5.00 +
Nirlon	77.00	21.50	19.00	5.50 −
Orkay Silk Mills	192.00	92.00	110.00	10.00 +
Otis Elevator	200.00	88.00	180.00	10.00 +
Peico Electronics	104.50	48.00	57.25	0.25 −
Ponds	390.00	200.00	360.00	nil
Premier Auto	99.00	25.00	25.50	3.50 −
Ranbaxy	160.00	105.00	130.00	nil
Raymond	97.00	58.00	75.00	8.00 +
Reckitt & Colman	183.00	81.25	182.00	11.00 +
Reliance Industries	392.00	179.00	228.00	44.00 +
Shriram Fibres	88.00	30.00	36.00	0.50 +
Sandoz	142.50	62.00	140.00	18.00 +
SPIC	184.00	41.00	49.00	1.50 +
Tata Steel	1610.00	927.50	1120.00	125.00 +
Telco	910.00	460.00	620.00	72.50 +
Vulcan Laval	162.50	42.50	47.50	nil

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	TT Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.7175	8.6722
Austria	Schilling	100	96.9489	96.1223
Bahrain	Dinar	1	34.8600	34.8000
Bangladesh	Taka	100	43.3110	43.2990
Canada	Dollar	1	9.5350	9.4586
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.8014	1.7872
Egypt	Pound	1	9.5480	9.4998
France	Franc	1	2.0512	2.0325
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6856	1.6731
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.7900	0.7800
Iran	Rial	100	17.2030	17.1779
Italy	Lira	100	0.9400	0.9200
Japan	Yen	100	8.2712	8.2034
Kenya	Schilling	1	0.8100	0.8000
Kuwait	Dinar	1	44.6463	44.5900
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.0505	5.0092
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.9769	0.9665
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6009	0.5907
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.0052	5.9977
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7600	0.7500
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.0089	5.9977
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0969	0.0958
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4639	0.4554
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.9434	1.9262
Switzerland	Franc	1	8.1405	8.0754
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.2800	0.2700
Thailand	Baht	100	49.9000	48.0000
UK	Pound	1	19.3704	19.2437
USA	Dollar	1	13.0900	12.9950
UAE	Dirham	1	3.5669	3.5665
USSR	Rouble	1	19.4900	19.4300
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	6.8306	6.7796

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 7.1.87.

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Extracts from the Statement of the Chairman Sri M.L. Mittal
at the 2nd Annual General Meeting held on 30th December, 1986.

"A year of considerable achievement and profitable growth"

Dear Shareholders,

It gives me immense pleasure to welcome you all at this Second Annual General Meeting of the Company. I wish to extend a warm welcome to the large family of about 30,000 members spread through out the country. I also take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy and prosperous new year.

IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE — A GOOD BEGINNING

During the period under review which was the very first year of operation, the Company achieved a turnover of Rs.47.75 Crores. The Company produced 30,379 MT of Galvanised Sheets inspite of teething constraints faced by the Company and was able to earn a profit before interest and depreciation of Rs.6.66 Crores. The production could have been much better, if the Company would have received adequate C.R. Coils, the principal raw material which is in short supply in India, and has to be procured mainly by way of imports.

Your Directors have recommended a dividend of 20% including a maiden interim dividend of 10% already paid in the very first year making a good beginning. These achievements show that your Company has amply demonstrated its ability, its will to work and its aim to maximize returns to the Shareholders.

PIONEERING IMPORT SUBSTITUTE PRODUCTS—HERALDING A NEW ERA.

You must be happy to note that though several Letters of Intent were issued by Government of India, ours is the first plant in the country to start production of thin gauge Galvanised Sheet with technical assistance from Nippon Denro Mfg. Co. Ltd., Japan. Hitherto imported, the production of ISPAT SHEETS heralded the era of thin gauge Galvanised Steel Sheets in the country. With regular indigenous availability the prices of thinner gauge Galvanised Sheets in the Country have come down considerably during the last year. The prices could have been brought down even further but for the anomalies existing in the present import duty structure i.e. the rate of import duty on C.R. Coils, principal raw material for the products of the Company is much higher than the import duty on the finished Galvanised Sheets.

The products of your Company are today in great demand and conform to the highest international standards.

The applications of the thin gauge Galvanised Sheets are manifold. In the past, due to non-availability of the thinner gauge sheets, its use was restricted to the areas of house buildings, factory sheds, airconditioning panels etc. However, by our emergence as

M.L. Mittal, Chairman

local producers of thin gauge sheets, uses in other areas are expanding very fast. Your Company is planning to produce materials to meet the demands in various Industrial Sectors, like electrical appliances, automobiles, refrigeration, storage tanks etc. The Company's marketing development wing is actively exploring new areas of use to create further demands, as is being done in other developed countries. The Company has established 19 sales centres spread all over the country to ensure efficient distribution of the products and satisfaction of our consumers.

BUOYANT ECONOMY—RIGHT CLIMATE

Before I discuss the future plans of the Company, I would like to share my thoughts with you on the present economic scene. The new economic policy aims at reducing areas of control, minimising procedural requirements and creating incentives for savings, investments and efficiency. We can see the new thrust forward and I believe the Country is on the threshhold of a quantum leap in economic development. At Nippon Denro Ispat, we are perfectly positioned to capitalise on this situation.

EXPANSION AND DIVERSIFICATION—MEASURES OF CONTINUOUS GROWTH

A major hurdle in the company achieving higher production was the "regular availability of C.R. Coils — the basic raw material". To end this hurdle and also as a measure of continuous growth, your company decided to set up manufacturing facilities for C.R. Coils. The Company has already received a Letter of Intent for the manufacture of C.R. Coils with a capacity of 100,000 MT per annum. This Cold Rolling Mill complex is being set up in technical collaboration with the renowned HITACHI LTD of Japan and will involve a capital outlay of approx. Rs.80 Crores. The company is implementing this project with the same zeal, dynamism and dedication and I am confident that the project would be completed well within the implementation schedule.

THE ISPAT SPIRIT—SATISFACTION TO CUSTOMERS AND SHAREHOLDERS

We have the State-of-the-Art Technology and the finest facilities available, but at Nippon Denro Ispat Ltd, I feel our greatest competitive advantage is the Ispat Spirit which has developed our fast-paced, intense and enthusiastic approach to satisfying our customers and our shareholders. This spirit will fuel our future growth.

The impressive results that your Company has achieved in the very first year of operation are due to the ISPAT SPIRIT that exists in your Company.

I feel it is again the result of this ISPAT SPIRIT that the shares of your Company at present command a value of around Rs.43.00 in the capital market and is already a fancied script. Our endeavour to grow, and grow profitably, shall continue. And in the same vein our efforts to maximize returns to the shareholders. This spirit is crucial for our ongoing growth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Before I conclude, on behalf of my colleagues on the Board and myself, I wish to place on record our appreciation for the co-operation and timely assistance extended to us by the Government of India, Government of Maharashtra, Financial Institutions, Bankers of the Company, SICOM, MIDC, Iron & Steel Controller, various other Government and Semi Government authorities.

We are indeed thankful to the shareholders of the Company, all investors, share brokers, underwriters and other business associates who have reposed so much confidence and trust upon us but for whose understanding and co-operation, your Company would not have achieved such success in such a short time.

Equally significant is to acknowledge the sincere and dedicated services of all the executives and other employees of the Company for their untiring and dedicated efforts and services. Last but not the least, let me also offer my sincere thanks to each one of you for sparing your valuable time and giving us the benefits of your presence in this meeting.

NOTE : This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

NIPPON DENRO ISPAT LIMITED

Regd. & Head Office :
Chatterjee International Centre
19th Floor, 33A Jawaharlal Nehru Road
Calcutta 700 071.

NIPPON DENRO ISPAT LIMITED

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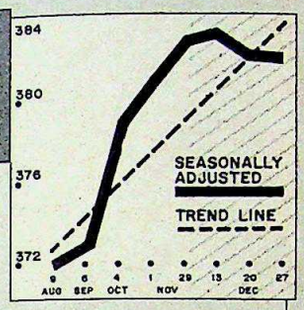
AN inconsistent picture continues to be reported by the indicators. Infrastructure developments have been encouragingly healthy, but industrial production, on the other hand, is depressingly stagnant. Stock prices are now gradually emerging from the doldrums, and gold continues to scale new peaks. A guesstimate is still for steady growth.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months (weekly data) or two years (monthly data) figures. Quarters in text are calendar quarters.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
8.5% p.a.

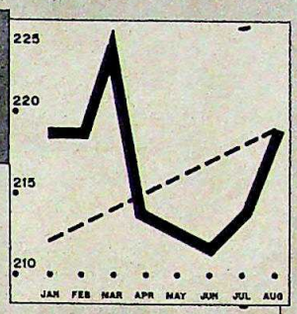


The ripple effects of the September leap in prices are still being felt. Encouraging signs of a softening in the inflation rate are present.

Industrial Production Index

1970 = 100

Current Trend
5.3% p.a.

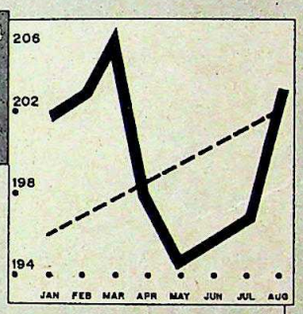


The reported growth rate represents increases in 1985. For 1986, no growth is apparent. But this is inconsistent with other growth indicators.

Manufacturing Output Index

1970 = 100

Current Trend
5.2% p.a.

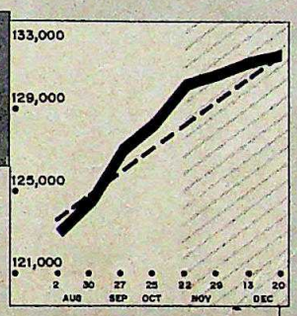


Growth in manufacturing is disappointing and given developments in infrastructure, the lack of increase since January-February is suspect.

Money Supply

Rs Crore

Current Trend
17.2% p.a.

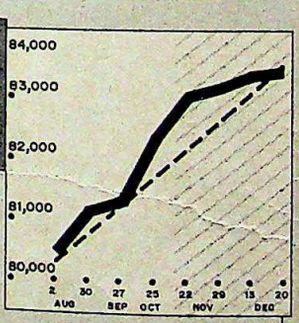


In contrast to credit to the private sector, money supply shows signs of acceleration. Budget deficits may be financed by money creation.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
10.8% p.a.

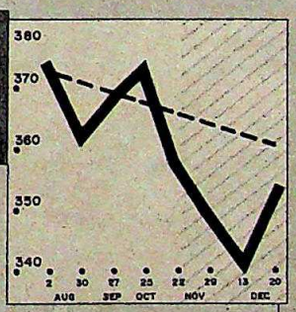


No signs of abatement are present in the sluggishness of the provision of credit to the private sector.

Share Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
— 8.9% p.a.

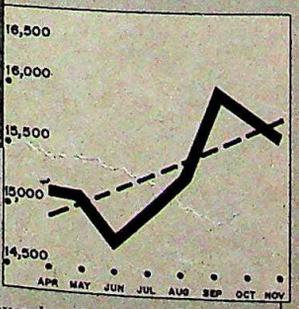


The trend rate is deceiving. In 1987, the stock market has returned to life and may soon be challenging the highs of 1986.

Power Generation

Million KWH

Current Trend
9.4% p.a.

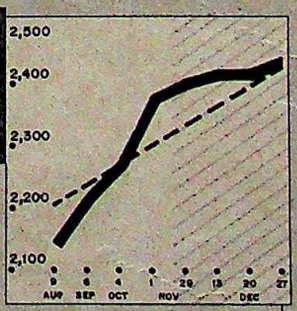


Even with a November decline, the first two months of the last quarter have registered an 8% increase. Prospects are for steady growth.

Closing Gold Price

Rs per 10 gm

Current Trend
27.0% p.a.



Unlike foreign markets, domestic gold prices are not entering a trading range. Is gold becoming a proxy for an overvalued exchange rate?

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

Growth of Items in June, 1986

	% Growth
Salt	277.55
Air Gas Compresses	35.64
Cosmetics	23.93
Synthetic Resins & Plastics	22.61
Railway Locomotives	20.78
Tea Machinery	17.68
Ferro-Alloys	16.41
Hurricane Lanterns	16.04
Watches & Clocks	14.1
Mining Machinery	13.59
Generation & Transmission Equipment	13.58
Iron & Steel Pipes	12.08
Fertilisers	11.94
Textile Machinery	9.41
Petroleum & Coal Products	9.17
Buses Trucks & Jeeps	8.97
Sewing Machines	7.42
Boilers Steam Generating Plants	7
Electrical Lamps	6.58
Tea	6.32
Conveying Equipment	6.07
Bolts & Nuts	5.9
Soaps & Glycerine	5.86
Railway Rolling Stock	5.77
Tyres & Tubes	4.67
Chemical & Pharmaceutical Machinery	4.57
Motorcycles & Bicycles	3.69
Organic Chemicals	3.51
Electrical Motors	3
Inorganic Chemicals	2.48
Bakery Products	2.35
Tobacco Manufacture	2.32
Non-Ferrous Basic Metal Industries	2.03
Electric Light & Power	1.77
Electrical Fans	1.76
Iron & Steel Structurals	1.66
Earth-Moving Machinery	.93
Power-Driven Pumps	.45
Telecommunications	.41
Cotton & Blended Fabrics	.23
Dry Cells	– .01
Airconditioners & Refrigerators	– .06
Paints & Varnishes	– .14
Mining & Quarrying	– .36
Grain Mill Products	– .36
Cotton & Blended Yarn	– .64

Of the 86 series considered, 40 of them with a total weight of 42.7 had a positive growth and 46 of them with a total weight of 45.1 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1986	1985
Coal		
Thousand Tonnes, November	14274	13073
Saleable Steel		
Thousand Tonnes, November	751.9	665.9
Cement		
Thousand Tonnes, November	3000	2654
Fertiliser		
Thousand Tonnes, November	662.0	507.2
Thermal Plant Load Factor		
Per Cent, November	53.3	50.2

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CHILD ABUSE

Tragically Widespread

PHYSICAL cruelty, often assuming bestial proportions, is inflicted daily on countless hundreds of thousands of children by adults throughout the country. Experts say that even though the phenomenon is widespread it is still not taken up seriously by government authorities and doctors who refuse to face up to the socially debilitating ramifications of this malady. Very often the child abusers are the parents and close relatives. Special Correspondent RAMESH MENON reports on this tragic phenomenon with a spotlight on Gujarat:

Gopal Parmar, 8, who is deaf and dumb is tied up by his parents and tethered to an iron grill of the window of his house before they leave for work. Bondage and severe beatings are the only way Gopal's parents know of subduing his rebellious spirit. Handicapped children are the worst victims of child abuse.

KALAJI Patel of Hassannagar village in Gujarat was born blind. For 18 years his parents, farm labourers, chained and locked him in the house. He grew up sitting in a dark corner, unable to even talk as no one spoke to him. He had long matted hair and nails which looked like claws. He had also become mentally retarded.

A few years ago, a social worker attached to the Blind Men's Association (BMA) in Ahmedabad spotted him. Kalaji could not even walk properly as his back had bent after years of sitting in a crouched position. After a great deal of persuasion, Kalaji's parents unchained him and let him out. BMA workers have now taught him the basics of living. He has started walking with help, and also speaks a few sentences. But the best years of his life have been lost.

Kalaji is not alone. There are many unknown hundreds of others like him who suffer abuse at the hands of their parents and other relatives in what psychiatrists now recognise as a growing national problem.

Mayur, 5, from Baroda, was brutally slapped around and flung onto the bare floor by his mother when he was barely two weeks old. Reason: his parents' marriage was coming unstuck and his mother associated the child with her husband. And Kamini Khatri, 7, of Wadhwan was branded on the thighs with a red hot iron rod by her stepmother. Reason: she detested having to look after a child who was not hers.

Gopal Parmar, 8, remains tied up for hours to the iron grill of a window of his house in Rajpur Gomtipur in Ahmedabad. He is deaf and dumb and also hyperactive. Physical bondage is the only method his labourer parents understand when they go out to work and have to leave Gopal behind with his aged grandparents. When they do not tie him up, Gopal's parents beat him brutally in order to subdue his rebellious spirit. His grandparents, Jotharam and Somti break down and weep when they witness this violence but remain helpless to stop it. Sometimes when Gopal is unable to take the violence any more, he signals his submission by voluntarily stretching out his little arms asking to be tied up again.

There are no accurate figures of the extent of child abuse because most of the incidents are neither reported nor punished. But experts believe that the phenomenon is widespread, and caused by the pressures of modern-day life, the break-up of traditional families, working parents, increasing divorces and alcoholism, job and marriage frustrations, and the mental conditions of the parents themselves. The defenceless child becomes the easiest scapegoat—indeed the whipping boy—for the adult's pent up rage and frustration. Says Dr Manorama

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Mehta, superintendent of the children's hospital in Rajkot: "Child abuse all over India is very common. It has come to be accepted as a normal pattern of life. Even educated parents who batter their children refuse to recognise the damage they do to future generations."

Children are the victims of physical abuse even in schools, usually at the hands of insensitive teachers, who believe that only a relentless rod can straighten out an errant child. Though there is a clear provision in the Directorate of Education's grant-in-aid code banning corporal punishment in government-recognised schools, even the best of such schools doles out large doses of crude punishment. A primary school child in Ahmedabad turned deaf after a teacher hit him on the face.

In other cases, children are punished by being made to kneel on rough gravel, or ordered to bend and touch their toes for long periods under a scorching sun. Says Frenny Ginwala, a senior Ahmedabad-based teacher: "Teachers are not committed to ensuring the emotional growth of children and so, resort to abuse. This damages the child's ego who then grows up with all kinds of complexes."

Child abuse takes a variety of forms—physical, sexual and emotional. But in India, even the major hospitals do not have specialists capable of detecting and dealing with this problem. Some even plead total ignorance about its very existence. As a top Ahmedabad doctor said: "Child abuse does not take place in India. I have not seen a single case in the last 30 years." But, as an INDIA TODAY investigation was able to establish, nothing could be further from the truth. Says Dr Lalit Vaya, a psychiatrist: "Most of the time we never get to know why the child has been abused as he is too young to talk and the parents often lie." The commonest falsehood is that the child fell and broke his limbs.

Lalit Vaya notes that while most Indian parents inflict a high degree of pain, they refuse to be branded as "child abusers", arguing that violence against the child is a necessary act of discipline. But there is a thin line between a mild but firm slap with an open palm delivered to a child's buttocks and an act of brutality. For example, Jagruti Brambhatt, 5, from Khambhat in Gujarat, gets convulsions. Her mother, Jyotsna, has realised only now, after consulting doctors, that the child's paroxysms have been caused by the constant beatings she receives. Jyotsna says that she beats Jagruti severely because she is "so hyperactive and uncontrollable".

In this incident, alert doctors were able to establish child abuse, and realised that the patient needed no medication save a cessation of the beatings. But in most cases, a child suffering from fits would have been treated like any other similarly-afflicted patient. Several doctors admitted that children under their care with different symptoms could well be victims of such situations. But the real malady is hardly ever detected because most doctors neither have the time nor the inclination to ask the right questions.

In many cases parents who were

"The answer to reducing the alarming increase in child abuse is not merely to have stiff penalties against parents. They have to be educated and made to realise the damage done. Doctors only talk of healthy babies, forgetting that children are safe only if they have mentally healthy parents."

RATNA BILWANI
psychiatrist

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"I cannot shout at others in the house. They are all older. In my frustration my eight-year-old son, Taral, gets severe beatings from me and now suffers from a severe speech impediment."
RAKSHA SHAH
Ahmedabad housewife

themselves abused as children unconsciously recreate the situations they lived through. Children are also abused by parents who have great expectations of them and often exert intolerable mental pressure on the child.

An Ahmedabad doctor who was treating a three-year-old boy for constipation, found that none of his medicines was working. He referred the child to a psychiatrist. It did not take long for the psychiatrist to discover that the child was terrified of passing urine and stools because his mother had beaten him when he was a toddler "for not learning good toilet habits". The mother wanted the child to use the toilet as adults would, even before the little boy was a year old.

Continued physical and emotional abuse may result in the child becoming an introvert, emotionally insecure, incapable of loving, lacking self-confidence, pessimistic, aggressive, rebellious, and destructive. Ramesh Vankar, 14, from Umeta village in Kaira district in Gujarat had the makings of a good student. He liked studying, but when he was just six, his brother (now aged 35) used to beat him daily, asking him to "bring money home as food was not free". This brutality left deep scars on his left leg. He ran away from home to escape the torture, worked in a Baroda hotel and learnt how to easily earn Rs40 a day as a pimp. He says he does not dislike the job and will continue with it. He, however, adds: "I would have liked to study, but my brother broke all my dreams."

Unable to defend themselves, abused children get their own back on parents by neglecting their studies—this invariably hurts parents the most—and using other forms of emotional blackmail. But most children, no matter what they do, are unable to change the painful reality around them.

The children most vulnerable to battering are, perhaps, the handicapped. Pravin Mithar, 5, is now mentally retarded, the victim of severe beatings at the hands of his mother, Santosh, who admits that she beat her baby at the slightest provocation—frustrated by the fact that by being born blind he had shattered all her expectations.

In an overcrowded chawl in Ahmedabad, Mohammed Yunus, 6, is crippled in both legs by polio. Notwithstanding the child's handicap his mother, Zuleka Bibi beats him regularly and severely. She mumbles the excuse that she feels frustrated by his handicap and by the fact that she has five other children she is barely able to feed. "It is our poverty and desperation that makes us ill treat our children," she says.

The children of mentally unstable parents who refuse to seek professional help for themselves suffer equally. Raksha Shah, an Ahmedabad housewife, lives in a joint family in which there is considerable disharmony. She admits: "There is so much tension. I cannot shout at anybody in the house as they are all older to me. In my frustration, my son, Taral, who is now eight, gets severe beatings from me at the slightest excuse." Taral is now undergoing treatment at the Child Guidance Clinic of the Civil Hospital for faulty speech—a result doctors say, of the constant trauma he undergoes.

Dr Ratna Bilwani, a psychiatrist says: "The answer to reducing the alarming increase in child abuse is not to merely have stiff laws penalising parents, but to educate and make them realise the damage they are causing. If parents have emotional problems, they have to be helped. We doctors keep talking of healthy babies, forgetting that children are safe only if they have mentally healthy parents."

Mohammed Yunus, 6, is crippled in both legs by polio. His mother, Zuleka Bibi, thrashes him regularly because, she admits, she feels "frustrated by his handicap". She also has five other children she is barely able to feed. Poverty is often the reason parents ill treat their children.

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Matters are, of course, not helped by the fact that the laws for protecting children are hardly ever enforced. Under the Bombay Children's Act of 1948, parents can be punished for cruelty to children with a fine of Rs 1,000 or two years in jail. The law clearly specifies that any person who wilfully assaults, ill treats, neglects or creates a situation causing mental and physical agony to a child shall be punished. The fact that the police do not have a department to deal with abused children is indicative of the callous indifference to the problem.

EVEN when parents agree to be counselled along with their abused children, they often refuse to admit their fault and continue to justify their actions on the ground that there is no other way to discipline the child. A well-to-do mother recently brought her seven-year-old son to a psychiatrist, saying that he had become totally unmanageable. It did not take long for the psychiatrist to discover that the child was emotionally abused. His mother hated him because he was dark complexioned and constantly compared him to his two fair sisters.

Severe beating often leads to lifelong abnormalities in children. Ahmedabad's Manoj Lalchand, 12, is under psychiatric treatment as he is rebellious, destructive, and refuses to study. He has a normal intelligence quotient but the emotional imbalance created by parental battering has taken its toll. "My mother beats me with a cricket bat. It is very painful. I am mischievous, but often I get beaten for no reason," says Manoj, who is clearly terrified of his mother.

"Minor girls are often sexually abused by close relatives. But because of the social stigma attached to rape victims, these cases are never registered with the police or even otherwise revealed."
DIVYASBEN MARWADI
social activist

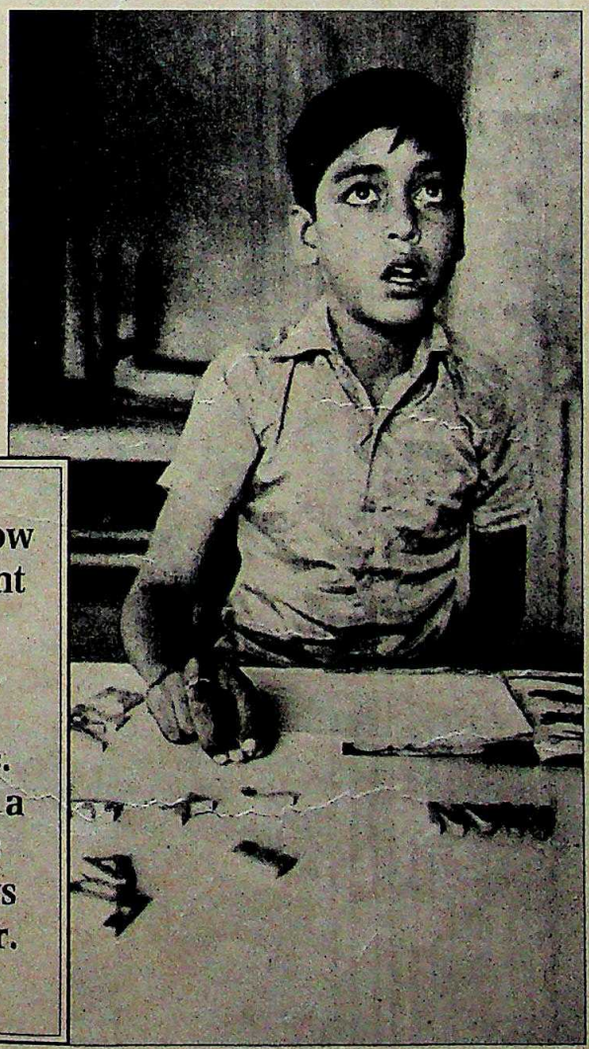
His father, Kanayalal Lalchand, who is too busy with his cloth business to spend time at home, was himself a part of the problem. He admits frankly: "I used to come back tense after a hard day's work, and my wife would reel out a long list of complaints. Our beatings have harmed the child, so I hardly do it now." But, the damage has already been done.

Girls are usually mistreated more often than boys, often the form being sexual abuse—a problem that is rarely talked about or reported. Because of the intense stigma attached to rape victims, the social system protects elders who rape children. And girls who have been raped as children are usually traumatised for life.

In one of the few such instances that have come to light, the packed central hall of Bombay's Vidhan Sabha was stunned into silence three years ago. The then minister of state for home Vilas Deshmukh, admitted before a shocked house that the superintendent and cook of a government-run residential primary school for Adivasi children in the state's backward Yavatmal district stood accused of raping 14 girls aged 6 to 10 under their charge.

Points out Divyasben Marwadi, a leading social activist: "Minor girls are often sexually abused, sometimes by close relatives. But because of the stigma against rape victims, cases are never registered or revealed." Adds Nandini Rawal, project officer, BMA: "Most blind girls are sexually abused by the time they are 15, in spite of strict checks kept at institutions for blind girls."

Whatever the reasons for violence against children—poverty, alcoholism, desperation—the stark fact is that the problem is ignored and treated neither as a disease by professionals nor as a crime by law enforcers. The problem is simply ignored or brushed under the carpet. What is obviously needed is a radical new awareness among doctors, teachers, parents, social workers, policemen, and legislators about a sickness in society that is taking a heavy toll of the next generation of Indians.



Manoj Lalchand, 12, is now under psychiatric treatment for being rebellious, destructive, stubborn—emotional disturbances created by parental abuse. "My mother beat me with a cricket bat," he says. His cloth-merchant father says they don't do it any longer. But the damage is done.

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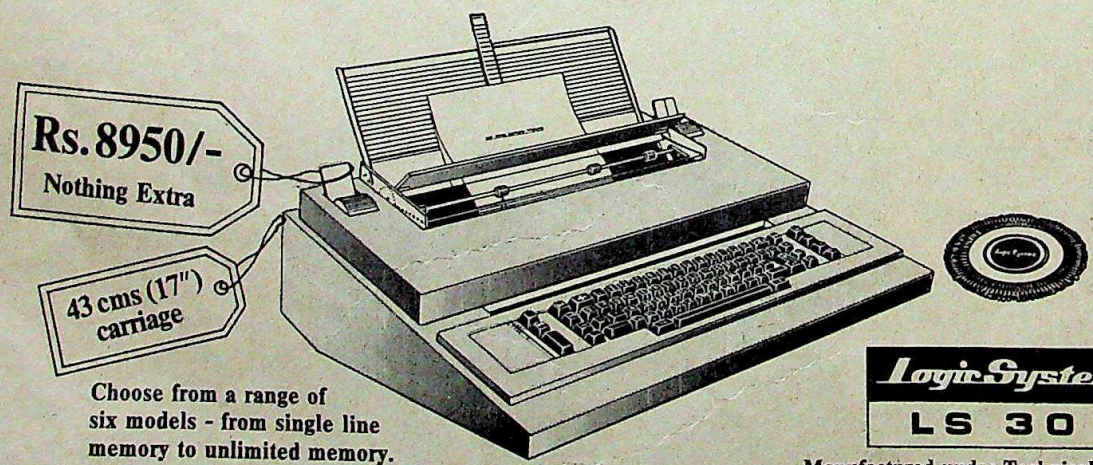

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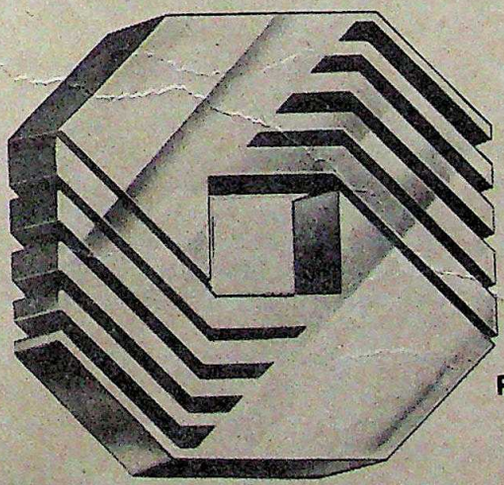

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The NRI Sop Opera

SOME time ago there was a cartoon by Laxman portraying a gentleman dressed in a dark suit being introduced by a Gandhi-capped politician to a meeting of fellow-politicians as the most exceptional kind of Indian patriot—the non-resident Indian.

The fuss that is being made about non-resident Indian investments in this country and the numerous tax concessions and other inducements being lavishly offered for this "investment" are based, in my view, on a conceptual confusion.

It would be desirable to examine the objectives with which these concessions are given and whether, in fact, the objectives for which they are intended are being met.

The tax concessions are that the maximum rate of income tax payable by non-resident Indians, or foreigners of "Indian origin"—that is people whose grandfathers were citizens of pre-partition India (who will all be referred to henceforth as NRIs)—on their Indian investments is 20 per cent and so is the rate at which the capital gains tax is levied.

In addition, certain investments, for example, units of the Unit Trust of India, National Savings Certificates etc, are exempted from all taxes. All NRI investments are completely free of wealth tax without limit.

The non-tax concessions are that higher rates of interest are allowed to NRIs on bank deposits and National Savings Certificates than are allowed to resident Indians. What is more, while there are some qualitative restrictions on the total percentage of NRI holdings of the equity capital and convertible debentures of a company, there is no limit at all on the holdings of non-convertible debentures.

This kind of investment is totally prohibited to foreigners who are not NRIs. Moreover, NRIs are permitted to invest freely in the equity capital of all new issues up to 40 per cent and up to 74 per cent in similar new issues of high priority industries listed in Appendix 1 to the Industrial Licensing Policy. Other foreigners are not afforded the same privileges.

There are three possible reasons why the NRI is placed in this favourable position: first, to attract capital; second, to attract foreign exchange; and third, to attract technology and know-how. If the country is in need of more capital or foreign exchange or technology and know-how from abroad, however, why are the concessions and inducements limited to NRIs alone and not extended to all foreigners?

The economic effect and foreign exchange burden on servicing the capital, whether by way of dividend, interest or repatriation, is exactly the same for all non-resident investors, whether they are NRIs or not. But the fact is that the amount of capital and foreign exchange and the quality of technology and know-how available to non-Indian foreigners is infinitely greater than to NRIs.

> "We believe that the affluent class of NRIs will invest in India for patriotic and not commercial reasons. But it is doubtful if the patriotism of this class is so great that it will invest in India when it can get better returns in other countries."

If we exclude foreigners but allow these concessions to NRIs, the only reason can be that we believe that NRIs can invest in India, not for commercial reasons but for patriotic ones, which non-NRIs, of course, will not. Is this assumption at all tenable?

Basically, NRIs consist of two classes—one consists mainly of temporary migrants, mostly to the Gulf area, who are generally poor. They will remit their savings to India in any case because the money is needed by their families here and because they intend to return to India. The other class of NRIs consists of permanent migrants, usually belonging to the professional and business classes, who have no intention whatsoever of returning to India.

It is this affluent class towards whom all these concessions and inducements are directed. But is the patriotism of this class so great that it will invest in India even if it can get better financial returns in other countries? This is very doubtful indeed.

The reason why these Indians have migrated is that they are in search of money; the reason why they don't come back is because our low pay scales and high rates of direct taxation (in spite of the recent reforms instituted by the present finance minister) prevent them from maintaining a standard of living compatible with their abilities and qualifications without becoming totally dishonest.

If they are staying abroad because of the lure of money—of which there is no doubt—though they often give other non-material excuses for not returning in spite of the very clear social disadvantages and discriminations from which they suffer, why is it assumed that they are so patriotic that they would be prepared to invest in India without maximising their profit?

And why, in particular, do we extend this assumption to those who have made patent their lack of loyalty to this country by renouncing their Indian nationality and embracing another? And if this assumption is indeed correct why are concessions offered to them which make the return on investments in India actually higher than are today available practically anywhere else in the world?

If the country is in need of foreign exchange, is the best and cheapest way to obtain it through the kind of concessions that we give to the NRIs? I would submit that it certainly is not.

An NRI who deposits dollars in an Indian bank for five years and a day earns, free of all taxes, interest at the rate of 12 per cent per annum which is remitted to him in dollars. If the Government of India were instead to borrow dollars for the same length of time in the international market they would be able to float a loan at around 8 per cent. If the loan was for a maturity of seven to 10 years, the cost would be around 10 per cent. Industrial debentures of the same maturity, which we woo NRIs to buy, give a net return of over 16 per cent. The country is therefore

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paying 50 per cent more that it need for the favours of NRIs.

The effect of NRI investment in equity or convertible debentures can best be illustrated by the most recent case. The Government of India has decided that Rs 88 crore of the G series of Reliance convertible debentures shall be set aside for NRIs. These debentures are convertible at the end of 12 months into two ordinary shares at a net cost of Rs 72.50 each. The price of a Reliance share in the depressed stock exchanges of today is, as I write, Rs 190.

It is hardly likely that it will be less than Rs 145 a year from now. What we are doing then is to borrow Rs 88 crore worth of dollars at 100 per cent interest (even neglecting the 13.5 per cent interest on debentures) for a period of 12 months. Dollars are available to the Government of India for that period at an interest rate of 6 per cent. Nor is this example untypical.

It seems to me the concessions and inducements to NRIs for portfolio investment have been given under total confusion between the two entirely different kinds of operation which the word investment covers, viz, direct investment and portfolio investment, which have different consequences.

Direct investment consists of the investor or entrepreneur spending money on the purchase of physical goods for establishing or expanding a productive enterprise which creates new and additional wealth for the country. Portfolio investment, on the other hand, consists of the purchase by the investor of an existing (or sometimes even new) financial instrument with the object of selling it when the price has risen.

People like me have for a long time pleaded in favour of foreign investment. But when we do so we are pleading for direct investment and not portfolio investment. While direct investment in equity capital is in the long run more expensive than the market loans which the Government of India can manage to raise, the reason why it is favoured is because it brings in foreign exchange and capital, besides technology.

Transfer of technology is today prominent in the minds of policy-makers. But the fact is that at least in the western world, the latest and best technology is almost exclusively in the hands of private companies, usually multinationals. Technology is not a sack of potatoes which can be bought and transferred in a one-shot arrangement.

It is something which develops continuously, becomes obsolete rapidly and has to be updated. Thus, a meaningful transfer of technology involves a continuous relationship with its source till such time as the transferee has reached a level of technology at which this continuous import can be replaced by a totally indigenous updating.

This stage has not been reached in any country—even the most highly advanced. The result of this has been a continuous inter-country transfer of technology and inter-country investment.

Portfolio investment, however, is a totally different matter. The portfolio investor represents the exploitative and predatory aspects of capitalism. He creates, unlike the direct investor, no wealth nor does he provide any other input for economic growth. His function is to simply buy when the market is low and sell when it is high, pocketing the profit. It is a zero-sum game from the national point of view—the profit of one investor is the loss of another.

> "The policy should extend the benefits available to NRIs to all foreigners and abolish non-resident portfolio investment. The haemorrhage caused by the outflow of foreign exchange must be stemmed by reducing direct taxes."

But as long as both the buyer and the seller are residents—not necessarily nationals—of the same country, the effect on the national economy is nil. But when the profit maker is a resident abroad, no matter what his ancestry or the colour of his skin, the profit made by him must be transferred across the exchanges.

In developing India, this profit for a wise portfolio investor can be colossal and the net effect of allowing portfolio investment is not an earning of foreign exchange but a substantial drain on existing resources.

The NRI scheme suffers from another peculiarity. As a result of our taxation policies, Indian capital is continuously sent abroad, of which the recent IMF paper on Indian assets in Switzerland has made the public aware. Since Switzerland is not the sole tax shelter, the totality of Indian capital in foreign countries must be astronomical.

And now that a large number of Indians have relations abroad, the NRI money-laundering operation has become glaringly simple. Money is illegally transferred abroad and is held in the name of brothers, sons or nephews. These relatives then invest in India in a business of their own and then transfer the profits quite legally abroad again.

I happen to be the chairman of an expert committee of the United Nations called the Committee on Investments. In that capacity, I was questioned some years ago about why India did not allow foreign portfolio investment. My answer was that in India finances were managed by a highly sophisticated group of persons who had no desire to allow India to be looted by foreigners.

It was therefore a matter of surprise when India allowed portfolio investment four years ago, even though to thinly veiled foreigners known as NRIs. The explanation I got was that one of the objects of the scheme was to get back the Indian money which had illegally gone abroad.

To my question as to why taxes couldn't have been pruned to prevent the money from leaving, the authors of the scheme replied that such reduction, though economically sensible, was politically impossible. So it made sense to get the money back!

I am afraid the present policy does not make economic sense. It should be modified in two respects—the first to extend the benefits available to NRI direct investment to all foreigners. It is only then that we can attract meaningful investment.

The second is to abolish the scheme for non-resident portfolio investment and to revert to the prohibition of such investment. Above all, we must stem the haemorrhage caused by the outflow of foreign exchange and capital by further reducing direct taxes.

The reductions made by the present Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh have cut the irrationality of our taxation system but the combined effect of wealth and income taxes is still lethal. If Indians resident in India were given the same treatment as given to those who have migrated there would be no incentive to export our capital and foreign exchange. Nor would it be necessary to bring it back at considerable cost to the national economy.

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CHINA

Changing Strategies

AFTER more than two decades of single-minded obsession with Pakistan, Indian defence planners have begun to look with some concern at China's renewed drive to refurbish and modernise its conventional military might. Even though defence comes last in Deng Xiaoping's "four modernisations" programme, experts in Beijing and Hong Kong say that this is the time for relatively smaller neighbours such as India and Vietnam to begin worrying. They point out that in its quest for parity with the Soviet Union, the Chinese would succeed in matching India in terms of sophistication, mobility and firepower. "So far, your people have been smug in feeling that your more modern army and air superiority could neutralise the Chinese numerical edge over the Himalayas. But soon it would be a thing of the past," says a Beijing-based western military diplomat.

This is not an exaggeration for, in the aftermath of the disastrous invasion of Vietnam in 1979 (in which China lost more than 34,000 soldiers) the top brass of the Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) has decided to shed manpower in favour of better weaponry and electronics.

So far, the Indian defence plans for the Himalayas are based on the theory that the well-dug-in defenders would take such a heavy toll of the attackers as to make the price of ultimate victory unaffordable to the Chinese. But now, with the Chinese unwilling to accept too many casualties, the approach will have to change. A senior Indian general taking a pragmatic view says that in a future war, "we would not have thousands of Chinese troops swarming up the hill right into our killing ground. We could instead have massive heliborne attacks from the flanks or the rear, backed by overwhelming artillery fire".

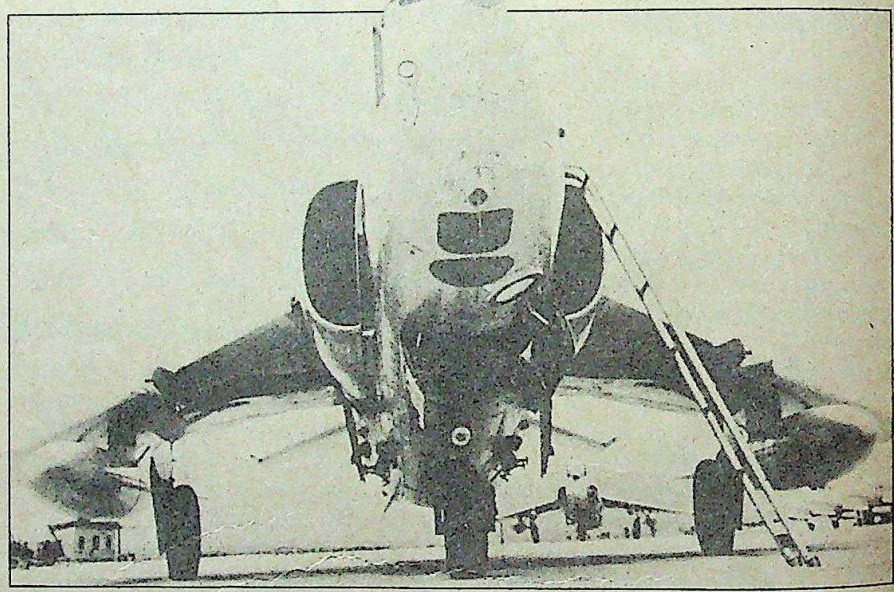
The Chinese drive to strengthen its helicopter force to make it capable of mounting heliborne operations in the Himalayas worries Indian defence experts the most. While the PLA air force already has some American Sikorsky helicopters, it is now making inquiries for attack and transport helicopters in western markets. Routinely, most of these would be deployed against the USSR and Vietnam. But helicopters can be shifted easily and this would solve the PLA's mobility problems in Tibet. It will also render obsolete the Indian doctrine of defending the Himalayas in depth—to hit back at the Chinese invaders when their supply lines are stretched.

India is also monitoring China's expanding investments in tanks, artillery, armoured personnel carriers, command control communications and intelligence (C31) systems as well as the navy. The immediate Indian worry, however, is the relatively smaller acquisitions. Last fortnight, the Chinese signed up with the US for the supply of ANTPQ-635 Firefinder radar at Rs 29 crore apiece. The radar is used to detect the trajectory of the enemy's artillery shells so as to pinpoint the location of his guns and is extremely useful in the mountains. The Chinese are believed to be deploying them along the Vietnam border. Shifted to Ladakh, these would prove to be force multipliers.

Another setback to India could come in the field of air superiority. Today, the Chinese can throw in several times more fighter bombers into a conflict than the Indian Air Force. But the PLA aircraft are slow, carry too little ammunition, are poor on electronic counter-measures and could be easily shot down. But this is an area in which the Chinese are now concentrating. Drawing generously from the Soviet MiG variants transferred to them by the Egyptians, the Chinese have perfected a new model of J-8M (also called F-8) fighter which has nearly the same capabilities as the Soviet MiG-23, which India has.

The Chinese are also feverishly searching world markets for avionics, radars and missiles to equip their newest creation displayed at the 1986 Farnborough air show. Says Claire Hollingworth, an expert on the Chinese military at Hong Kong University: "It now seems likely that the $5 million (Rs 7 crore) credit from the US will be used to update the interceptor capabilities of the F-8, providing it with similar power in action as that of the MiG-23."

Besides, in September, the China Aerospace Technology Import Corporation signed an agreement with the US company Flight Refuelling for the supply of inflight refuelling equipment and expertise for its Quiang-5 attack aircraft. Inflight fuelling would add substantially to the strike range of the air force. Significantly, only last year the Chinese sold 140 Quiang-5s to Pakistan.



Quiang-5: Chinese attacker

Indian experts studying the scene concede that it is impossible for India at this stage to match all the new Chinese acquisitions. The only way out, they say, is to strengthen India's own defences further by making them more flexible and, above all, to ensure through good diplomacy that the Chinese should not find another adventure across the Himalayas politically feasible, no matter how much noise they make over the elevation of Arunachal Pradesh to statehood.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Beijing

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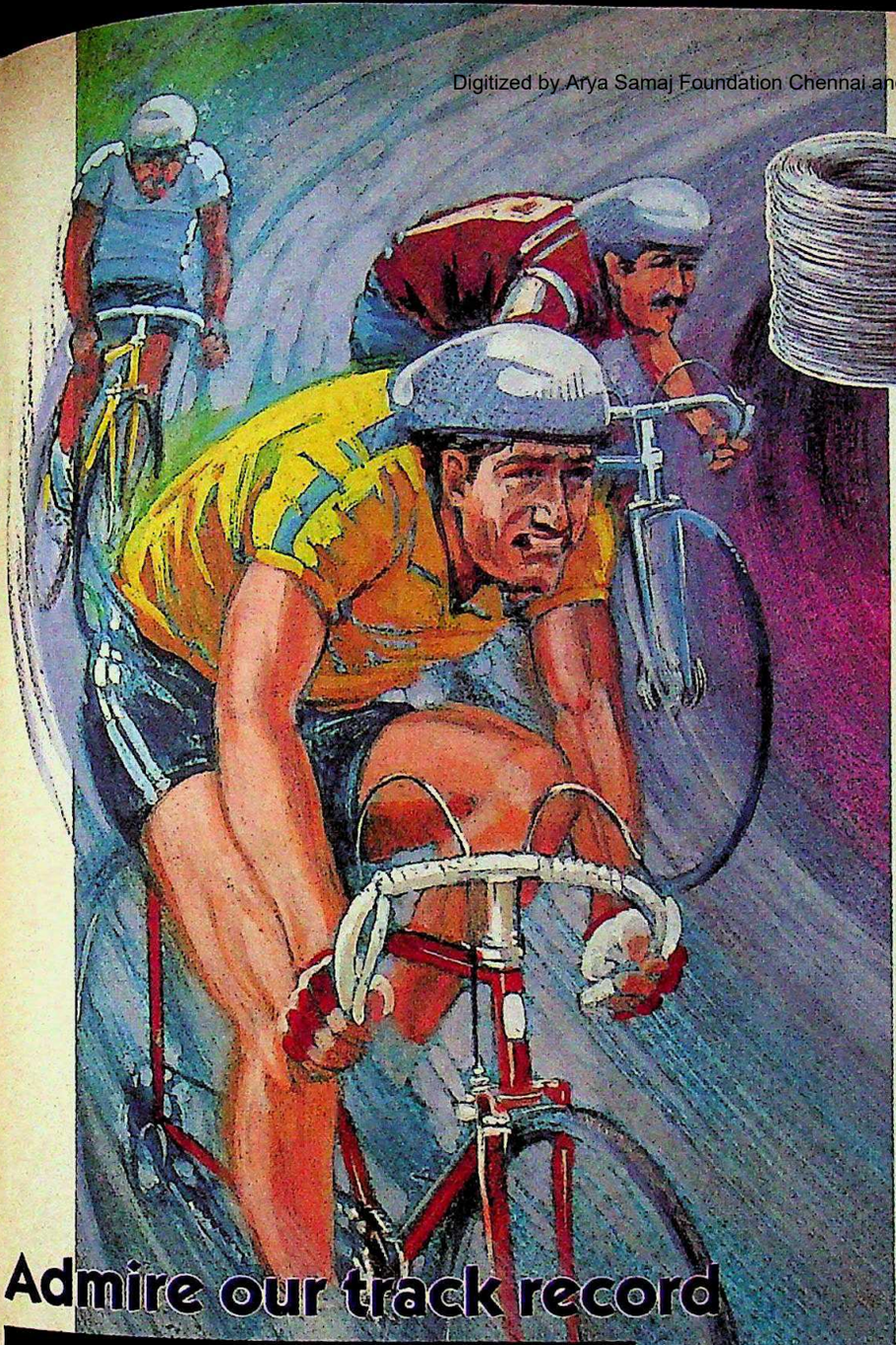

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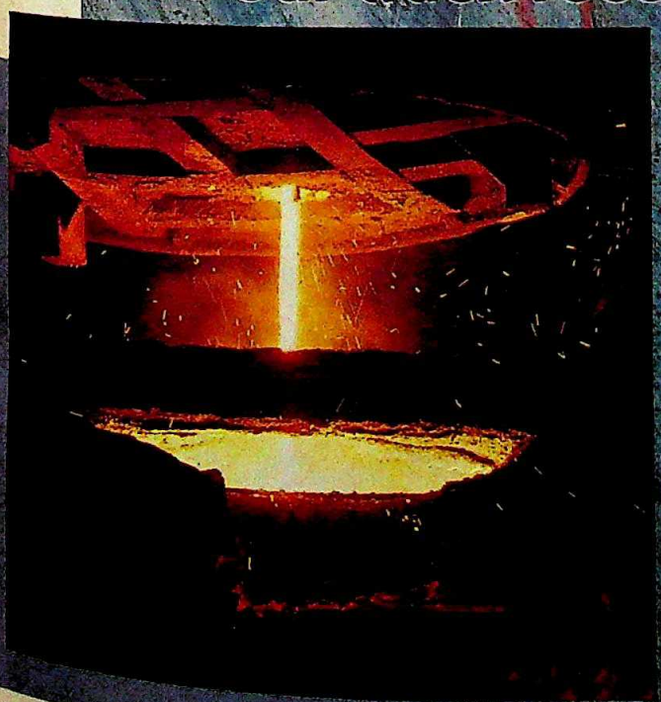

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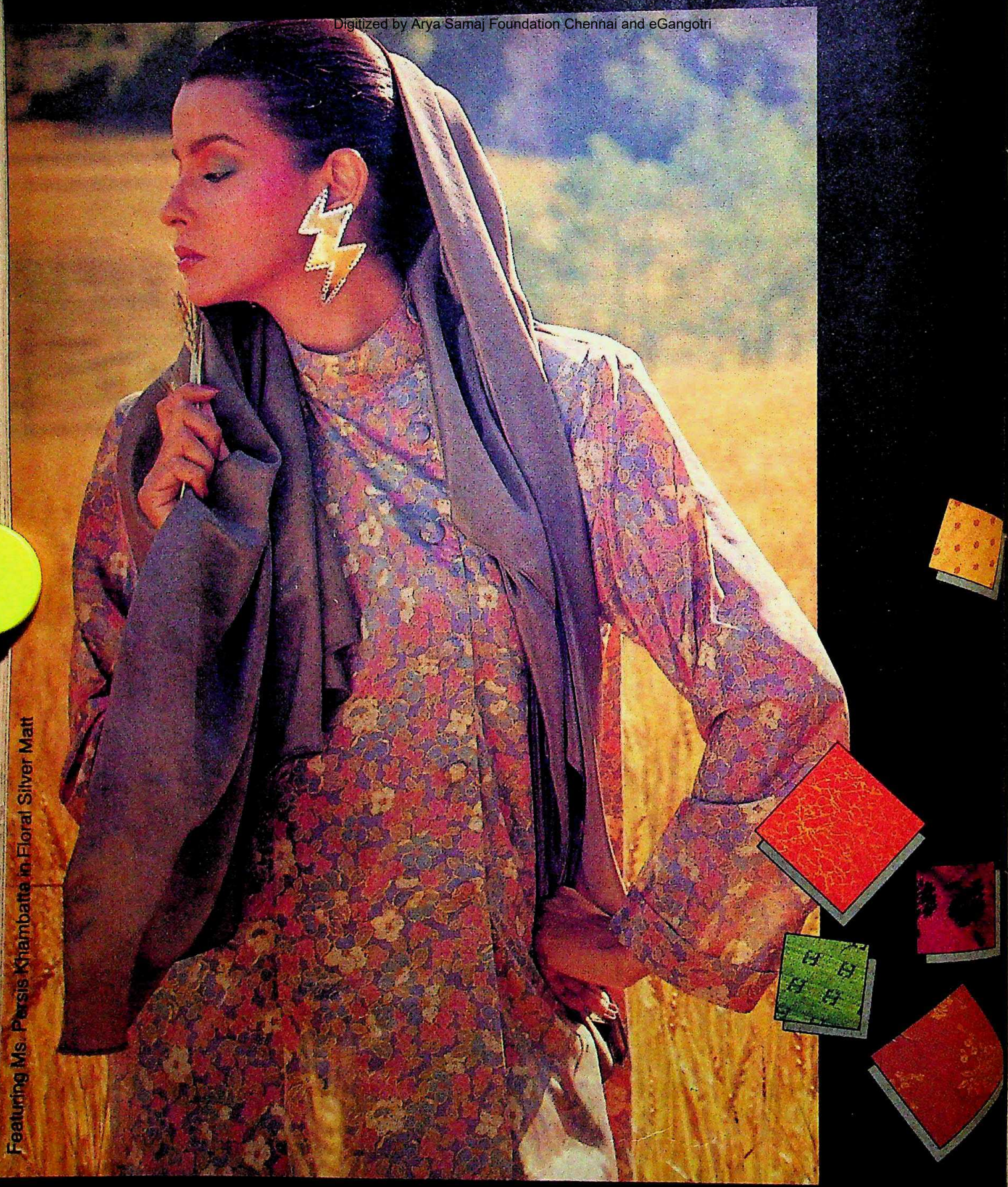

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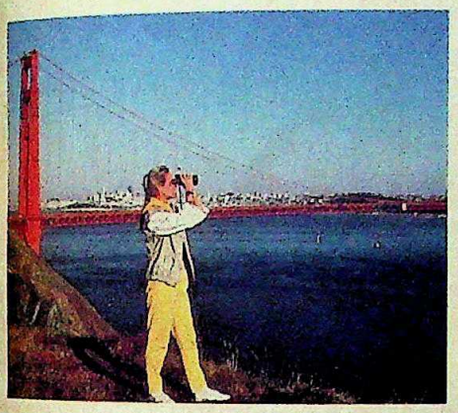

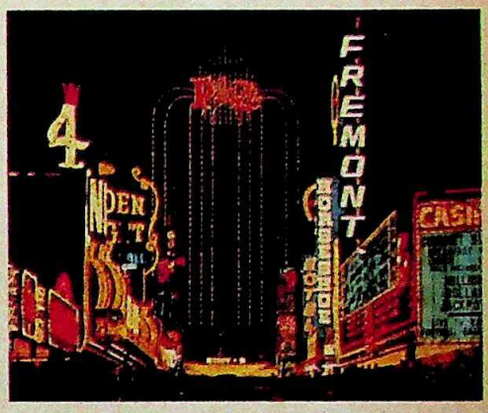

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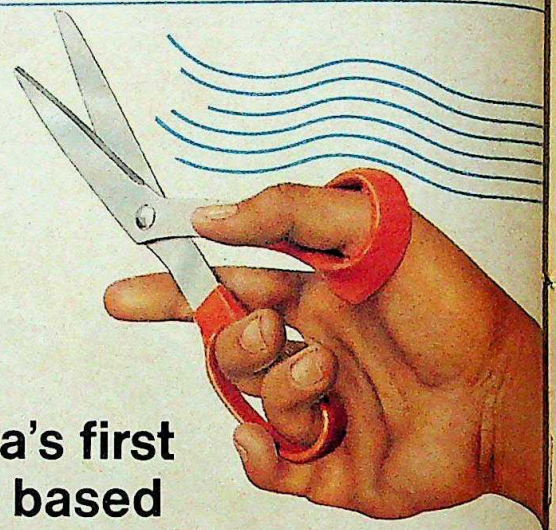

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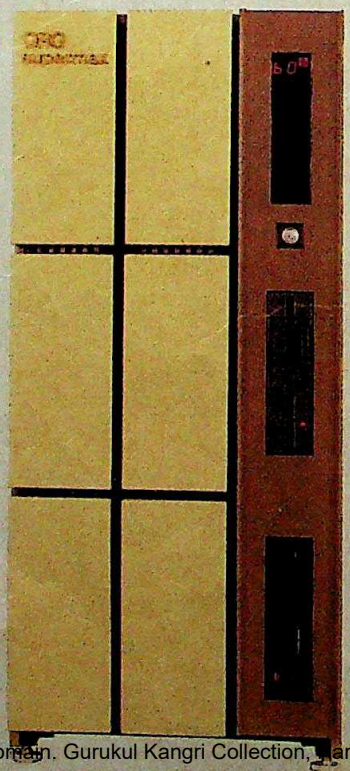

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AIDS

Campus Jitters

JABALPUR in Madhya Pradesh is hardly the kind of town that is associated with sexual permissiveness. Nor for that matter is Quilon, the cashew growing centre 70 km from Trivandrum in Kerala. But these towns are now faced with the threat of the modern sexually-transmitted scourge: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, better known by its chilling acronym, AIDS.

A routine medical check in these towns taken at the directive of the Union Health Ministry showed frightening results: in the blood samples of nine people, all foreign students, the presence of the AIDS virus was detected. In Jabalpur, the six victims were all Kenyan males while in Quilon the three cases reported were Tanzanians. None of these cases, however, have showed any outward manifestations of the devastating disease so far. In Jabalpur, Dr S.K. Kanwar, joint director of health services, said: "We suspect that they may be simple carriers of the disease, who have the capacity to transmit it to another person but can remain unaffected themselves."

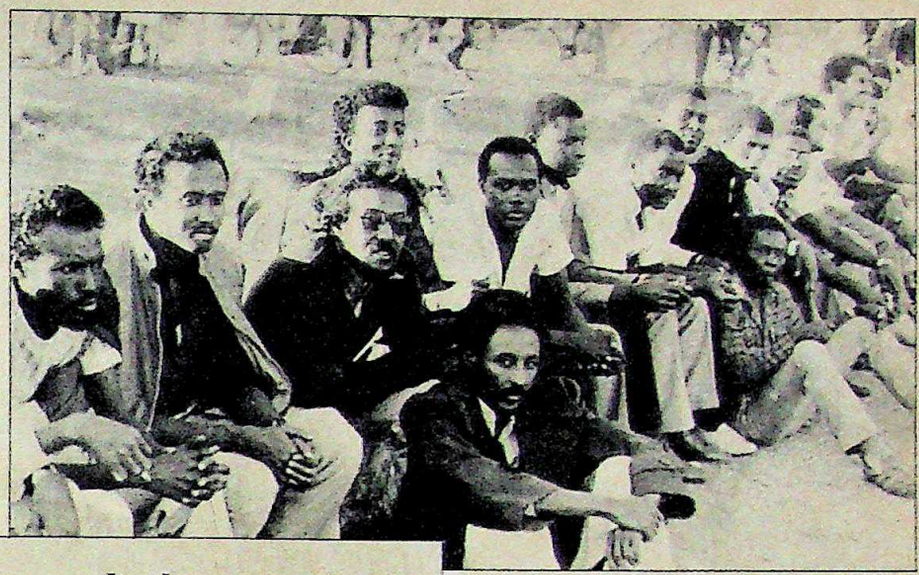
But in both towns, as soon as the news spread, panic broke out. Not only were the AIDS victims dismissed from the university but the high commissions of both these countries were trunk-called to fly them out immediately. In Quilon, Anand Bose, the young collecter, personally saw to it that everything used by the three affected students was destroyed. In both towns, all foreign students were looked upon with suspicion and as public pressure mounted, they were asked to undergo compulsory AIDS tests. The Quilon victims were kept under police surveillance and soon whisked out of town. In Jabalpur, the ostracised students barricaded themselves in their dorms where a bewildered Manashon Ongei, 26, one of the AIDS victims, wondered: "Will I live or die?"

Ongei, the only son of his parents, came to India in September last year. White with fear, he pleaded with the authorities to allow him to remain in India. "If you repatriate me to Kenya, I shall certainly die there; we don't have any medical facilities," he reportedly told the doctors. John Kwado, 25, another expelled student who came to Jabalpur in July 1984, burst into tears when he heard that he was suspected to be suffering from AIDS.

When medical examinations of foreign students in Jabalpur and Quilon threw up nine cases of AIDS, they suddenly found themselves socially ostracised.

As Jabalpur University authorities struck the names of the six victims off their rolls, Vice-Chancellor H.P. Dixit said: "We told them that it was in their own interest to leave the town for better medical treatment." But it was only after a top official of the Kenyan High Commission flew into Jabalpur last fortnight that things started moving. He had a closed door meeting with the students and finally persuaded them to fly out with him to Delhi.

But life has changed not only for the banished students. All foreign students in the two towns suddenly found that no Indians were talking to them, no one was visiting them and few were even going to the places they went to. "I was a regular visitor to the Indian Coffee House, but I have stopped going there ever since the AIDS news," said Ramoo Shrivastava, resident editor of a local Hindi daily. In Quilon, Sasi, a paan-shop owner says: "The AIDS patients used to buy cigarettes from my shop. But today people are hesitating to buy from here." Mary Onyia, a Nigerian student admitted: "We are all very much afraid. We have restricted our activities and most of us don't move out socially at all."



Foreign students in Jabalpur: private agony

Most foreign students—especially Kenyans—are scared, not only that they might be carrying the dreaded AIDS virus but that they may be deported, en masse, back to their countries. Interestingly enough, in Jabalpur, although students from other nationalities including several other African countries, were also examined for AIDS, so far none of them has been found afflicted with the disease. It was only the Kenyan male—none of the 72 Kenyan girl students had it—who was suffering from the problem. Yet all foreign students have been told that they will not be allowed to appear in their examinations until they undergo the medical test.

There were other problems as well. So far blood samples of 837 of the estimated 1,200 foreign students have been collected. But there is a shortage of AIDS kits to test the samples and the health authorities say there is no point in collecting more till the kits arrive.

Their worries don't end there. Some of the AIDS victims are believed to have had sexual contact with Indians and authorities are busy trying to probe into their private lives to find out who did what to whom. A social worker of the Health Department has been put on the difficult job of trying to find out, by talking to them in confidence, whether any student or someone else had any sexual contact with the AIDS victims. The public humiliation along with the private agony of AIDS is certainly not going to be easy to live with—but then, those are only some of the side effects of the terrifying disease.

—N.K. SINGH and SREEDHAR PILLAI

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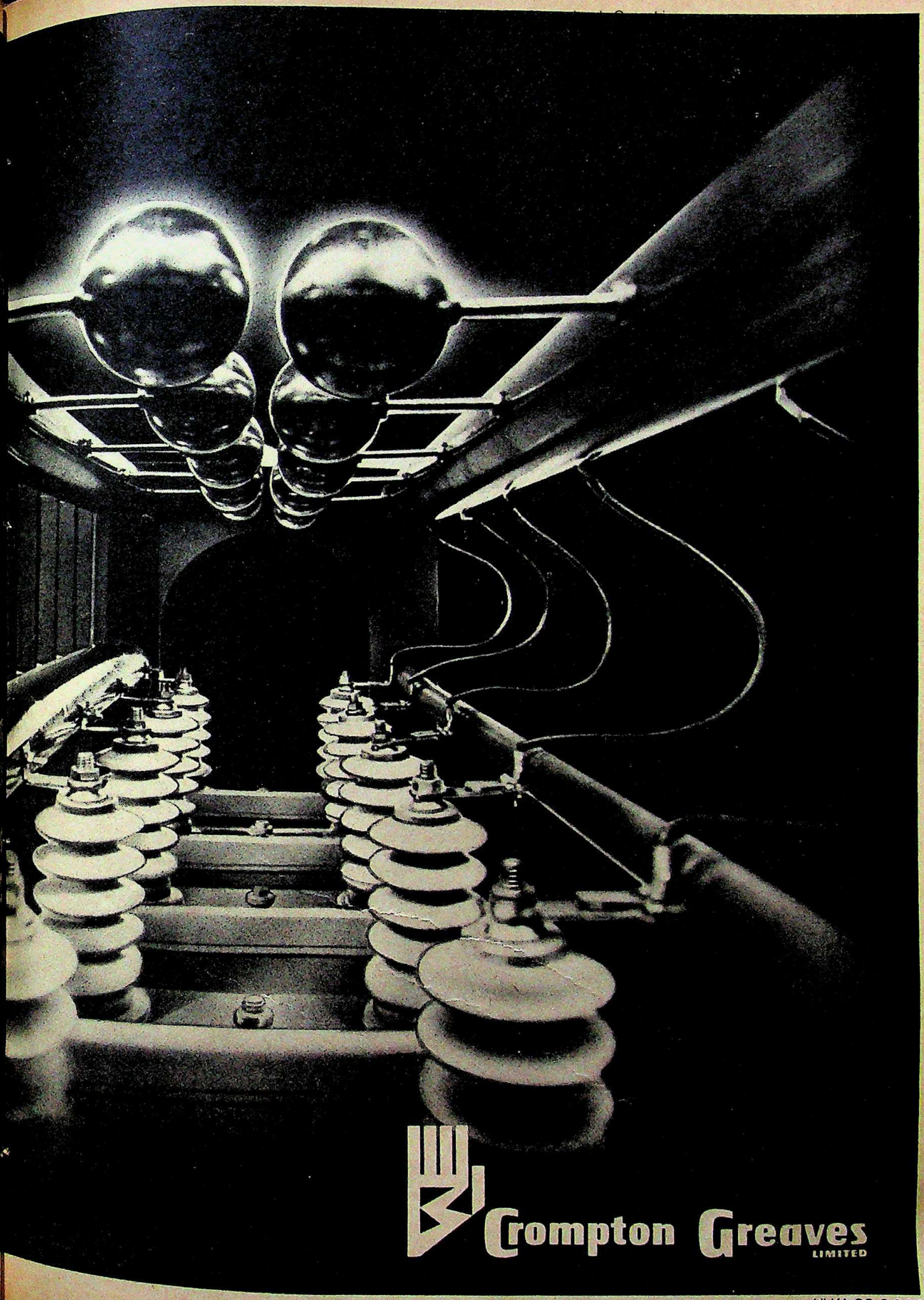

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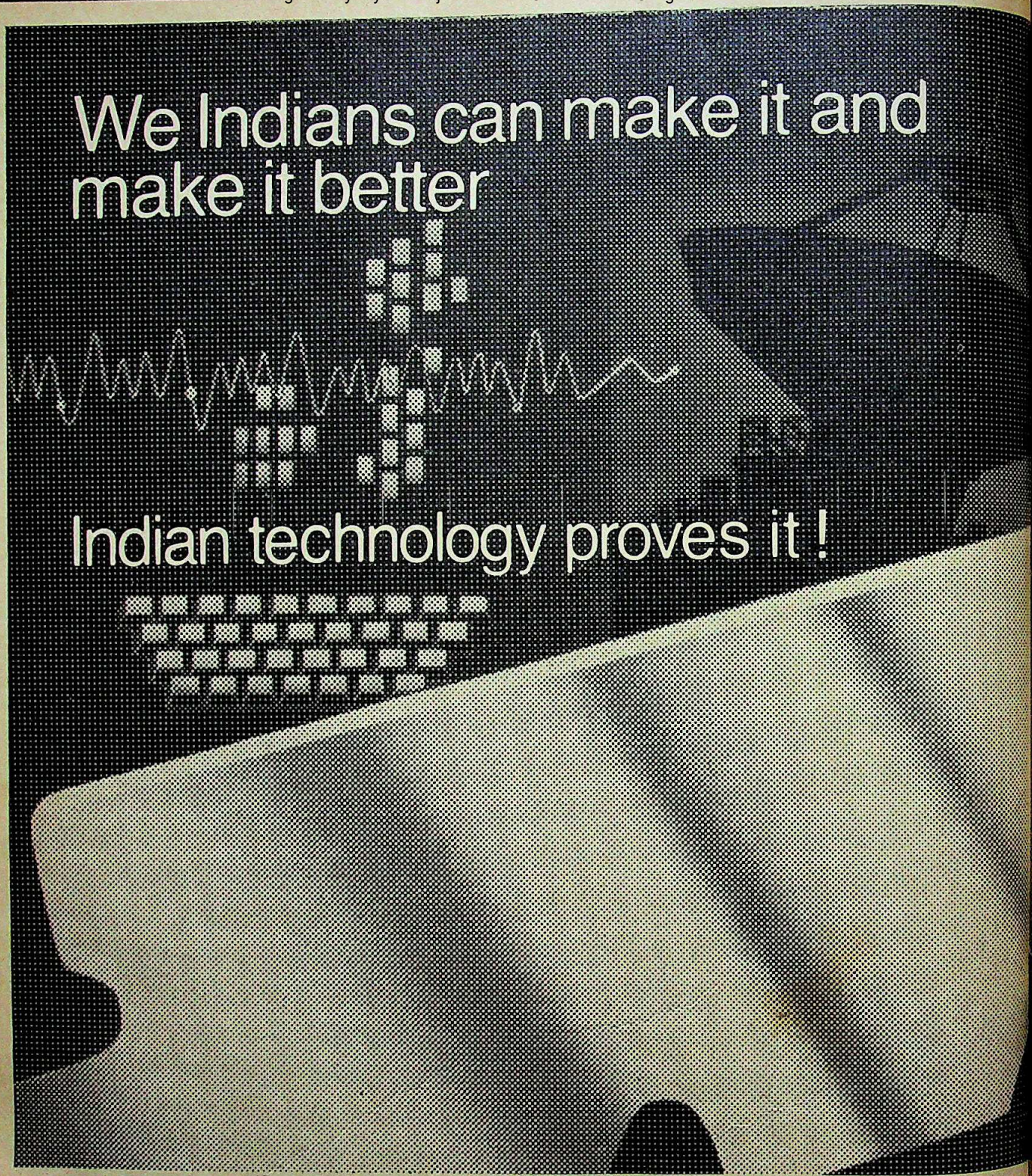

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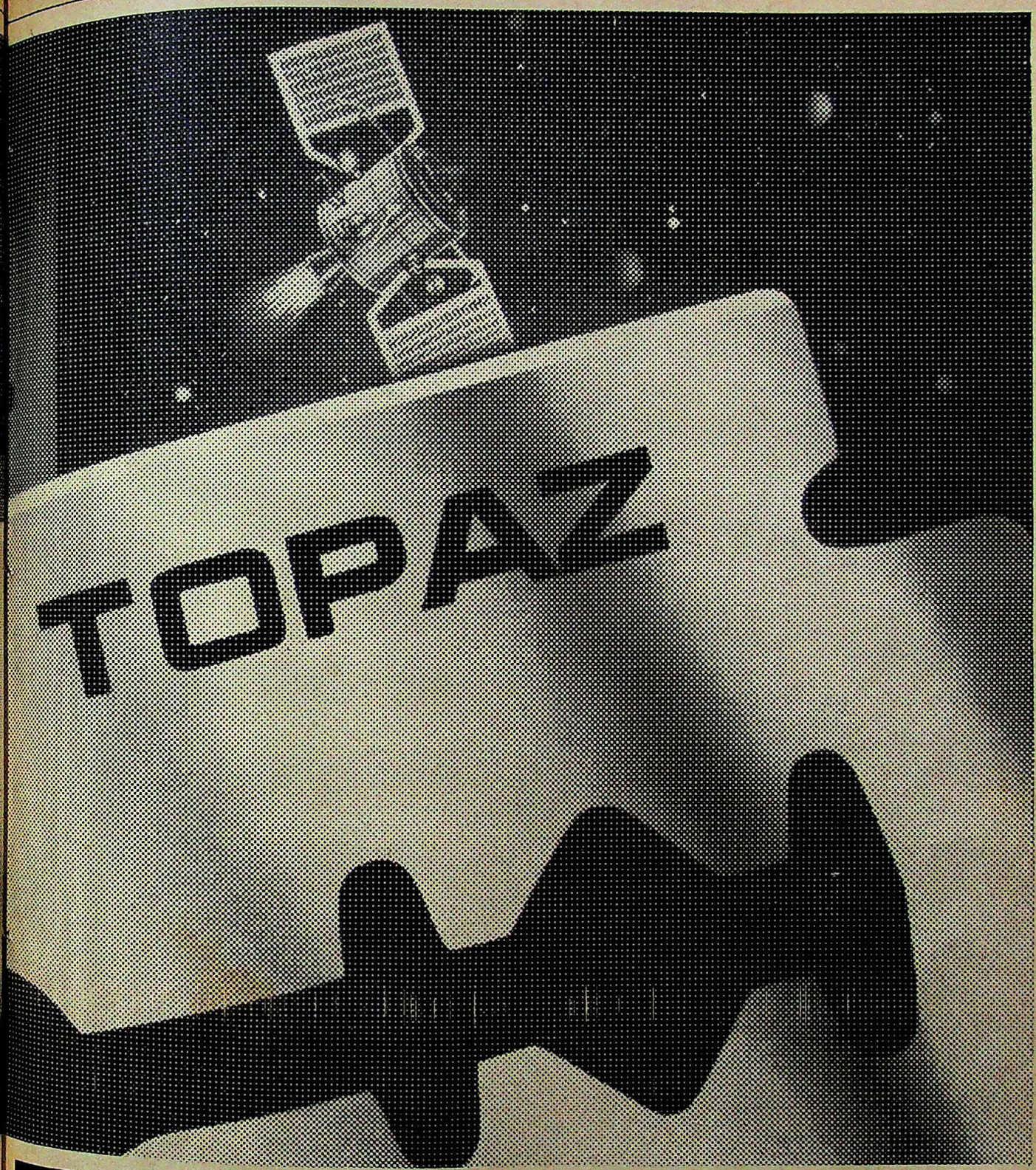

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KGMC

Terminal Illness

PATIENTS come from faraway places to be treated at Lucknow's prestigious King George's Medical College with complete faith in its competence. Most of them are poor people who spend their hard-earned savings to be treated at what they naively believe is a premier institution. If they were to know of its disorganised insides, their trust would turn to horror. Senior Correspondent DILIP AWASTHI *investigates the shocking state of affairs. His report:*

KING George's Medical College (KGMC) of Lucknow—the nerve-centre of Uttar Pradesh's medical services—completed 75 years of its existence recently. But at a time when it should have been celebrating its platinum jubilee, all the employees—from professors to junior doctors to class IV staff—were on strike to press their respective demands. "It is a disgrace to celebrate such an event with a complete strike. Only the KGMC could do this," says Health Secretary Shyam Suri disgustedly.

The postponement of the celebrations, which were to have been attended by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, served to illustrate the decay that has overtaken one of the country's top medical institutions over the years. KGMC's 1,850-bed hospital with a 1,400-member staff has as many as 31 departments, including five super-speciality departments—and three more are in the making. But none of these impressive figures reflect the true—and appalling—state of the hospital. Put bluntly, it is a disgrace to the state's health services. Uttar Pradesh's Health Minister, Lokpati Tripathi, does not even try to defend the situation, admitting: "It is nothing but bad administration."

The emergency unit—the hub of any hospital—is a perfect example of the sorry state of affairs. The casualty room which has neither beds nor equipment, has only two house officers from any speciality at a time. Concedes a house surgeon on duty: "You might find an ENT student handling a patient who is in a diabetic coma (related to medicine) or an orthopaedic graduate treating some unfortunate patient's eye."

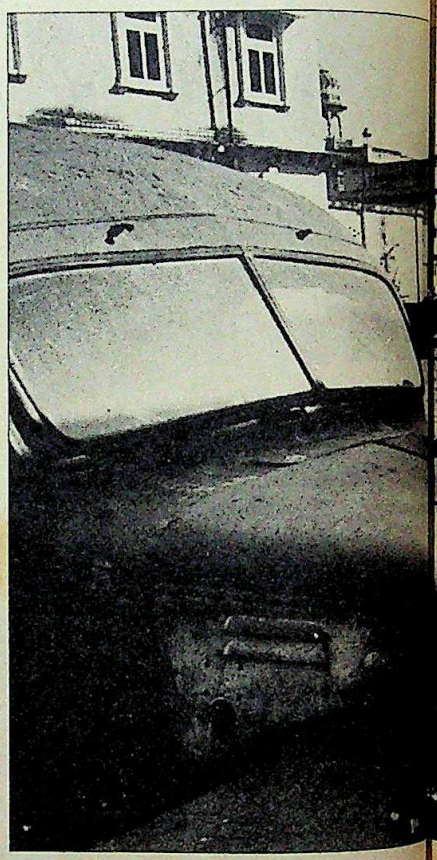
Only three specialities—surgery, orthopaedics and ENT—are represented in a separate emergency surgical ward. Besides, there are hardly any drugs, bandages, syringes or other primary medical aids to deal with emergency cases. To top it all, the only telephone number of the emergency mentioned boldly in the telephone directory was disconnected for non-payment of bills over 18 months ago.

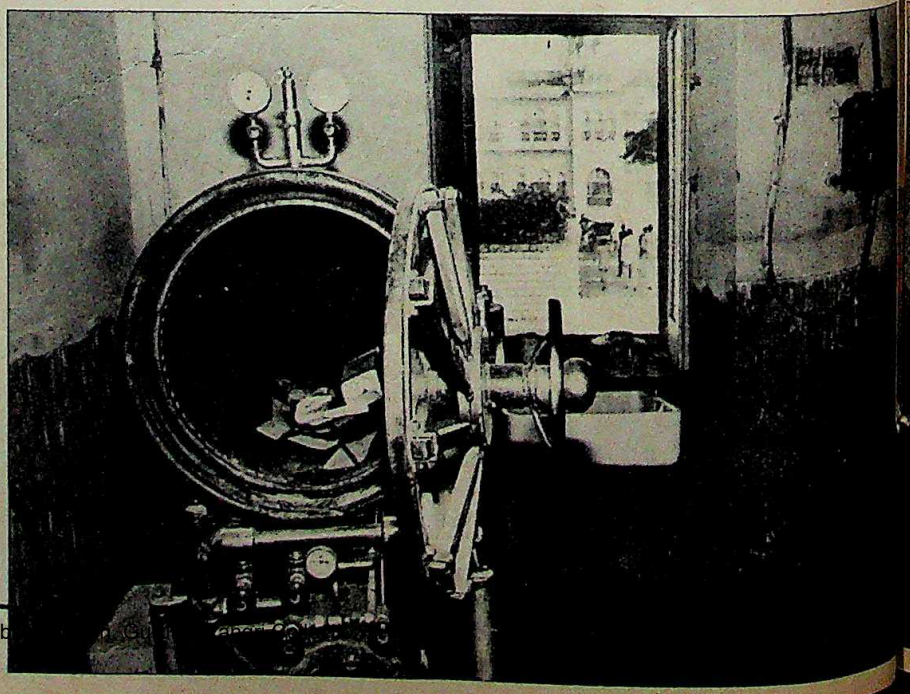
One of the four posts of chief medical officer (CMO) for the emergency has been lying vacant for over a year while the CMO-in-charge here, Dr Maya Mathur, has applied for long leave to look after a nursing home in which she is a partner. According to hospital records, 80 per cent of the medico-legal cases are handled by house surgeons who have neither the training nor the experience, because the other two CMOs are rarely present to deal with them.

Of the six ambulances attached to the casualty wing, only two are in running condition. And to transport the patients from the casualty wing to the various departments, there is but one trolley—which until recently had only three wheels—and one wheelchair.

Not only is essential equipment out of order, even basic, life-saving drugs are often unavailable. The appalling state of neglect is all-pervasive.

The emergency complex has no provision for the primary pathological or radiological (blood urea, blood sugar or X-ray) tests, essential before any operation. There is evidence of carelessness all over. Blood is stored in a refrigerator that has a door that lies detached from its hinges. For the 12-bed ward, there are only six drip stands. Also, the whole complex is infested with rats that run wild. It is here that critical cases are referred to, not just from Uttar Pradesh but also from Bihar





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and Madhya Pradesh.

The emergency surgical ward has two operation theatres for general and orthopaedic surgery but none at all for ENT. The two auto-clave units outside the operation theatres have not been functioning for two years, as a result of which the linen, cotton and instruments used during operations are not sterilised. The four air-conditioners in the theatres seldom work, and there is no generator in case of power cuts and breakdowns, which are frequent. Says a junior doctor: "Three times a week—and this is the minimum—we conduct operations by torchlight or candlelight." Incidentally, nine of 14 operation theatres in various departments also do not have generators.

Every now and then, patients are rudely woken to the reality inside the hospital. In September, P.K. Khare, a senior high court advocate, got a shock when he was brought to the hospital with a head injury only to be operated upon by torchlight. The first thing he did on discharge was to sue the institution in the Lucknow bench of Allahabad High Court. Acting on his writ petition for compensation, the court ordered the installation of power generators in all city hospitals within three days. However, the college authorities managed to pacify the advocate, who dropped the case. The matter ended there and the authorities haven't done a thing about implementing the court orders.

It isn't in the emergency alone that patients have to suffer. Last June, Sohan Lal, 18, suffering from hypospadias (a disease leading to disfigurement of the organs) had to pay Rs 500 to a technician to get operated out of turn in the plastic surgery department. The technician performed the operation all by himself and Sohan Lal's genitals developed gangrene. An inquiry ordered since, has yielded no result.

Murat Chand, being treated for a stomach ailment in January last year, started vomiting after being put on a glucose drip. Fortunately, a junior doctor had the good sense to remove the drip. It turned out that the glucose bottle was spurious.

Some other home truths about the institution:

► Although pathological and radiological tests are vital in diagnosis, the services of the college's pathology department are available only four hours a day. The radiology department has five X-ray machines, but because of obsolete techniques and infrastructure, the results are not only poor, but the examination actually creates radiation hazards. Moreover, eight of 13 such machines in other departments have been out of commission for periods ranging from a year to two.

► The cobalt radiotherapy unit, a basic requirement for cancer treatment, is non-functional since 1983. Official explanation: Rs 60 lakh for a new machine has now been sanctioned. Similarly, the thyroid scanner in the surgery department has been out of order since December 1985. Explanation: not replaced due to shortage of funds.

► A hundred dental chairs from Australia—all donated—arrived in Lucknow in June 1985. They were not lifted for more than a year because there was reportedly no money to pay the demurrage. When they were finally unpacked, half of them were already non-functional.

► A full-body CAT-scan, a donation again, this time from Japan, has not been commissioned for more than six months. The unit, sensitive to humidity, has now been installed in the damp old part of a building of 1914 heritage.

► The empyema ward and the TB outpatient department are housed in a crumbling building which has been declared dangerous by the local municipal corporation.

► The paediatrics department does not have an intensive care unit though 25 per cent of the total 4,000 deliveries in the hospital every year are in the high-risk category. There are no artificial respirators or even monitors to check oxygen count.

► Only one of the two dialysis machines works and none of the six medicine wards has refrigerators.

Moreover, the very essentials in any hospital regularly figured in the "Not in Stock" list last year. While for 25 days over 1986, oxygen cylinders were unavailable,

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR

(Clockwise from left) Non-functional hearse and body outside morgue; refrigerator for blood storage with broken door; auto-clave unit used as dustbin: shocking disorder

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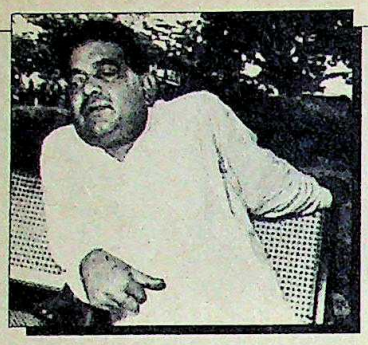
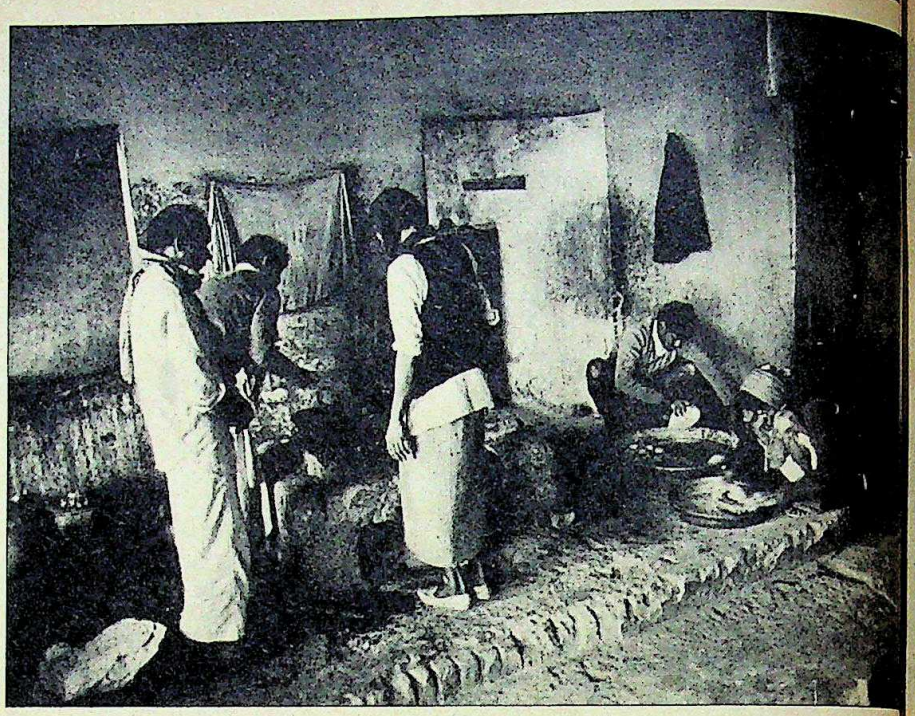


Health Minister Lokpati Tripathi dismisses the plea of fund shortage and blames the situation entirely on poor administration.



The squalid hospital kitchen: a mockery of medical care

insulin, the primary life-saving drug, has been out of stock for eight months. Ether, cotton bandages, lucoplast and even saline fluid were repeatedly unavailable last year.

Both, Senior Medical Superintendent Dr Dinkar Chandra and Dr B.K. Khanna, college principal for five months, blame the poor financial position for the existing situation. Says Khanna: "The prices of equipment—mostly imported—and drugs are rising by leaps and bounds every year. The Government within its existing constraints cannot support us the way we would like. Several of our proposals are not even responded to."

KGMC's budget, which was Rs 2.05 crore in 1980 has increased to Rs 3.47 crore in 1986-87. About half this amount goes into paying staff and doctors' salaries. The per patient expenditure per day has risen from Rs 4 to Rs 6 in 1980 to stand at between Rs 8 and Rs 10 today. But Chandra says that this is only half the sum actually required. The number of patients has also swelled. Today, though the sanctioned bed strength is 1,583, there are actually 1,850 beds. And even this extra number is inadequate: there are still patients who have to make do on the floor.

Chandra provides an example of fund shortage. He says that the budget for X-ray films which was Rs 6 lakh in 1984-85, was raised to Rs 7.50 lakh the next year but slashed to just Rs 2.25 lakh in 1986-87. "It is only a third of the money we require. What is more, the cost of films has risen by 30 per cent," says Chandra. And he adds: "The Government has a tendency to make cuts that prove detrimental to hospital running." He also argues that KGMC gets only a fraction of funds available to a set-up like New Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS).

Tripathi takes a diametrically opposite viewpoint. He dismisses the complaint of fund shortage saying that Rs 12 crore over and above the regular budget have been provided to KGMC since 1980 and adds: "If that had been properly utilised, things would have been different." Dissatisfied by the current set-up, Tripathi says that he has already "warned the present superintendent of the college twice in the past year".

BUT the crux of the matter is that it is not a question just of the senior administrators currently in charge. KGMC's decline has been taking place over several years and no one has thought it necessary to reverse the downslide. When the Government took over the administration from Lucknow University in 1981, the hopes that had been raised of an improvement have now been belied.

Tripathi admits this shortcoming, saying: "We have so far failed to provide KGMC or for that matter any hospital with people who know the job of running a hospital. We will have to change the system of having an ordinary doctor as superintendent." He says that the Government is now planning to create for this purpose, a special cadre of doctors trained either at AIIMS or the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh.

Although there are complaints of fund shortfalls, Uttar Pradesh in its wisdom is now setting up the Rs 100-crore Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences at Lucknow. Tripathi, naturally, defends it.

Complains a senior lady paediatrician at KGMC: "We seem to have everything but the will to work. If we want some basic drugs or equipment to save a baby, we are treated as if we are being done a personal favour. Everything works on an ad hoc basis."

The truth is that no one, neither in KGMC or in the state Government, has given serious thought to the sickness that plagues it. After all, the situation couldn't have persisted over the years if someone in authority had cared. Its state is a reflection actually on the callousness with which common people are treated, whether in hospitals or elsewhere.

But the state's premier medical college could still be saved. As Dr N.C. Misra, professor in the department of surgery and a reputed cancer specialist, says: "Each one of us, whether in the Government or on the medical college staff, has to put in everything to revive this fine place." It would indeed be a tragic irony if an institution of doctors died of a curable illness.

—DILIP AWASTHI

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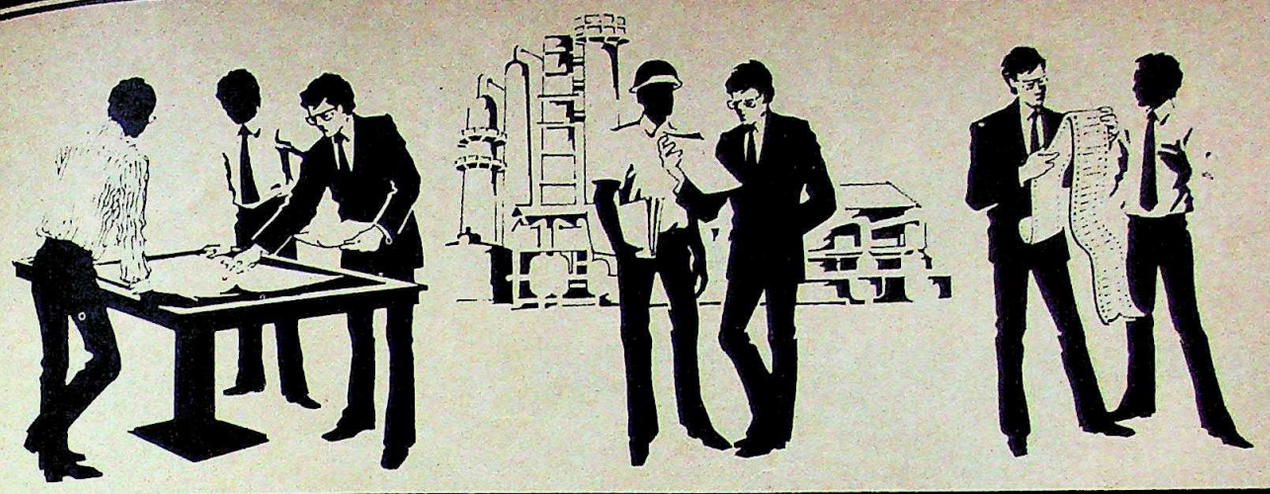

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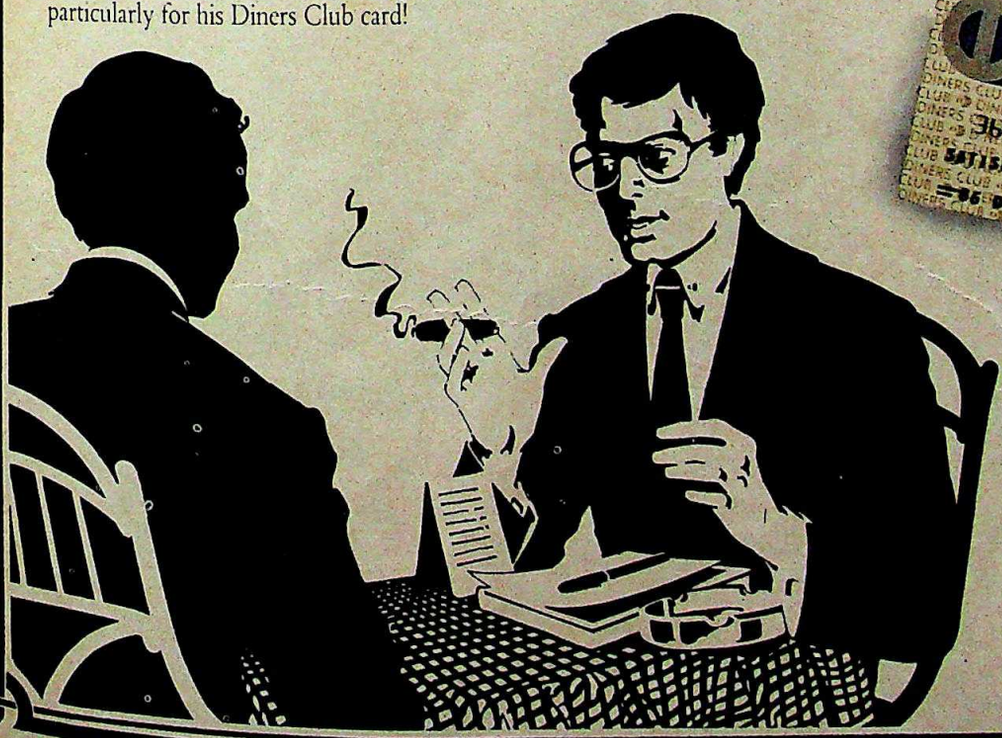
Enterprising businessman Satish Mehta puts his Card on the table



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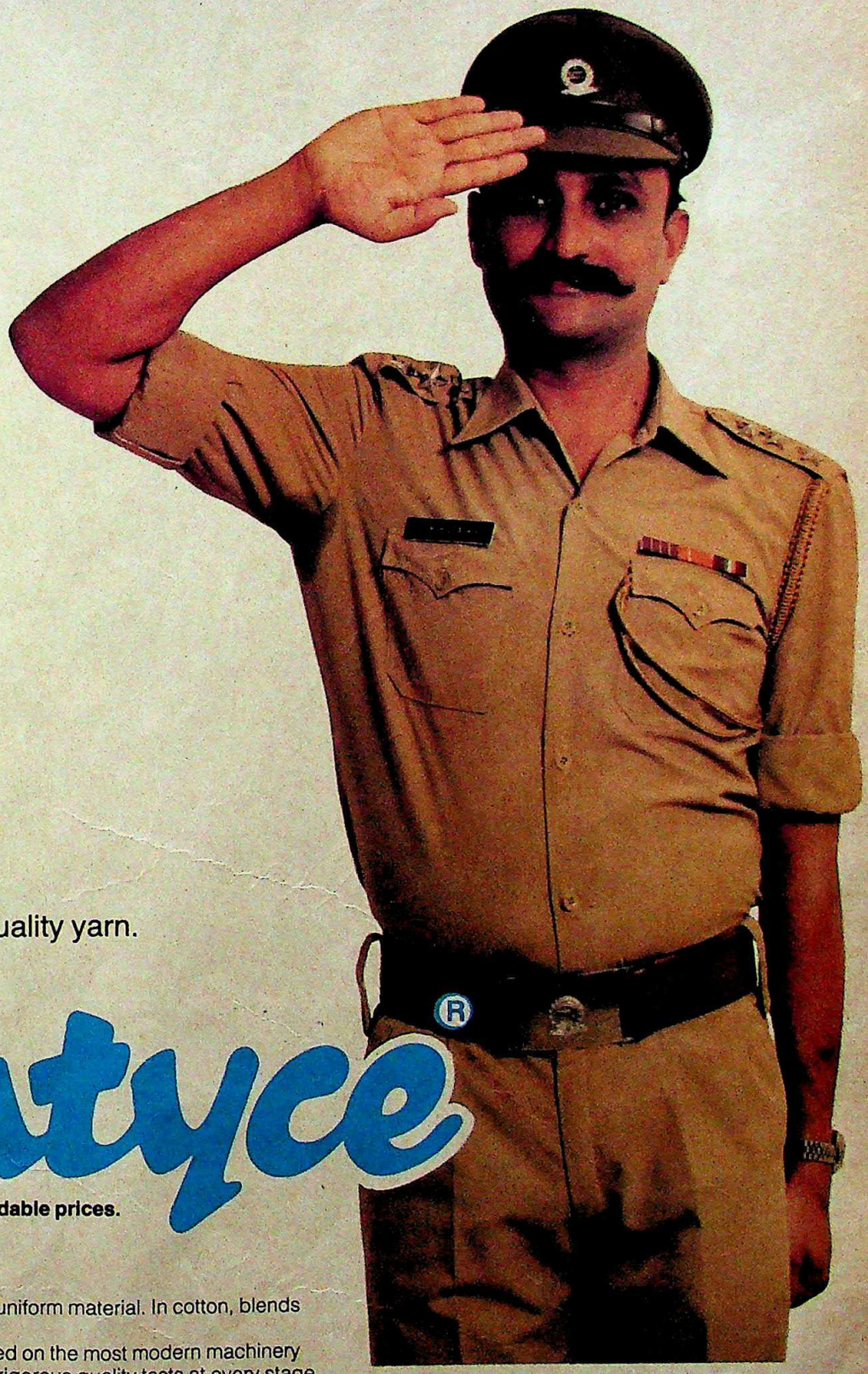

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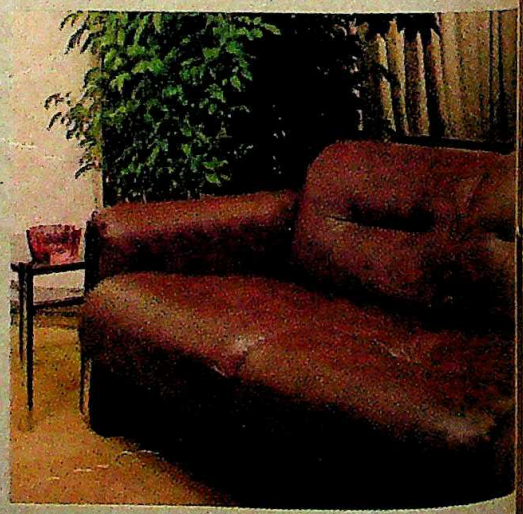

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CRICKET

A New Confidence

IT will be remembered as a series of records and achievements: the explosive Kapil Dev getting his 300th Test wicket; Sunil Gavaskar hitting his 34th century and nearing the milestone of 10,000 runs in Test cricket; Dilip Vengsarkar bashing two successive centuries; the third or fourth comeback of Mohinder Amarnath; Mohammed Azharuddin back among the runs at last and the blooming of Maninder Singh.

But personal achievements aside, the just concluded series with Sri Lanka, could at best be regarded as a batting and bowling practice for the Indians. The country's cricketing prowess would be actually put to test when the team faces a strong Pakistani side which begins a five-Test tour from January 16. As India's Captain Kapil Dev told INDIA TODAY last week: "What we have to see is how effectively our batsmen and bowlers perform against Pakistan which has a better attack and a finer batting side."

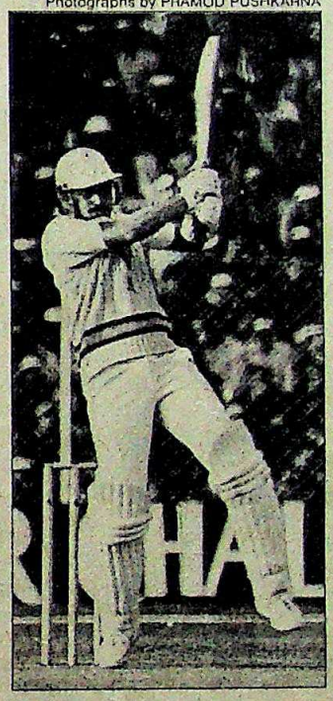
If Kapil is cautious he has plenty of reason to be. Compared to Pakistan's battery of quick bowlers, which includes Imran Khan, the Sri Lankan pacers like Ravi Ratnayake, Asantha De Mel and Graeme Labrooy appeared friendly. And spinners Asoke De Silva and Donanurasari are no match for the guiles of Abdul Qadir. Add to it the immense competitive spirit that is generated when these two teams meet and India has a tough fight ahead.

But if the Lanka tour did anything it was to give the Indian team the taste of victory again. Said Kapil: "Winning makes a lot of difference. It raises team spirit and adds to the confidence of the players." India have now won two of the last three series—they beat England 2-0 in England and drew with Australia at home—the Indian team goes into the contest with Pakistan on a confident note.

India's batting has got a tremendous morale boost. The middle-order looks much more solid than before. Vengsarkar has come into his own with his breath-taking haul of nearly a thousand runs in the last eight Tests. Mohinder Amarnath has played himself into the team again. The 199 that Azharuddin got in the Kanpur Test, has re-emphasised Zaheeer Abbas' assessment that he is the best bat to come out of the subcontinent in recent years.

Kapil (left) and Vengsarkar: raising hopes

Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Sunil Gavaskar (left) and Maninder Singh: in full cry

To add to Pakistan's worries the remarkable Gavaskar remains evergreen. As Pataudi said during the Delhi one-day match: "Sunil seems to get younger by the day." And even Dev, who never seems to get out of controversies with Gavaskar, said: "Do I have to say anything about Gavaskar's performance? He just keeps getting runs." If there is any cause for worry it is Srikkanth's poor run: he got just 62 runs in three innings in the Test matches. If he isn't able to regain his form and Raman Lamba continues to be out of his depth against top-class bowling, India will be on the lookout for a reliable Test opener.

But perhaps the best thing about the Lanka series is that Indian bowlers are finding their feet. Much to everyone's relief Kapil Dev has ended his long drought of wickets. He was not only back with much of his old fire but even got his 300th wicket to join the select band of six other players in the world that include Fred Trueman, Dennis Lillee and the irrepressible Ian Botham. A bit piqued about the doubts raised about his ability, Dev said: "I don't have to prove to anybody that I can bowl." Kapil's hunting partner is, however, a matter of some concern: Chetan Sharma's exuberance is not matched by his ability. Madan Lal and Roger Binny are not getting any quicker, and Raju Kulkarni and Bharath Arun are still greenhorns.

But the most comforting aspect is that after a long while India is again developing a spin trio that can win matches for it. The pick of the bowlers this season was the young left arm spinner Maninder Singh. Following in the famed Bishen Singh Bedi's bowling steps, Maninder distinguished himself by capturing 18 wickets in the three Tests including a career best 7 for 51 in Nagpur. With off-spinner Shivlal Yadav returning to form and Vice-Captain Ravi Shastri steadily pegging away, India seems well on its way on developing a formidable spin attack. But as a senior member of the team says: "They lack experience but with a lot of dedication and hardwork the team could mature."

Kapil Dev is unwilling to comment on India's chances against Pakistan saying simply: "We don't take any team lightly. And we have to watch how the Pakistanis play initially before I could give an assessment of our chances." Kapil's caution seems to summarise the mood of the Indian team as it gets ready to battle with its arch-rival.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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Sakthi's contribution to Socio-Economic growth

COMPARATIVE DATA (Rupees in lakhs)

Particulars	Year ended 31-3-85	Year ended 31-3-86	Half year ended 30-9-86
Deposits	329.35	1012.33	1568.00
Advances	563.34	1461.56	2356.87
Gross Earnings	82.65	323.67	304.10
Profit after depreciation	17.70	116.63	96.65
Profit available for distribution	22.73	129.24	125.52
Dividend	8.13 (20%)	17.81 (20%)	16.52 12% (Interim)

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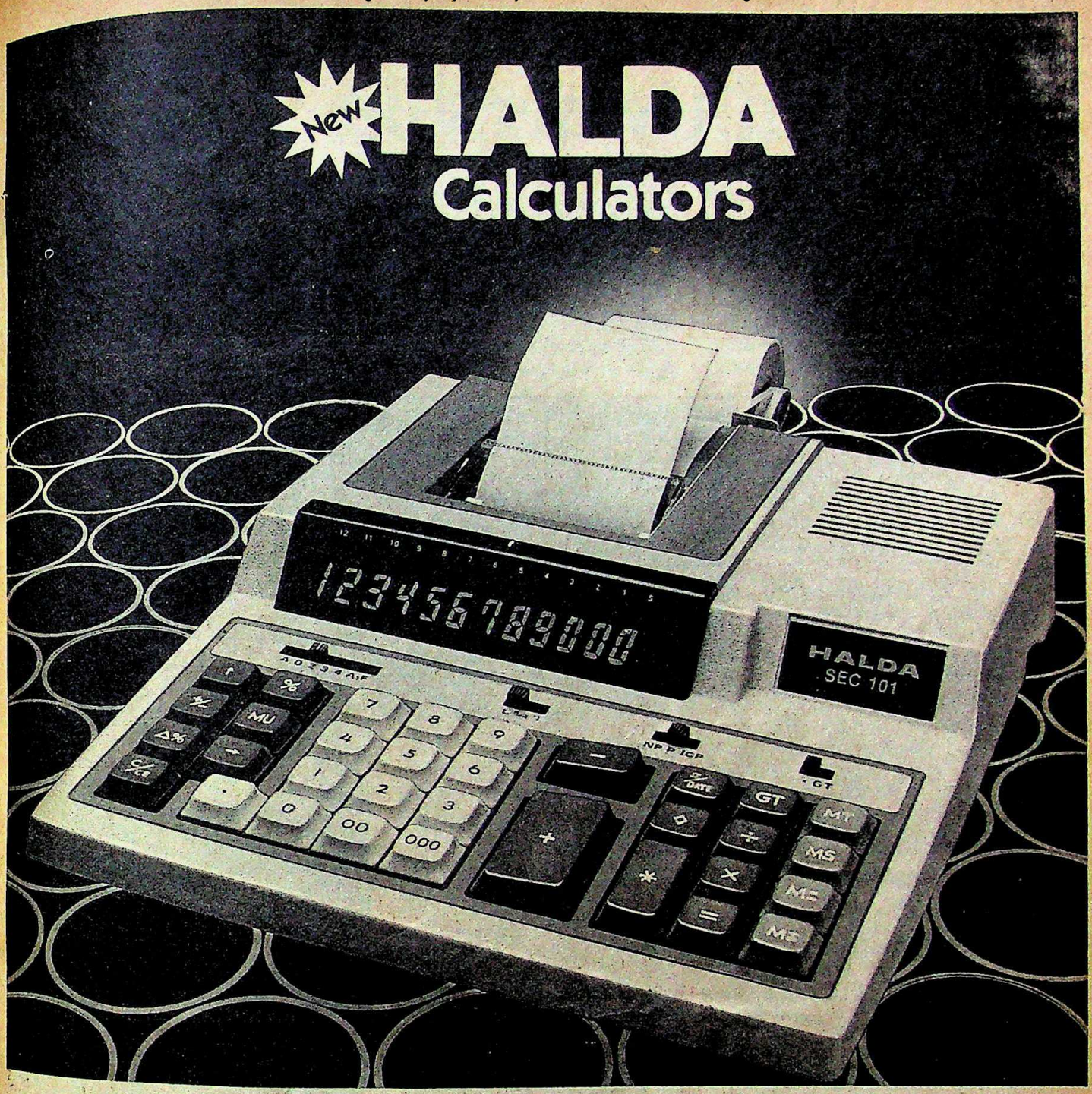

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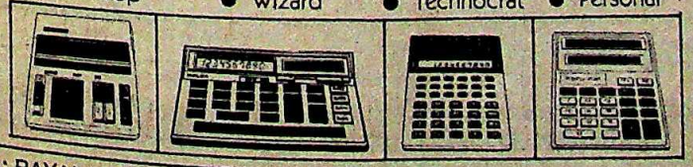

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SHILLONG

Disputed Ownership

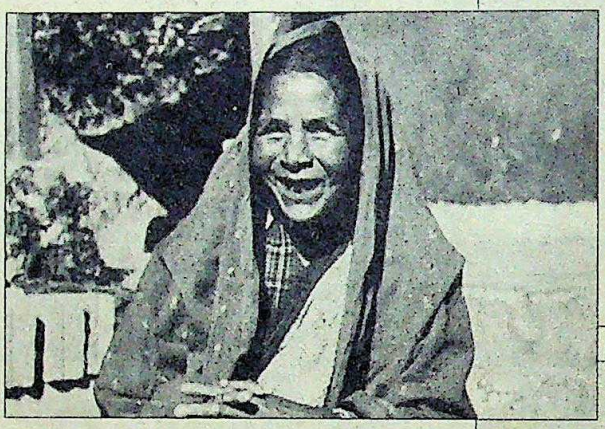
A historical claim revived by an illiterate Khasi clanswoman of Shillong is threatening to tie up the Meghalaya Government and a host of Central government departments in an unprecedented legal foul up. Ka Smienty Nongkhlaw Rngi, 62, is claiming that 1,000 acres of prime property constituting the heart of Shillong city rightfully belongs to her clan. Charging the state Government with violating an agreement signed more than a century ago, Smienty Nongkhlaw has demanded, in a petition filed in the Shillong District Court, that either her land be returned or else she be paid adequate compensation for it.

Under the matriarchal Khasi laws, Smienty Nongkhlaw is the legal heir to all the lands belonging to the 200-odd families which constitute the Nongkhlaw clan. The property she is claiming is valued at several hundred crore rupees, and comprises the entire former European ward (including Shillong's main market), parts of the army cantonment, the state secretariat and most of Shillong's main Central government offices.

The state Government's initial response to the claim was one of amusement: officials did not bother to reply to Smienty Nongkhlaw's first notice. But when she and her lawyer persisted and filed eviction notices under the Indian Tenancy Act in October, amusement turned to alarm. Old records were pulled out and the finer points of law studied. It was soon obvious that the illiterate clanswoman did have a case.

"This land always belonged to our clan," Smienty Nongkhlaw stoutly maintains, explaining through a Khasi translator: "My grandmother used to talk about the time when British soldiers with guns forcibly occupied our land. Since we were scared and could do nothing against them, the Britishers told us that instead of fighting and ultimately losing our land forever, it would be better if we hired it out to them and they would return it when they left." State government records with the Directorate of Surveys testify to the essence of the Nongkhlaw clan's claim.

In March 1861, a British military contingent led by Lieutenant Colonel J.C. Haughton, acting as the agent to the governor-general of the North-east frontier, had signed an agreement with the local Khasi *Syiem* (elected chieftain), Melay Sing, taking over several hundred acres of land in and around present-day Shillong. The Khasi chieftain, however, had rights only over lands owned by the *Syiem* and not individually held properties of the clans.



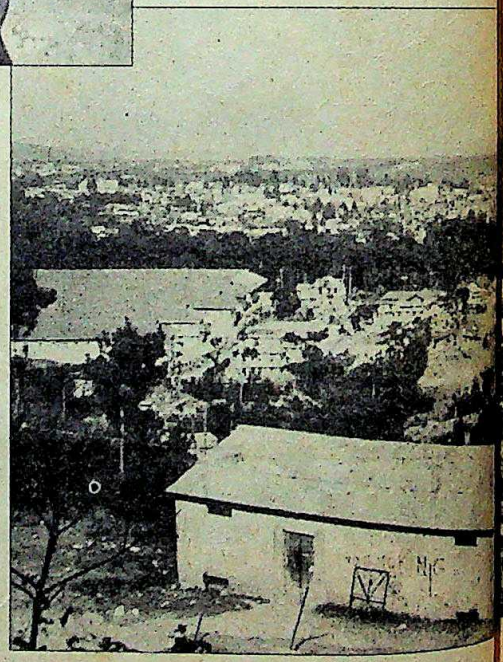
"This land was always ours. But we were made to lease it to the British. We now want justice."
SMIENTY NONGKHLAW
chief claimant

To swallow the islands of individual land within the Shillong area, Haughton subsequently had to force separate agreements with individual clans, most of whom sold their lands at prices ranging from 15 to 2,000 silver rupees. Only three clans—represented by U Beh Nongkhlaw Rngi, Dor Sing and Borjan Myntree—held on to their lands, but finally capitulated after two years.

The current dispute is over conflicting sections in the agreement signed by U Beh, an ancestor of Smienty Nongkhlaw. At one place, U Beh appears to have agreed to "gift" his land to the British. A little later, however, there is a mention of a yearly "compensation" of Rs 50. In the closing section, the agreement categorically stipulates: "I hereby renounce all right and title to the said land... so long as the said sum due on the 1st January each year, shall be continued to be paid in advance to me or my heir on demand."

Smienty Nongkhlaw claims that her ancestor "being illiterate and unfamiliar with the English language, was by dubious and questionable ways," persuaded by Haughton "to put his thumb impression to a hurriedly drafted document leasing out to the then rulers of India, the British Government, his clan's vast and valuable property." Smienty's lawyer Dr Martin Narayan Majaw, argues that the last clause proves that the land had been given on a conditional lease and the agreement should be treated as a lease document under Indian tenancy and property laws.

In fact, government records show that the annual compensation or rent, as Majaw insists it should be termed, was regularly paid to U Beh and thereafter to his heirs. The Nongkhlaw Rngi clan continued to live in vacant portions of the land leased to the British till the First World War, when the existing military cantonment was extended and the clan pushed to its present home in Laitkor, a small village overlooking Shillong town.



U Beh had signed the lease agreement on behalf of his youngest sister, Ka Nongkhlaw Rngi as under Khasi laws property is owned by a family's youngest daughter, called the Khatduh. The ownership of the land later devolved to Jynsu

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Smienty's mother, who regularly received the rent till 1976. But, thereafter, the payments stopped abruptly. To the state bureaucracy this might have been an insignificant omission, but, as Majaw points out, it amounted to the breach of "a formal, binding and legal contract" and an omission that nullified the 1863 agreement.

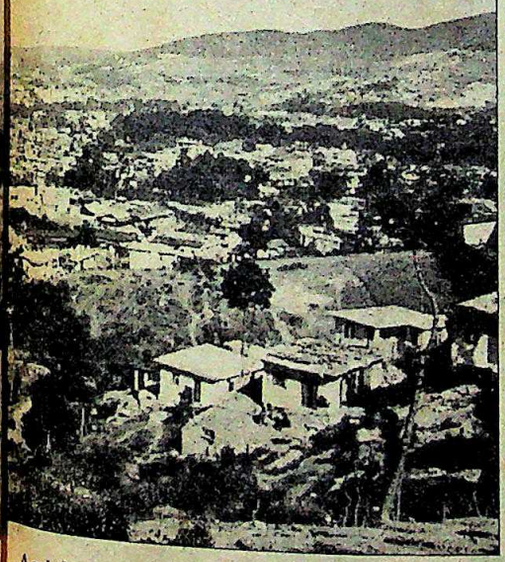
Majaw argues that there are other equally compelling legal reasons as per Indian property laws supporting his contention that the 1863 agreement that was signed with the British no longer holds good. They are the following:

► If the agreement is taken to be a 'conditional lease' and the British Government the first tenant or lessee, the agreement should have lapsed in 1947 with the end of British paramountcy;

► By failing to register the 1863 lease agreement under the Indian Registration Act, the governments of India and Meghalaya are in the strict legal sense, mere "licencees" liable to be summarily expelled or evicted from the clan's Shillong land;

► Also in the instrument of accession signed between the federation of Khasi *syiems* and the Indian Government on August 18, 1948, the *syiems* continue to be the custodians of all land, rivers and forests in the state and apart from the raj lands, individual clans continue to have full rights over their lands. In the circumstances the then government of Assam should legally have drawn up a new agreement if it wanted to retain its rights over the Nongkhlaw clan's land in Shillong; and finally

> "The land was a gift to the British. As its successor, the Indian Government naturally has the same rights over it."
>
> R.K. BORAH
> *joint director of surveys*



Aerial view of Shillong: disputed land

► By not paying rent for the last 10 years, the governments of India and Meghalaya, as Nongkhlaw's petition declares, "have become trespassers, illegally occupying land and enjoying the same without any right, title or justification".

The Meghalaya Government's initial reaction to the notice from Nongkhlaw's lawyer was an indignant letter from East Khasi hills Deputy Commissioner Neeraj Prasad to Majaw, cautioning him against disturbing the situation since the state Government was in full lawful possession of the land. Next, in the latter part of November last year, the deputy commissioner issued a notice asking the "legal heir" of the clan to contact him for payment of the annual compensation due to the clan. The notification stated that the compensation could not be paid for all these years because no legal heir had come forward to collect the money.

R.K. Borah, joint director of surveys, who is researching the case for the Meghalaya Government, says there are two claimants for the compensation money and "unless the true successor is determined it is not possible for the Government to pay up". The other claimant, the Government revealed, is Kelnar Kharkongar, a Khasi who lives on the outskirts of Shillong town, who has even sold some property within the Nongkhlaw area.

The Nongkhlaw Rngi clan protests that this is just a government ruse. "If the Government is serious it can easily determine that a Kharkongar can never inherit property belonging to the Nongkhlaw Rngi clan," says Jimmy Kharkongar, who is assisting Majaw in the case. Property ownership remains with the clan, passing to the youngest daughter of each generation and males marrying into the clan must take up their wives' surname. After the Government revealed the fact that Kelnar Kharkongar had also claimed a stake in the Shillong land, the Nongkhlaw Rngis filed a case against him last fortnight for criminal impersonation.

But Borah argues that the 1863 agreement is ambiguous and there is nothing concretely stated to suggest that it is a conditional lease as Majaw is arguing. Says he: "The words 'lease' or 'rent' are not mentioned even once in the agreement. The key word, on the other hand, is 'gift'; the land was a gift to the British and the Indian Government as its successor naturally has the same rights over the land."

But this is precisely what the petition filed in the Shillong District Court argues against. Although the 1863 agreement does refer to the land transfer as a "gift", the Nongkhlaw petition argues that in reality it hardly could be construed as one since it was not given free, but in exchange for a consideration in the form of an annual rent. "We want justice from our government but it is behaving just like the British," complains Smienty.

Majaw estimates that the state Government is capable of earning at least Rs 52 crore annually from the clan's land by letting it to sub-tenants. He is ready to settle with the state Government for exactly a quarter of the annual rental value, that is for an annual rent of Rs 13 crore, provided the Government pays up this amount from 1976, the year it stopped paying the "compensation". Alternatively, the Meghalaya Government can if it so desires, acquire the property at existing market rates.

But both options have a price tag running into hundreds of crores of rupees. The state Government now seems reconciled to fighting it out in court.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE in Shillong

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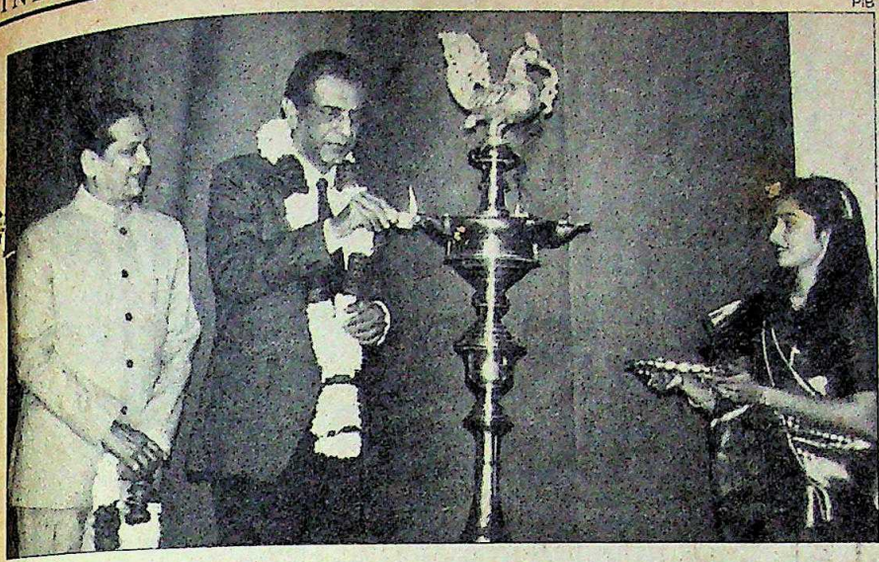

Ray at the festival inauguration

11th FILM FESTIVAL

Tragedy of Errors

OPENING night of the 11th International Film Festival was as exciting as a souffle gone flat. A galaxy of stars had indeed descended on Delhi for the inauguration on January 10. But no amount of the showering tinsel: the Kapoor *khandaan*, star-MP Sunil Dutt, Shabana Azmi, Poonam Dhillon, Anupam Kher, Naseeruddin Shah, Jaya Prada, and many tinier stars could salvage the festival from shabbiness. Cracks showed beneath the thin veneer of glamour quick-fixed on for the occasion. The frayed slip, alas, showed beneath the brocade.

Impresarios are certainly not in short supply: all the *utsavs*, both *apna* and *unka*, and various winter happenings are proof enough of an adequate supply of the conjurers of culture. But where were they on the inauguration night? Doordarshan's darlings kept appearing and disappearing, as did the little things burdened down by garlands. But nothing held the festival together.

It was to have been a hi-tech opening, electronically upbeat. Closed circuit television with two giant video screens were poised on each side of the stage to give a blow-by-blow account of the events. But all the hi-fi wizardry could not raise it above the level of a school function. Hindu *shlokas* at the outset jarred with the giant screen showing an electronic galaxy animated by strobe lights. The gold and silver cardboard peacocks pasted on a cellophane-like material hung incongruously across the stage. The 24 clips screened from the competition films were a jumbled mess because there was no voice to string them together. Pamela Rook's commentary did not make it to the show on time because some bureaucrat somewhere felt that a Doordarshan voice ought to have been used and not that of an outsider.

Whose festival was this anyway? Film delegates' or our ever-present bureaucrats', (some of whom came with their entire families, including crying babies)? More awkward still was the way in which the jury—two of whom never made it to opening night—were brought on to stage one by one, with an escort and then shuffled out the same way like schoolchildren. A rather ill-looking Satyajit Ray, the chief guest, was made to stand too long with nothing to do while Terence Stamp, the brilliant British actor and star of *Theorem* and *Collecter*, was not even called on stage, and sat forgotten in the audience.

The Directorate of Film Festivals and Urmila Gupta—who was only appointed the executive director on August 8—were hardly given any time to organise this festival since regulations were printed as late as September. Invitations to many countries to send their films went out too late. Algeria, for instance, does not have any films this time because they were asked for only two weeks before the festival began. Strangely enough, despite a focus on Asia and the Pacific there are no films from neighbours Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh. Obviously, the festival is not a priority for the managers of culture: they were still looking for interpreters for jury members 24 hours before the festival. The Information and Broadcasting Ministry even wanted to fly the jury to India on economy class tickets.

The festival has certainly been jinxed from the outset: jury member Sharmila Tagore opted out the day after the festival opened because she fell ill. Ajit Panja, the minister of state for information and broadcasting just had to accompany the prime minister on a 24-hour trip to Calcutta on the very day of the opening. But the last straw was the eleventh hour withdrawal of one of the two Indian entries—Ketan Mehta's *Mirch Masala*—by the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) on the eve of the festival. Apparently, the film will be entered in another international film festival—perhaps the Berlin one. If even the NFDC prefers other festivals for its films, something is obviously very wrong with Delhi.

If there were too many blunders before the curtain went up, there were even more after it did. The reels of the Argentinian film *Miss Mary* went quite contrary: with the third reel of the film, the audience suddenly landed in Czechoslovakia and it was a good 15 minutes before the projectionist realised what a tour he had led the audience on. The same happened with Ettore Scola's *Le Bal* but fortunately the jumbled reels, this time, were from the same film. Tempers are also rising amongst film makers. The quality of the projection of films at the cinema where the Indian panorama is being held is dreadful: the screen itself looks like a cloud of dust with streaks across it. And at another cinema darkness descended over the magnificent vast landscapes of China in *Yellow Earth*.

There were, however, a few saving graces: an effervescent Madhur Jaffery who introduced Ismail Merchant, producer of the exquisite *Room With a View* and its heroine Helena Bonham-Carter, who put more into her hello than the lengthy orations of the others. Mercifully short and precise, also, was Urmila Gupta's speech, in happy contrast to the bumblings of actress Moon Moon Sen and the come-to-Karnataka-to-make-a-film drone of actor Anant Nag. Perhaps, the festival, although it did not start off too well, may still have a happy ending—Hindi film style.

—MADHU JAIN

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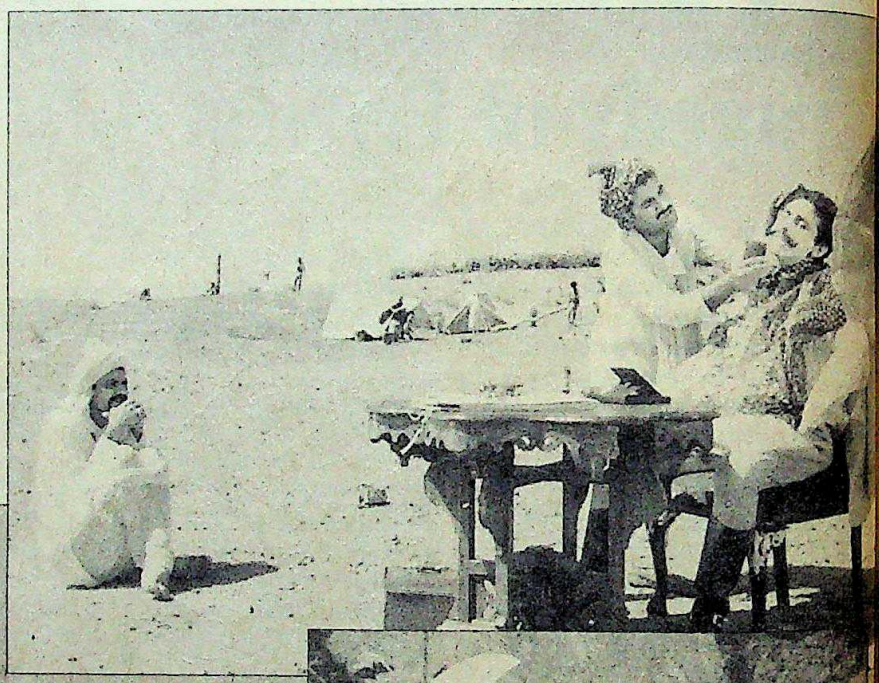
PARALLEL CINEMA

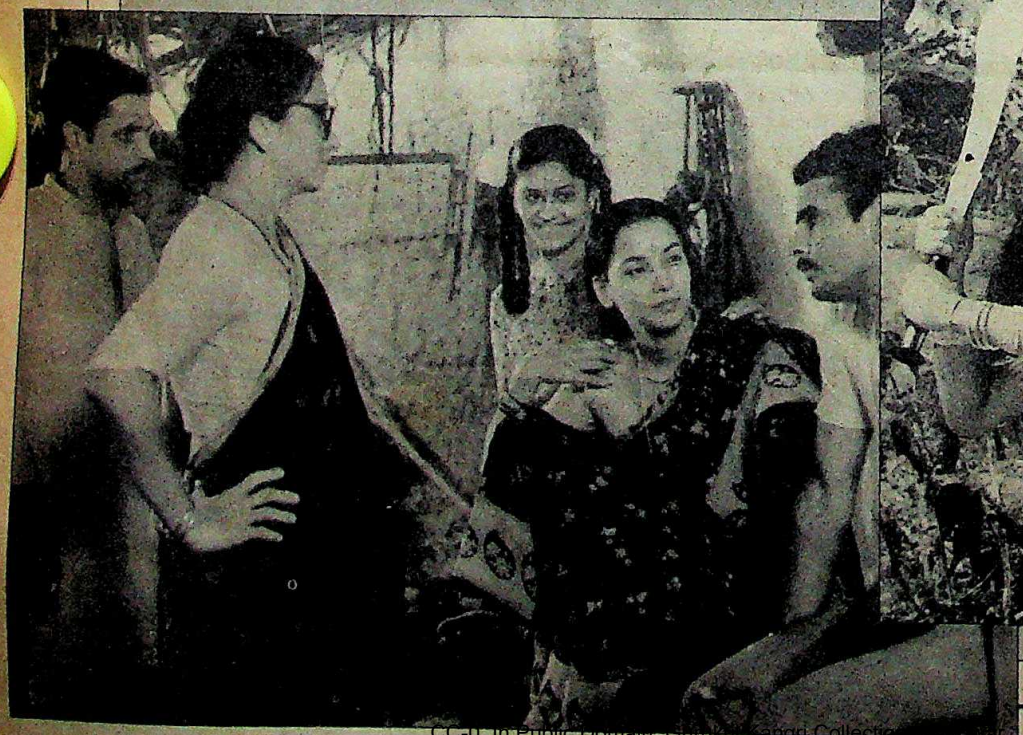
Fading Out Slowly

LIKE an extended dissolve at the end of a mildly absorbing film, the new cinema movement in India is gradually fading out from screens across the country. Producers are no longer willing to finance good, small-budget films in Hindi. Distributors and exhibitors are more than ever reluctant to risk showing films by even the established 'new wave' directors like Shyam Benegal or Govind Nihalani. The film makers themselves are being lured increasingly by the seductive power of television. And accomplished actors and actresses are once again in search of good roles. After more than two decades of controversy and promise, the alternative cinema movement appears to have reached a blind turn, if not the end of the road, uncertain about what to expect in the future.

The movement began in 1967 with Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome*, financed by the Film Finance Corporation—which later changed into the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC). It was quickly followed by Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti*, Kumar Shahani's *Maya Darpan* and Avtar Kaul's *27 Down*. The 'new wave' cinema, as it was then called, surged ahead with the success of Shyam Benegal's *Ankur*, which was perhaps the first small film to get a significant theatre audience. It reached its peak with Govind Nihalani's *Ardh Satya* in 1983, which cost Rs 17 lakh, found buyers all over India in just two weeks and finally grossed over Rs 60 lakh.

But even as *Ardh Satya* became a runaway success, the small cinema movement started losing its audience. In the last five years, barely 50-odd sm Hindi films have been made and t number has been constantly declinin Today, according to Naseeruddin Sha the star most closely identified with t movement, there is just one such fi being made: *Doosra Badshah*, directed script-writer Hriday Lani. Lani's scri had won an award in the NFDC scri competition and so he got the money fro NFDC to make the film. Kumar Shahani presently working on an Indo-Frenc Hungarian production on painter Amri Sher-Gil but this is still at the scriptin stage. Says Shah: "Somewhere along t way, the motivation of film makers h petered out."





(Clockwise from right) Stills from *Mirch Masala*, *Debshishu* and *Susman*: small budget films whose only hope for distribution is possibly Doordarshan

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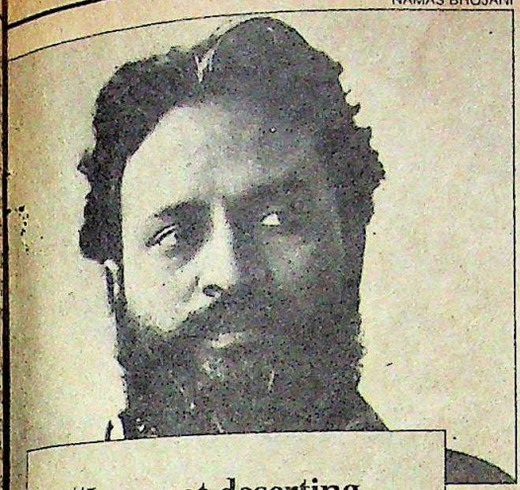
NAMAS BHOJANI



"I am not deserting small cinema; but it cannot be seen as a religion by itself."
KETAN MEHTA

To an extent, the crisis in the parallel cinema movement is the reflection of a larger problem facing the film industry in India: the threat from TV and video. With big-budget films flopping, the small film makers feel they stand even less of a chance. But while nobody expects big cinema to die out, there is growing concern over the fate of serious films.

"The situation seems hopeless today," says Shabana Azmi, one of the few who has done equally well in both. "I am in a state of total despair. For the last five years I have happily done my quota of entertainment films, confident of the fact that every year I would also have two or three good films on hand. Suddenly, it's no longer so and everybody—Shyam Benegal, Mrinal Sen, Gautam Ghosh—seems to be doing television."

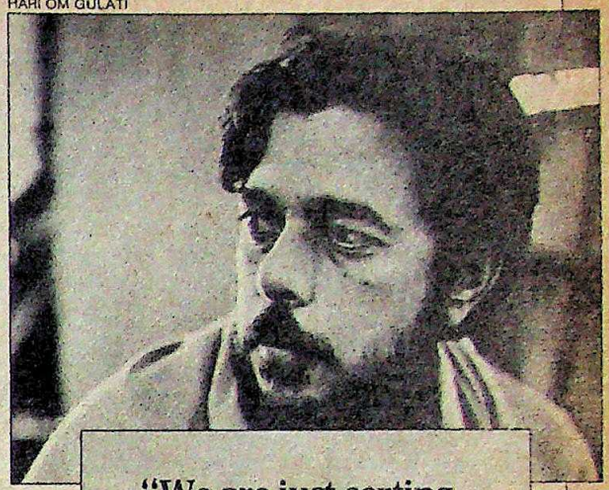
In fact, in recent months the films of many of the well-known directors from alternative cinema have been shown first not in cinema theatres but on the national network of Doordarshan. Producers can no longer sell these films to distributors; and with many good films lying unsold in the cans they have become wary of investing in any new projects. "Good cinema is dying its own natural death," says Manmohan Shetty, a partner in Neo Films, which produced *Ardh Satya*. "Though we are not in the red from the five films we have produced so far, we are not taking up any new films. There are no buyers any more."

Perhaps the best example of this disillusionment is Shashi Kapoor who, after producing five films with directors like Shyam Benegal, Govind Nihalani, Aparna Sen and Girish Karnad, now says that the whole venture was a money-losing mistake. Kapoor's Filmvalas lost substantially on its last production—Karnad's expensive erotic fantasy *Utsav*—and now Shashi is busy producing, directing or acting in a clutch of commercial films to try and recover his losses.

"My intention originally was to make good films which would also attract a large audience," says a bitter Shashi. But except for Benegal's *Junoon*, all the other films lost money, though Sen's *36 Chowringhee Lane* earned international acclaim for her and Filmvalas. "Basically," he rues, "I was let down by directors who have a lot of contempt for the audience and the craft of film making." Shashi, who is also on the board of NFDC, feels that with the present crisis, even good directors like Shyam Benegal will find it difficult to raise money for their films in the future.

Two of Benegal's films, *Trikaal* (completed in end-1985) and *Susman* (March 1986) are still awaiting release. *Trikaal* is now likely to be premiered on the national network. A prolific director whose name had become synonymous with the new cinema movement, Benegal is now fully involved in TV productions. Besides the current serial *Yatra*, he is now working on an ambitious 52-part series called *Discovery of India*.

HARI OM GULATI



"We are just sorting ourselves out. Good cinema is going through a transition."
SAEED AKHTAR MIRZA

Small cinema films had certainly captured the imagination of a section of the urban middle class but if the movement has begun to peter out, the film makers must take part of the blame. Essentially, the film makers are facing the consequences of not having bothered much about the audience. "We have been making films for international film festivals after seeing European and American classics at the Pune Film Institute," says critic Iqbal Masud. "This limited approach has cut off small cinema from the common people."

Many film makers zealously continued to make films about the dispossessed, acquiring the label of radical but perhaps alienating the middle class audience at the same time. Says Mani Kaul: "These films had as little chance of success as the family planning films. Films should be made on social issues, but in a far more complex manner than was the case in small cinema."

The other aspect ignored by the film makers was the pace of a film, influenced as they were by newfangled theories on cinema from Europe. In the early years, their reaction to the rigid format of the commercial cinema was to make some experimental films which broke new ground. But many directors later failed to utilise one of the main strengths of popular cinema—a

RAGHU RAI

"The situation seems hopeless today. I am in a state of total despair."
SHABANA AZMI

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good dramatic structure. Says Govind Nihalani: "One cannot be so totally esoteric and forget the pace of a film." Script-writers also let down the film makers, by producing unimaginative scripts without strong characters with whom the audience could identify. Shashi Kapoor, for instance, blames the failure of *Kalyug* entirely on the script-writers.

But at the same time, small cinema directors remained somewhat unconcerned about the commercial prospects of their films. Says Shah: "It is not at all surprising that there are no backers for good films, since 99 per cent of them failed to recover their costs." Adds Marathi film director Jabbar Patel, who directed Smita Patil in her finest role in *Umbartha*: "Small cinema stars like Smita, Naseer and Shabana felt let down by some directors who did not care at all about the distribution of their films. Now small cinema's biggest star is dead, and the future is gloomier than ever."

Lack of outlets has been the main reason for the gloom surrounding the movement. Setting up a chain of alternative small theatres was the only solution, but this was not done by the Government when it should have been: in the early years when real estate prices in urban areas had not shot up to the present heights. Says Shabana Azmi: "The Government goes on and on about the need for good cinema; but we have been clamouring for small theatres for years and nothing has been done so far."

Critics of the NFDC feel that the organisation let film makers down by not giving enough importance to distribution in a market dominated by commercial extravaganzas. In fact, the NFDC has faithfully reflected the Government's own confusion over whether good cinema should be subsidised or show profits like any other commercial activity. Argues NFDC General Manager Ravi Gupta: "Our sales get restricted as we cannot deal in black money. Then, high theatre rentals and publicity costs, along with a limited audience, also prevent our films from breaking even on the theatre circuit."

THE NFDC has been financing nearly 20 cinema theatres annually but has only recently introduced an economically feasible scheme whereby it can screen its films in these theatres for four weeks in a year. "Only exemption from entertainment tax will give a fillip to exhibiting good films," bemoans Gupta. "And we have been repeatedly stressing, without much success, that state governments should exempt the 21 films featured in the Indian Panorama of the film festival from the tax every year."

While there might be an audience for good cinema in the country, the fate of a recent attempt at an innovative distribution of serious films indicates that serious film buffs, used as they are to seeing good films virtually free, may not always be willing to pay even a nominal price to see a *Damul* or a *Holi*. Last year, Manmohan Shetty started an organisation called Movement to distribute serious films to the 700 registered film societies in the country. These societies together have five lakh members and Shetty calculated that even if each member paid Rs 2 to see a good film, the Movement would be viable. Recalls Shetty: "We put together a package of eight films, but discovered that film societies, used to getting prints free from the National Film Archives or foreign embassies, were not willing to pay anything for a good, new film."

Doordarshan is the new hope. So far some 10 small cinema films have been premiered on Doordarshan. The NFDC is planning to enter into joint productions with Doordarshan. After the films have been shown on television, the NFDC plans to exploit their potential on the theatre, video and overseas circuits. Says Benegal: "The situation can change if Doordarshan consciously makes the promotion of good cinema one of its objectives."

But increasing reliance on Mandi House has its major pitfalls too. Argues Kumar Shahani: "We must be careful not to talk about film as if it has no function except to make money. After all, if the Government considers cinema a powerful medium, then importance must first be given to the subject and its treatment by the director."

After *Saaransh*, Mahesh Bhatt felt that the death-watch of small cinema had begun. With *Janam*, he felt the powerful reach of television.

But if the film's theme and the director's approach are to determine whether it should be sponsored by Doordarshan, then Mandi House will have to protect small cinema from the tyranny of the advertiser. "Doordarshan should follow not the American but the British model, where advertisers come in only after the commissioning officer and the film maker have decided on the production," says Mani Kaul. "But here things are different, and recently Mandi House was even planning to ask film makers to first get the sponsor's approval."

But though joint productions with NFDC will surely help Mandi House develop a more complex perception of cinema, Doordarshan seems quite ambiv

Shyam Benegal's *Ankur* was the first small film to get a significant theatre audience. But now, he too can't sell his new films easily.

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lent about its own commitment to good cinema. It had taken up its own "telefilm" idea in 1985 but quickly abandoned it after the screening of just one film, Mahesh Bhatt's *Janam*. Bhatt had deserted mainstream cinema to direct *Arth* and *Saaransh*, but neither film was easy to distribute. "After *Saaransh* I felt the death-watch of small cinema had begun," says Bhatt, who is back as a full-fledged commercial film maker with the success of *Naam*. "But *Janam* did wonders for me and I became aware of the powerful reach of television." Despite the fact that *Janam* was well received, Doordarshan seems to have changed its mind and the second telefilm, Praveen Bhatt's *Jeevan Sandhya*, has been lying in the cans for the past four months.

Instead, Doordarshan has been occasionally telecasting good films on Saturday nights or Sunday evenings, paying a maximum of Rs 8 lakh (soon to be raised to Rs 10 lakh) for an unreleased film. But virtually every director whose film has been telecast complains about the reckless manner in which the film is cut by Doordarshan either to make it fit into the time slot or to conform to Mandi House's ideas about what is good for the audience. "Doordarshan's censorship is totally arbitrary and the director is never consulted," says Nihalani, who watched two of his films premiered on television, *Party* and *Aaghat*, after considerable vandalism by the censor's scissors.

Yet, as Nihalani (who is now directing the TV serial, *Tamas*) readily acknowledges, most serious film makers have not been able to resist the popular appeal of television. Many, like Saeed Mirza (*Nukkad*) and Kundan Shah (*Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi*), have tasted success on television that they couldn't have dreamed of in parallel cinema. And sometimes, as with *Party* and Ketan Mehta's *Holi*, audience response to TV premieres has prompted distributors to change their minds and buy them for modest theatrical releases, in Calcutta and Bangalore.

Govind Nihalani, whose *Ardh Satya* was the peak of parallel cinema, acknowledges that most serious film makers have not been able to resist TV's appeal.

SAEED Mirza—who after *Nukkad*'s success is negotiating for a film with Raj Kapoor—remains optimistic about the future. "We are just sorting ourselves out, good cinema is going through a period of transition," he says. "Now if Doordarshan and NFDC come together, a new phase will begin and I'll happily make a film for television, even though it would have to be completely different from my earlier films."

However, the altogether different aesthetic demands of television make critics wonder whether small cinema's saviour will also turn out to be its undertaker. "Television is a depressing alternative, since on the box the image is vulgarised and its subtlety is lost, with prominence given to close-ups," says critic Masud. "While television will provide a solution to the present crisis, film makers will have to keep up the battle for commercial release of good films."

Shabana shares this view. "TV can only be an alternative, it can never replace the magic of the movie theatre," she says. "And I am not being snobbish, I am only too aware of television's vast audience. After *Paar* was telecast, even junior artistes and technicians on Bombay film sets who would never have paid Rs 8 to see it in a theatre spoke to me about it."

One alternative, of course, is to go big with a vengeance, and this is precisely what Ketan Mehta now plans to do. Ketan's *Mirch Masala* has been hailed as the finest film to emerge from the new cinema movement, but for months it has been looking for a distributor. Now the film maker is on the verge of signing up Amitabh Bachchan for his next film, *Kartoos*, which will have the superstar playing Mangal Pandey in the 1857 War of Independence. "I am not deserting small cinema; but it cannot be seen as a religion by itself," asserts Ketan. "One is willing to take the risk of making a big budget film instead of accepting the marginal role that the commercial industry and the Government is willing to give to our kind of cinema."

Shabana defends Ketan's decision to make a film with Bachchan, the only star with both the acting abilities and the commercial appeal to carry off a big-budget film like *Kartoos*. "It's totally unrealistic to criticise small film makers for signing up big stars," she says. "I know other actors have been complaining, but it is also important to know how much one is worth commercially."

But *Kartoos* inevitably will only be a single shot in the dark. As far as most other small cinema directors are concerned, the future is crystal clear—there are no funds, no buyers, and only Doordarshan promises some kind of salvation. As even Shabana, who so confidently bridges the gap between small and commercial cinema, confesses: "I have been wanting to direct my own film, but now I am frightened. What is there to look forward to?" Small, finally, is no longer beautiful.

—M. RAHMAN

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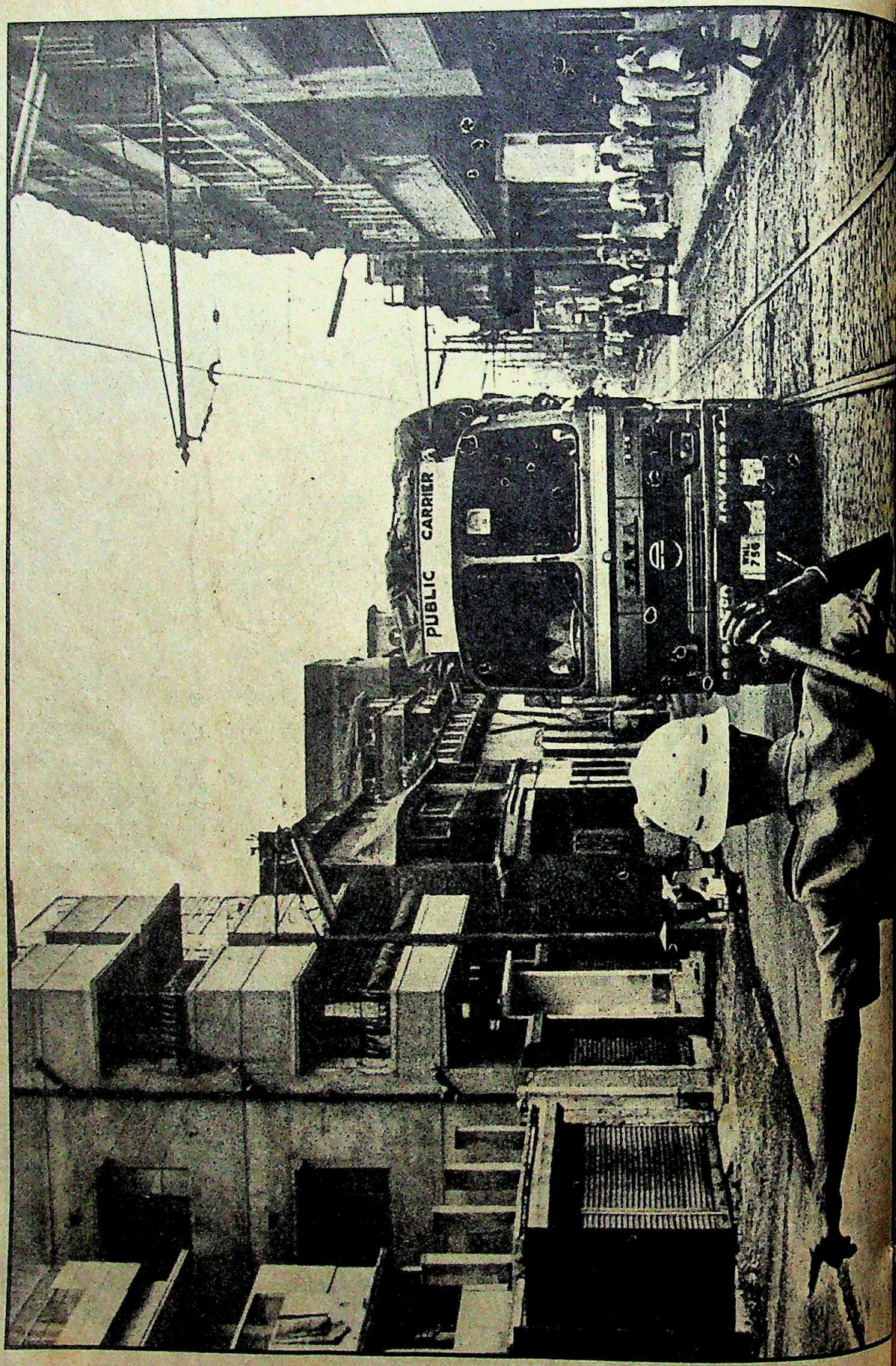

SNAPSHOT

RAGHU RAI

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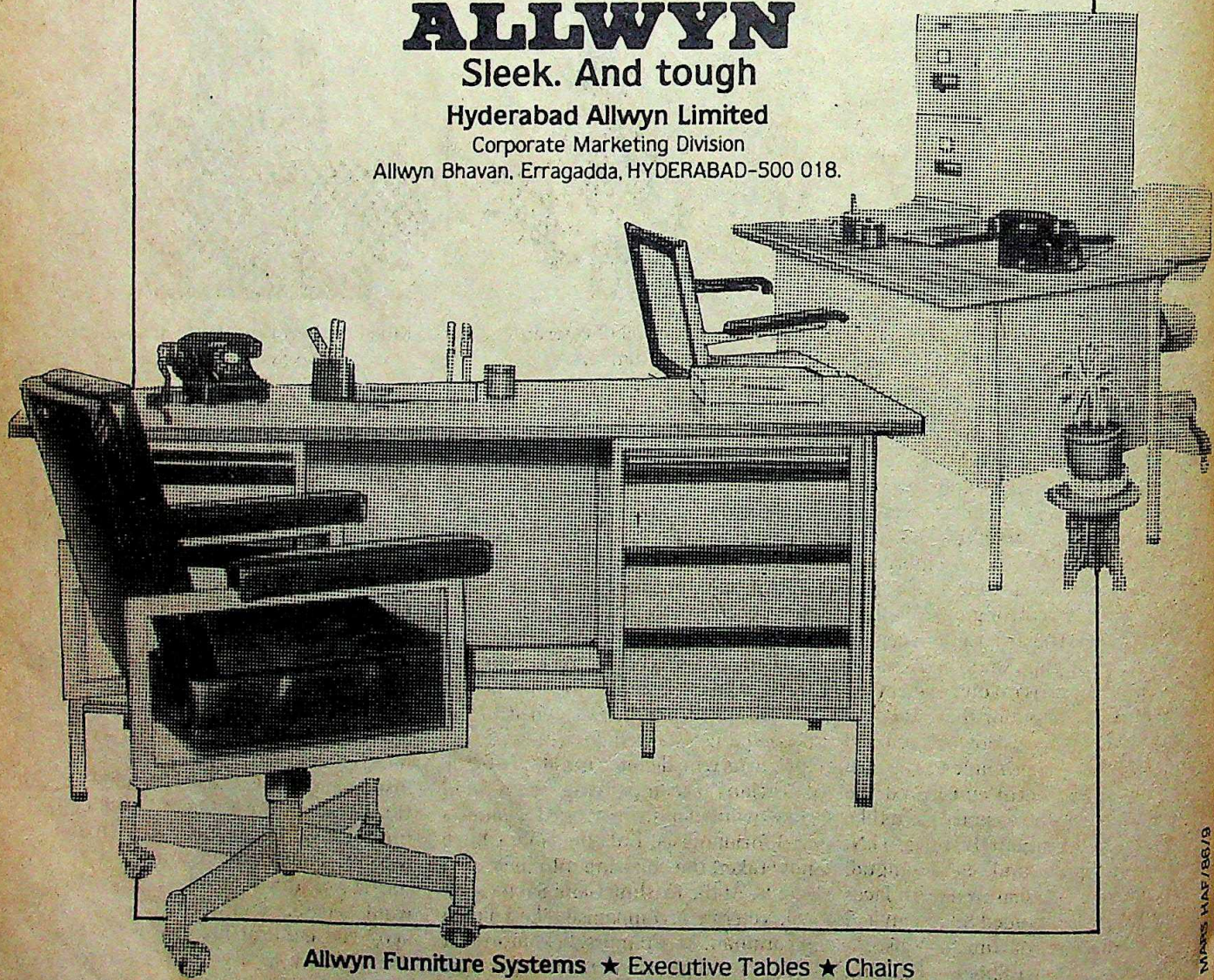

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MADRAS

New Melody

COME winter and the cultural season in Madras is off to a lilting start to the strains of the veena, the beat of the mridangam and the heady jingle of dancing feet. For more than 60 years, the annual festivals organised by the city's music groups—called sabhas—formed the staple of the city's populace, keeping alive the traditions of music and dance with their rigid adherence to classicism and purity. But over the past two years, a subtle change has crept in. Old faces have been replaced by new. Gurus are increasingly making way for the disciples. And in place of the musician is the multitude. As this year's concerts showed, the change is here to stay. Says T.T. Vasu, president of the Music Academy, which held its 60th annual festival recently: "This liberalisation augurs well for Carnatic music."

The sabhas—whose number has dwindled from over a hundred a decade ago to a mere dozen now—have realised that strict adherence to tradition can lead to stagnation. At its recent festival, the Krishna Gana Sabha—active for 31 years and today one of the biggest in the city—made a major break from the centuries-old tradition of solo recitals by organising a massive 10-day *Harinama Sangeerthanam* for the first time. Instead of a virtuoso expounding on the rigid grammar of Carnatic music, there was a mass of people singing bhajans—from Mirabai to Surdas—in unison. The audience response was stupendous; and not only because it was invited to participate. The bhajan-singing, originally scheduled for one hour every morning, had to be extended to one and a half hours with crowds thronging the sabha hall long before the programme began. Says R. Yagnaraman, the sabha's secretary: "The rapturous involvement of the audience was a sight for the gods."

The liberalisation is not just confined to imaginative programmes. The annual festivals, hitherto considered the exclusive preserve of seasoned gurus like Ariyakudi Ramanujam Iyengar, G.N. Balasubramanian and Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, also featured fresh faces this time. These included S. Sowmya, a teenaged disciple of musicologist S. Ramanathan; Vijaya Shiva, a budding singer learning under D.K. Jayaraman; Neyveli Santhanagopalan, a disciple of Madurai T.N. Seshagopalan; and Sudha Raghunathan, pupil of veteran vocalist M.L. Vasanthakumari. Apart from the annual festival, the sabhas have now started organising mid-year concerts solely to encourage budding artistes. Observes Bharat Natyam dancer Chitra Visweswaran: "A lot of young blood is being introduced." For the uninitiated but curious, there is a welcome addition to the festival: lecture-demonstrations to educate and stimulate interest in music. Says vocalist Seetha Narayan: "At a time when some musicians fear that Carnatic music is becoming unpopular, this will give a big boost to new talent."

Mixed gathering at Music Academy fete (top); and Sudha receiving award

The resilience has extended to the accompanists as well. Until now, it was the gurus who dictated the choice of the musicians accompanying them, and they wanted only seasoned violinists and mridangists. But the sabhas have now taken the choosing into their own hands. At the Krishna Gana Sabha festival, veteran accompanists like Lalgudi Jayaraman, M. Chandrashekharan and T.N. Krishnan, were replaced by the much younger violinists Kovai Balu and Nagai Muralidharan who played with veteran vocalists like Nedanuri Krishnamurthy, Maharajapuram Santhanam and Yesudas. Asserted Yagnaraman: "No matter how big the musician, it is the sabha which will fix the accompanying trio."

The new cultural openness is also reflected in the assimilation of traditions from outside. The dance recitals of Krishna Gana Sabha, hitherto confined to south Indian forms, now also include Kathak and Manipuri, besides north Indian folk forms like the Punjabi bhangra. Predictably, the sabhas' increasing liberalisation has also begun to infect other spheres of cultural life in this insular metropolis. Last fortnight, the Uttar Pradesh Government held a cultural festival in Madras, close on the heels of a similar fete put up in the city by the Orissa Government—events that would have been unheard of a few years ago. The cultural mandarins of Madras—known as arch conservatives—are now reaching out, thus making for a richer pattern of artistic integration.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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Rare Air Fare

MY YEARS WITH THE IAF
by Air Chief Marshal P.C. LAL
Lancer International
Price: Rs 195; Pages: 380

FEW battle-tested military commanders take the trouble to write about their experiences. Of those who try, fewer still can tell a gripping story. Air Chief Marshal P.C. Lal was one such man and this makes his book *My Years With the IAF* a rare one. His wife, Ela, wrote more than 50 per cent of it but allowed herself to be persuaded not to claim co-authorship by the publisher, who argued that the book would sell better under the former air chief marshal's name.

The book was only half complete when Lal died in 1982. Had he been a less meticulous man or Ela Lal a less dedicated wife, the book may never have seen the light of day. But he left detailed pencil-written notes, transcripts of interviews he had conducted with army commanders and a list of persons remaining to be interviewed. Working from his notes and within the structure he had outlined, his wife completed the book three years after his death.

Most of the source material is unimpeachable, and this makes it the first authentic, IAF-cleared account of the 1971 India-Pakistan air war. But the book's importance goes beyond that. It is a readable account of a turbulent period on the subcontinent. Lal wields a facile pen and injects suspense and drama into his description of air battles in Burma during the Second World War and those against Pakistan in 1965 and 1971.

That apart, it needed a man of Lal's integrity, conviction and fairness to put down all that he has. Another person would have let service loyalty prevail and glossed over the shortcomings of the war. Not Lal. He does not hesitate to point out that in 1971 the IAF was forced to use some Second World War bombs and nearly 40 per cent of them turned out to be duds. Or that the napalm canisters dropped by the IAF fighters over Pakistani fortifications often failed to ignite and the planes had to do a second circuit to fire at the canisters to set them alight. Lal punctures the myth that the highly successful attack on Karachi harbour on December 9 was the result of navy-air force coordination.

In fact the IAF pilots who carried out the crucial air raid that set fire to the oil tanks near Karachi harbour did not even know that the navy would be attacking the harbour. It was on his own initiative that the Canberra squadron commander K.K. Badhwar led four planes to attack the oil installations. He had earlier spotted the oil tanks but permission to bomb them was denied to him by the Pune station commander Air Commodore Dilbagh Singh and the Central Air Command. But on December 9 Badhwar was assigned some target in the Karachi harbour area and decided to have a go at the nearby tanks. The conflagration caused a serious oil shortage which forced Pakistan to import oil from Iran. But the navy claimed the credit for setting the oil installations on fire. Says Lal: "The navy and the air force acted in close collaboration though the aim to launch their respective attacks from the air and from the sea was not known to either of the participants."

Lal is sensitive about the way General Sam Maneckshaw went about making public statements about "his air force", as if the IAF was a subordinate service. And in the chiefs of staff committee, Maneckshaw "tended to ask for more information about the other two services than he gave out about the activities of the army....giving the impression that he was more concerned with 'using' the other services to his own ends rather than collaborating with them". Lal says he and the navy chief Nanda did not make this an issue lest it effect the war effort. But later Lal strongly opposed the proposal to appoint General Maneckshaw as chief of defence staff. But he is fair to Sam Bahadur: "If ever a military officer deserved such a rank (field marshal), it is he." He later notes: "It takes a war to make our people work together. Peace breaks them into narrow sectional pieces."

But the untold story of the book is his wife Ela's. She spent three years preparing the draft, read two dozen books on the 1948, 1965 and 1971 operations and conducted over 40 interviews. "It was like fitting together a big jigsaw puzzle," she recalled. Still he had completed the most important parts himself, including most of the material on the 1971 war with Pakistan and his "summing up" of the lessons. Ela's most vivid recollection was of the inner torment her husband suffered during those war days. Every morning he would call up his staff officer to check how many pilots had gone out on sorties the previous night and how many had returned. "We used to cook only stews and other soft foods. He lost a pound each day and by the end of the war he had started looking glamorous. He also acquired a duodenal ulcer."

Self-assessment is always a difficult task: rarely can a person give a fair account of one's achievements without overstepping into boastfulness. Lal treads the middle ground sure-footedly. This is the kind of book that whets the appetite. One hopes it will encourage or provoke people like Sam Maneckshaw and Jagjit Singh Aurora to pen their reminiscences. Without that no account of the 1971 war can be complete.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

RANJAN BASU

Ela Lal: combined effort

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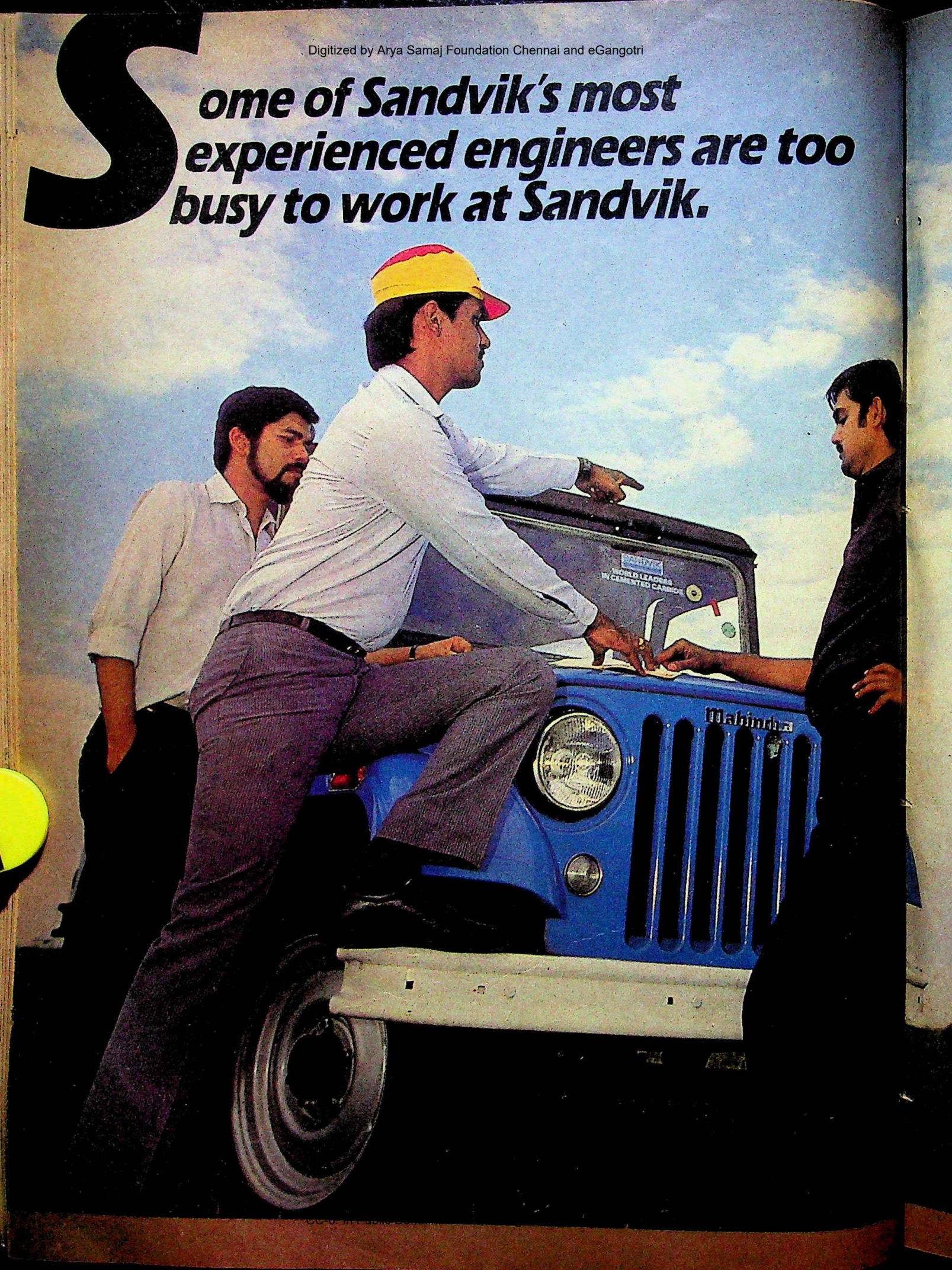

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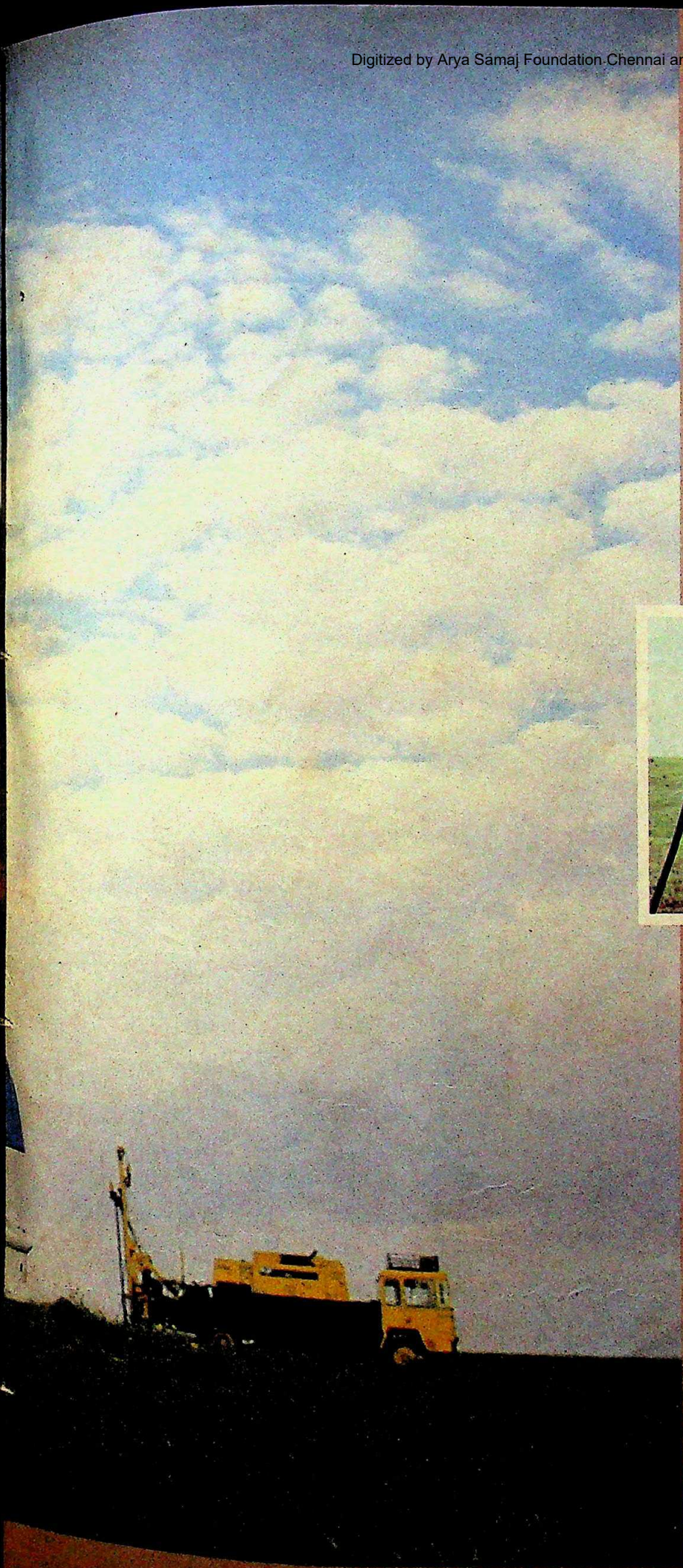

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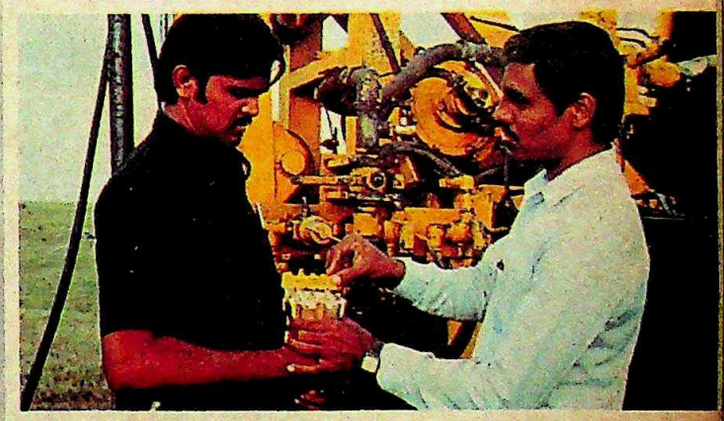

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◆ The *Air Hostess* used to fly once every week, until she finally landed for good last month. But she's far from grounded yet. **Kitu Gidwani**, the flying beauty who never showed her jet lag in the title role of the TV serial, is flying higher now. The model-turned-actress has just bagged an assignment that's going to make all the Sonu Walias and Kimi Katkars turn a deeper, wonderful shade of purple. She has been chosen by French film maker Christian Lara for his latest film *Black*. The prim-cheeked air hostess will now zoom into the jet set as a Brazilian theatre actress who lives in Paris and goes to Africa to do a play. In spite of the title and the theme, the film is not a dry document on apartheid. "It's an out and out fun film," says Gidwani, who wouldn't tell anyone how she clinched this plum deal. With the actress ready to shed and show all the way and with the film maker setting his sights on Cannes, the nights of insomnia may just wind on and on for the Walias and Katkars.

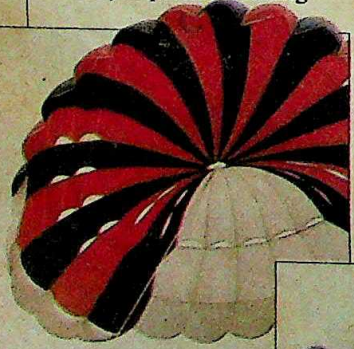
RATHIJIT GHATAK

Gidwani: flying high

◆ Serial number: 17. Date: 11.1.87. Type of launch: Parasail. Take-off time: 1317 hours. Landing time: 1319 hours. Person: **Rajiv Gandhi**. What, is an ex-pilot and present prime minister doing in the log book of the NCC Air Wing at Delhi's Safdarjung Aerodrome?

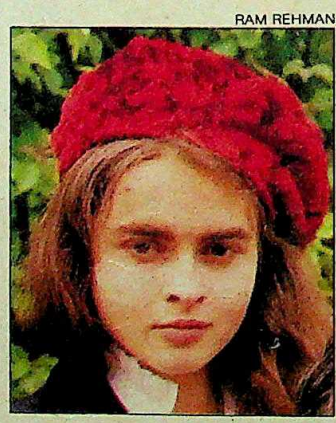
It all happened one morning last fortnight when Rajiv saw a group of NCC cadets afloat in their parasails, rehearsing for Republic Day. The PM descended on the assorted cadets, and commanders and ere they could recover their breath, helped himself to a parasail, and was gone with the whim. For two glorious minutes, he dipped, circled and swirled, making a perfect landing at the end. Confessed Rajiv, "Had a wonderful launch."

Rajiv: perfect landing



◆ She smiled and the Raj lived again. And the bunch of scribes could only gape for a while. "Come on, talk. Speak forth. I'm all here," she challenged and they gaped some more. Thus did **Helena Bonham Carter**—the love-lorn Lucy Honeychurch in Merchant-Ivory's *A Room With a View*—win the hearts of the press at the briefings during the Eleventh International Film Festival in New Delhi last fortnight.

RAM REHMAN



Helena: winning hearts

But it was not only newshounds whom she floored. The petite beauty, with true British blue blood coursing through her veins, was quite taken aback when a woman came up to her crying and told her how moved she was by her performance. But Carter had no stomach for compliments or adulation. She was busy gorging herself on "that lovely *kali dal* and *roti*". "We would get tired during the shooting," she disclosed. "But Ismail's succulent curries, *kulfi* and *dal* would make us work our palates off."

SIGNPOSTS

■ **Died: Raj Narain**, 69, after a cardiac arrest in New Delhi. The former health minister and veteran socialist leader had kept the political scene alive for decades with

his quixotic remarks and legal wrangles. Ironically, the man who defeated Mrs Indira Gandhi at Rae Bareli in 1977 also proved to be instrumental in her return and the fall of the Janata regime in 1980. With him, the country's political scenario has lost much colour.

■ **Died: Jaidev**, 68, after a cardiac arrest in Bombay. The noted composer will be remembered for the mellow touch that he brought to Indian film music with his classical-based compositions. In spite of winning the national award for best music director thrice, the shy and selective composer preferred to keep a low profile. He is credited with introducing and grooming several singers who are familiar playback voices today.

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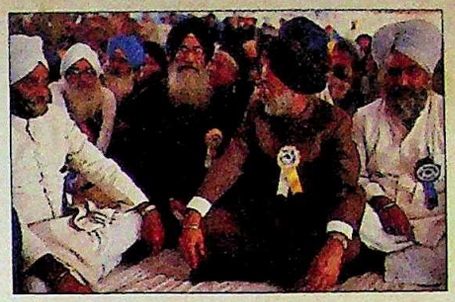
Government Waste

As much as 20 per cent of the Rs 100,000 crore that the Central and state governments spend in a year may be going waste. INDIA TODAY looks at the problem and spells out 12 laws that govern the colossal waste involved in government spending.

COVER STORY 86



Advantage Barnala

The mammoth Sikh convention at Longowal village last fortnight showed that Sikhs in large numbers are willing to condemn the politics of extremism. It was also a significant personal triumph for embattled Chief Minister Barnala.

SPECIAL REPORT 22

Playing to the Gallery

His visit was unofficial and the reception from his Indian hosts, cool. Yet President Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan managed to capture the glare of public and media attention during his unusual exercise in cricket diplomacy last fortnight.

CURRENT EVENTS 34

To Jail and Back

After two years in jail, Rajinder Sethia, who gained notoriety as the world's biggest bankrupt, was finally released on bail. But he still has to extricate himself from the tangle caused by unrecovered loans to London branches of Indian banks.

SPECIAL FEATURE 64

Shattered Lives

The trickle of Chakma refugees fleeing into Tripura from Bangladesh to escape atrocities by Bangladesh security forces has become a flood. The tales of brutality they bring are shocking but their numbers are certain to cause problems.

SPECIAL REPORT 76

The Merchant from Bombay

After years of making low-budget, artistically superior films, Ismail Merchant has hit the jackpot at last—with his latest film *A Room With A View*, which has grossed over Rs 65 crore since its release. A profile of a unique film maker.

CINEMA 124

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The Business Trip

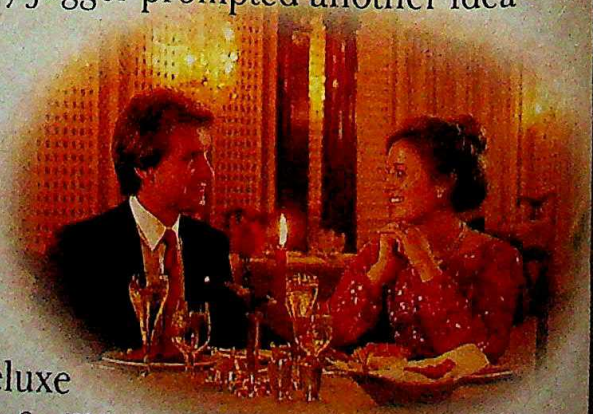
For the creative manager, innovative solutions are not always the result of a sequential working out of management syllogisms. They are very often the result of patterns formed out of millions of bits of information (not necessarily business-oriented) scattered over the vast expanse of his unconscious mind. This, of course, is a truism.

Innovation therefore seems to get bullied out of its rightful place by the tyranny of the well-ordered, step-by-step routine of corporate existence—of time-consuming maintenance and fire-fighting. Today the executive realises the need to switch on another process of 'thinking' that will compress time and jog his intuition to arrive at that moment of illumination. The office and the home may not always be the best environmental stimuli for this kind of thinking.

Many have confessed however, to a surprising glimmer of intuition on particular occasions—those corporate errands outside their work city. Forced out of the discipline of commercial routine the mind seems to free-float to possible illumination. "You travel to this other city on a pressing matter, which you are going to sort out," said an executive, "but the pleasant surprise is that you suddenly seem to see answers to questions that troubled you on quite another matter. This comes as a kind of bonus on such trips. I don't know how it happens, but it does."

The concept of the business trip as creativity jogger prompted another idea—the hotel room as creativity jogger.

The hospitality designers of Welcomgroup asked themselves the question:
"Can we create an environment that will encourage this creativity jogging?"



They realised that this would call for more than the plushness and luxury of the five-star deluxe experience or the obvious provision of executive facilities

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as Creativity Jogger.

and access to equipment. It would require the creation of an atmosphere of a different kind of exclusivity which allowed for uncluttered mental room combined with quiet intellectual stimulation.

It meant shaping a whole new quality of property and services. It involved programmes of executive life-style study and intensive training for a new breed of hotel personnel.

Maurya Sheraton Towers

Thus was born the idea of the Maurya Sheraton Towers which is now an international reality.

To describe the Maurya Towers it is necessary to dispel the traditional notions associated with five-star hotels. The hyperbole and the superlatives (that come to mind if you view the 'Towers' in the context of other hotels) are inadequate, for the simple reason that the Maurya Towers is another genre in the art of executive hospitality.

The exclusivity of each floor, the elegant design of the rooms; the Business Centre and conference rooms; the intellectual stimulation of the Tower Club with its library and bar, the dining room and the health club; the exquisite taste with which every corner is designed...all these are incomparable, but in a way not the real discriminators.

The real difference is in the intangibles which the sensitive and mature intellect will perceive; in the finesse, the unobtrusiveness of the service, the charm and the flair with which the personnel allow you that much-needed quiet and freedom (from even the smallest of irritants) to do your intuition-jogging.

Admittedly the Maurya Towers is not for everyone. But for you and your nucleus of brilliant people it certainly could be an investment in creativity.

The Maurya Sheraton Towers, at the Welcomgroup Maurya Sheraton, Diplomatic Enclave, New Delhi-110 021

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He works with some of the loveliest women in India

One photograph by Glamour Photographer Adrian Steven, says more about a beautiful woman than a thousand words.

Adrian transforms the fashion model from a mere clotheshorse to a warm, intelligent, exciting woman, one who celebrates the glamorous life. That she is beautiful to boot merely adds to her desirability.

With what does Adrian work his wizardry?

A battery of cameras, though his favourite format is the 35mm, which he says gives him the sharpest results.

I notice, not without pleasure, that there are a few cartons of Konica color film on his table.

I ask him how he finds Konica.

"You tell me", says Adrian.

He opens a folder and carefully removes a set of new portraits he says he's just done on Konica film, Konica paper.

I whistle softly. Glowing skin, soft red mouth, silken fabric... they look almost touchable. I leaf through the prints slowly.

When I look up, Adrian is loading a camera for another assignment, due in minutes.

And joy of joys, he's using Konica.

Konica

SR-V 100

COLOR FILM & PRIN

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INDIA TODAY
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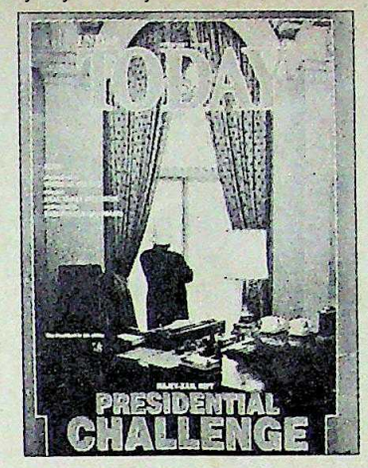

CONTROVERSIAL RIFT

In a country where the Government is armed with dictatorial powers, it is a welcome change to see a president who refuses to be a rubber-stamping authority only ("Presidential Challenge", February 28). By questioning many of the decisions made by the Government, Gianiji has proved beyond doubt that Parliament is not performing the duties entrusted to it by the people.

Ahmedabad VINOD C. DIXIT

■ Your story on the President is yet another intellectual exercise in futility. While there will undoubtedly be a mild shock if Singh does not approve the Postal Bill, our constitutional institutions are such that the same bill can be enacted that much more harshly. One wonders why we need a president at all. Such is the state of Indian democracy.

Calcutta U.S. SAHASRANAMAN

■ After inviting Rajiv Gandhi to form a government—after Mrs Gandhi's assassination—without even waiting for the majority party to elect its leader, why has Gianiji suddenly become overzealous? His motives in trying to prove that the President is no more a mere rubber-stamp are obvious. He seems to have set his eyes on another term.

New Delhi GEORGE MATHEW

■ It is a sad reflection on the state of affairs that the holders of the two most respected posts in our country should indulge in such petty squabbles. One hopes that both Rajiv and Gianiji will show more maturity in the future.

Kottayam V.K. SATHYAVAN NAIR

■ The controversy between Rajiv and Zail Singh, apart from the *mirch masala* it has generated, has also brought to life a constitution which is more violated than defended, ever since the infamous declaration of the Emergency.

Bangalore G.I. DZOUZA

FRACTURED IMAGE

Your cover story ("Crumbling Credibility", February 15) reveals how and why Rajiv's image has taken such a severe beating in an astonishingly short period. On his election, all of us had dearly hoped that he would make an excellent prime minister. But now it appears that our hopes were misplaced. Rajiv is increasingly being seen as a leader who is not well-versed in the art of governance, has an autocratic bent of mind and is greatly susceptible to pressure.

New Delhi SUSHIL MEHTANI

■ You have done justice to A.P. Venkateswaran. All right-thinking Indians can only pray: "May his tribe increase."

Calicut C.P. CHANDRA DAS

■ With reference to your story criticising the prime minister's behaviour, it needs to be pointed out that bureaucrats have not been able to keep pace with changing times and have failed to arouse confidence among the public. Our politicians are to some extent responsible for inefficiency but our bureaucrats also cannot escape responsibility, because they are busy pleasing their political masters. I think Rajiv is justified in admonishing the top ranking bureaucrats.

Ahmedabad ATUL SHAH

■ It is not the dismissal of a senior bureaucrat like Venkateswaran which was so shocking as the manner in which Rajiv Gandhi chose to do it. Even the late Raj Narain couldn't have been credited with such a blunder.

Baroda NAZNEEN S. VIMADALAL

■ Whatever be the justifications given for the shifting of V.P. Singh from Finance to the Defence Ministry, the public will perceive it as a victory of the dishonest businessman and a blow to upright and straightforward people. To regain the people's confidence Rajiv should restore Singh's portfolio.

Aizawl K. VITTAL SHETTY

■ By constantly shifting those of his ministers who seem to gain popularity by doing their jobs well, the prime minister is only showing one of the most common of human ailments: jealousy. It

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Examine the significance of a product line that's totally pollution free.

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Crompton Greaves are everywhere. In the city. In the village. At the factory. And at home. Crompton Greaves. With 9 manufacturing units, a network of 16 sales branches, and a work force exceeding 9000, it's the company people like to take for granted. Because it's so reliable.

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It's the company whose significance can only increase as environmental pollution threatens.

We were the first. We are the future.

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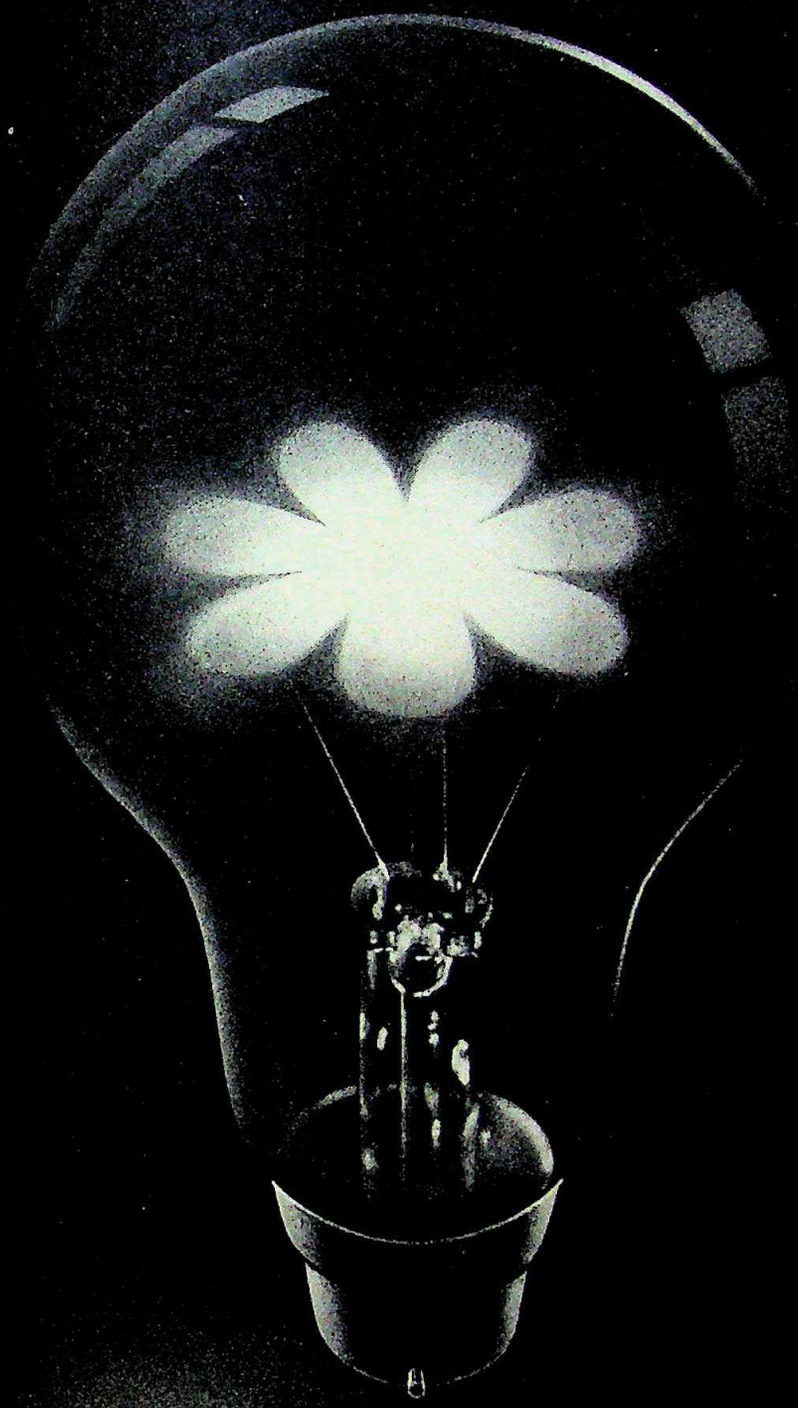

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also means that he now loves power and wants to sit on top.
Simla PRAMOD SUD

DANGEROUS INTERFERENCE

With reference to your editorial ("A Dangerous Mix", February 28), it is unthinkable that the chief minister of a secular country should subject his office to the dictates of a religious body. Barnala came to power obviously because people other than Sikhs voted for him. Under such a situation, the order of Sikh priests demanding that he step down, defies logic.
Delhi KAMALESH PRASAD

■ It is not the first time that the Akal Takht priests have acted as an extra-constitutional authority and interfered in national politics. Barnala should take a stand that "hukumnamas" of the Akal Takht cannot be issued on matters which have nothing to do with religion.
Agra M.C. GUPTA

GREAT CONTRIBUTION

Your coverage of the great flutist ("The Magic of his Flute", February 28) Hari Prasad Chaurasia who made his name by his dedication and devotion to music was excellent. Chaurasia has contributed greatly in popularising classical Indian music to foreign audiences.
Jamshedpur BHUPENDRA NATH BOSE

A CAVALIER STYLE

Your hard-hitting Comment ("The Importance of Style", February 15) could not have been better timed. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who is sailing the country to the 21st century post-haste, has laid bare his cavalier handling of matters. His style of functioning leaves the impression that he is vulnerable to lobbyism.
Ahmedabad M.V. RAVINDRAN

UNJUSTIFIED ATTACK

Your article ("Bearing the Blockade", February 15) was excellent. The economic blockade of innocent people is meaningless and will surely not yield the result the Sri Lankan Government hopes for. It is time India took a stronger stand by stopping exports to Sri Lanka and persuading other friendly countries to do so. Only steps like this might bring some sense to the Sri Lankan Government which uses diplomacy as a cover for its brutal attack on innocent Tamils.
Ramachandrapuram S.R. RAMAN

NOT OUT OF TURN

Your item in Capitalook ("Loose Mouth", February 15) was a gross distortion of facts. It made two points: first, that I spoke out of turn at a conference of state ministers of power on Januray 15 at which the prime minister was supposed to be the first speaker, and I was therefore responsible for a breach of protocol; second, that I to use your own words, "sprang up" to speak at a session of the Indira Gandhi Memorial Conference (Towards New Beginnings), without being specifically invited by the organisers to do so.

The truth is that I spoke according to schedule at the ministerial conference and did not in any way attempt to upstage the prime minister. Similarly, I was invited to attend the Indira Gandhi Conference as an observer by the prime minister's adviser, Sri Sharada Prasad. And at the conference I had sought written permission from the chairman of the afternoon session to read a paper after the main speakers had finished. I was, very graciously, given the required permission to do so. I am therefore pained to see how your respected magazine could have drawn such uncharitable and uncalled for references. I do not mind a considered criticism of my views, as indeed, should be in a proper dialogue. But in this case you resorted to gratuitously sarcastic comment.
New Delhi VASANT SATHE
Union minister of energy

■ *It is true that on both occasions Mr Sathe spoke according to the official plans and did not breach protocol. No ridicule was intended; the error is regretted.*
—Editor

DEPRESSING STATE

Your article ("Facing the Facts", February 15) clearly brought to light the weaknesses in Indian sports. In spite of such a large population, India has failed to produce sportsmen of international repute. In hockey, even small countries like South Korea have overtaken us. Politicking, lack of seriousness among sportsmen, use of old techniques, lack of practice as also funds, and the poor quality of equipment has played havoc in the field of sports. Only a fundamental restructuring can improve the situation.
New Delhi R. BHASKARAN

■ The Indian Olympic Association, probably for the first time, has made a realistic appraisal of a debacle. The whole nation is electrified when a P.T. Usha or a Padukone or for that matter an Indian team, becomes a world beater. Indeed, even if a fraction of the funds frittered away in superficial propaganda on national unity is diverted towards sport, we may have men and women who will do the nation proud.
Lonavla P.H. KAPADI

KILLING CRICKET

Thanks for the statistical analysis ("Way of the Wicket", February 15). The regal charm of Test cricket is already on the wane as more people prefer one-day matches. It is the dead Indian pitches which are responsible.
Darjeeling TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

GOOD SHOW

Your report ("Changing Panorama", February 15) made interesting reading. A short resume of the major Indian films made it even more enjoyable. The language was excellent.
Allahabad SAHID AMIR

POOR QUALITY

After paying a high-price, everybody expects that the indigenous toys function properly ("In High-Tech Land", February 15). It is surprising that some of the toys have won awards. It seems that prizes are given either due to its looks or because of the company's brand name, not due to its performance. It is essential that the standard of Indian toys improve.
Delhi R.R. CHAWLA

DIFFERING ASSESSMENT

Your story ("Ghosts of the Past", February 15) is misleading. There is no anti-Marwari or anti-Bengali feeling in Assam. Views of this kind only lower the image of the Assamese people.
Guwahati K. DUTTA

PROVING A POINT

Your report ("A Contentious Call", January 31) was nothing but an attempt to malign Shahabuddin. The peaceful bandh observed by the Muslims on February 1 proves whether Shahabuddin is a nonentity and the Babri mosque question a non-issue.
Bombay NAUSHAD ASLAM KHAN

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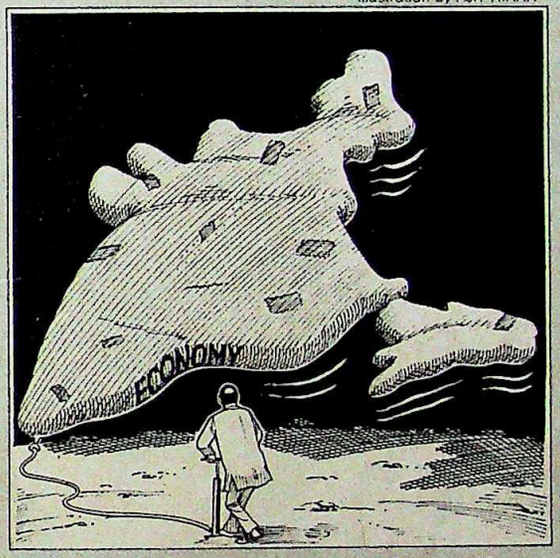
COMMENT
THE ECONOMY

Need To Aim Higher

THERE is little doubt that, in a fundamental sense, the Indian economy has entered an era of faster growth, and that it is at a distinctly different state of development than was the case even a decade ago. This has been evident to the discerning eye for some time, but it is only now that the Government's statistics fully reflect the new reality. India may or may not have reached what a theorist once called the 'take-off stage', but an average annual economic growth rate of 5 per cent in the 1980s is a quantum improvement over the 3.5 per cent growth rate that prevailed till the mid-1970s. And now, the Government's figures say that Indian industry has, in fact, been growing at nearly 8 per cent annually, and not at under 6 per cent as was thought earlier.

Illustration by AJIT NINAN



Certainly, the signs of development are everywhere, as also of better economic management. Food shortages have been banished, and even repeated failures of the monsoons have not led to the national crises that would have been automatic not so long ago. There hasn't been a single year of double-digit inflation throughout this decade. And the economy shows every sign of moving from a shortage-oriented system to a surplus-oriented one, as also from rigid controls to flexible policy stances. The entrepreneurial base has been broadened, while savings and investment rates (which help build for the future) remain high. Even internationally, the country's image has changed from being a basket case to one where economic successes have been scored.

This is not to say that there are no problems. Indeed, the task of economic development has barely begun in a country that still ranks near the bottom in any international ranking of socio-economic indices like per capita income, infant mortality, literacy and unemployment. In addition, there is further cause for worry about the large foreign trade deficit, the modest foreign exchange reserves, the growing industrial sickness, and the imminent threat of environmental disaster because of widespread deforestation, the rapid spread of wastelands as well as the growing incidence of droughts and floods. Finally, the employment challenge remains unmet.

Nevertheless, it is important that a consciousness of the achievements of the past permeate thinking and decision-making, and that those who have a role in economic planning do not stay in a mind-set that belongs to an earlier age and another situation. The Rajiv Gandhi Government has done well to change the focus of national economic debate in at least some ways—stressing the need for efficiency, economies of scale, international competitiveness, modernisation and freedom for entrepreneurship. But the action on the ground has been less impressive than the high-sounding objectives, and some of the economic policy liberalisation that has been attempted amounts to little more than tinkering. In some ways it would seem that the more things change, the more they remain the same. Besides, there is now the real danger that, as the prime minister's graph of political popularity dips, he will lose the initiative on the economic front as well. For instance, with public sector employees up in arms it seems unlikely that an embattled prime minister will try to trim flabby public sector organisations that have surplus labour.

That will be a pity, because the new economic situation presents an opportunity that no previous prime minister has had. And it will be a pity if, having attained take-off speed, the economy continues to remain grounded in the mire because the Government couldn't get its act together. In a country endowed with plentiful natural resources, agricultural strength and an intelligent, enterprising people, failure to perform can only be because the right environment was just not created.

There is still plenty of scope for freeing the economy from regulatory controls that inhibit productive activity. The challenge of replacing the 'babu culture' with one that places a premium on enterprise and purposeful action still remains. On the industrial front, good money continues to be thrown after bad because the problem of industrial sickness is not being confronted head on. In agriculture, the green revolution could spread much faster if the potential created by irrigation schemes did not lie half unused. While foreign exchange is a problem, the Government must realise that there is something fundamentally wrong with its policies if Indians stash away large sums of dollars abroad. And, a tremendous amount of surpluses generated by the economy ends up as wasteful government expenditure—at a time when the pressures on government finances are all too evident. All Government expenditure should not only be audited but the justification for it evaluated in detail. Finally, programmes in family planning, rural development and literacy need to be made far more effective, because the return on outlays in these sectors is pretty dismal.

The Government has taken the first steps towards reform in many of these areas but seems now to be losing steam when it should be pushing still harder for change and improvement. The prime minister needs to ask much tougher questions than he has so far, and ensure change in areas that cry out for change. Rajiv Gandhi's greatest strength is his pragmatism, and he should show some boldness on the economic front. Instead of getting caught in the cobewebs of worn out shibboleths like the Industrial Policy Resolution of 1956, his buzzwords should be productivity, profits and surpluses. After all, his record in office will be judged in terms of whether he recognised an opportunity to build on past successes, and whether he capitalised on it to reach for a vision of a more prosperous country.

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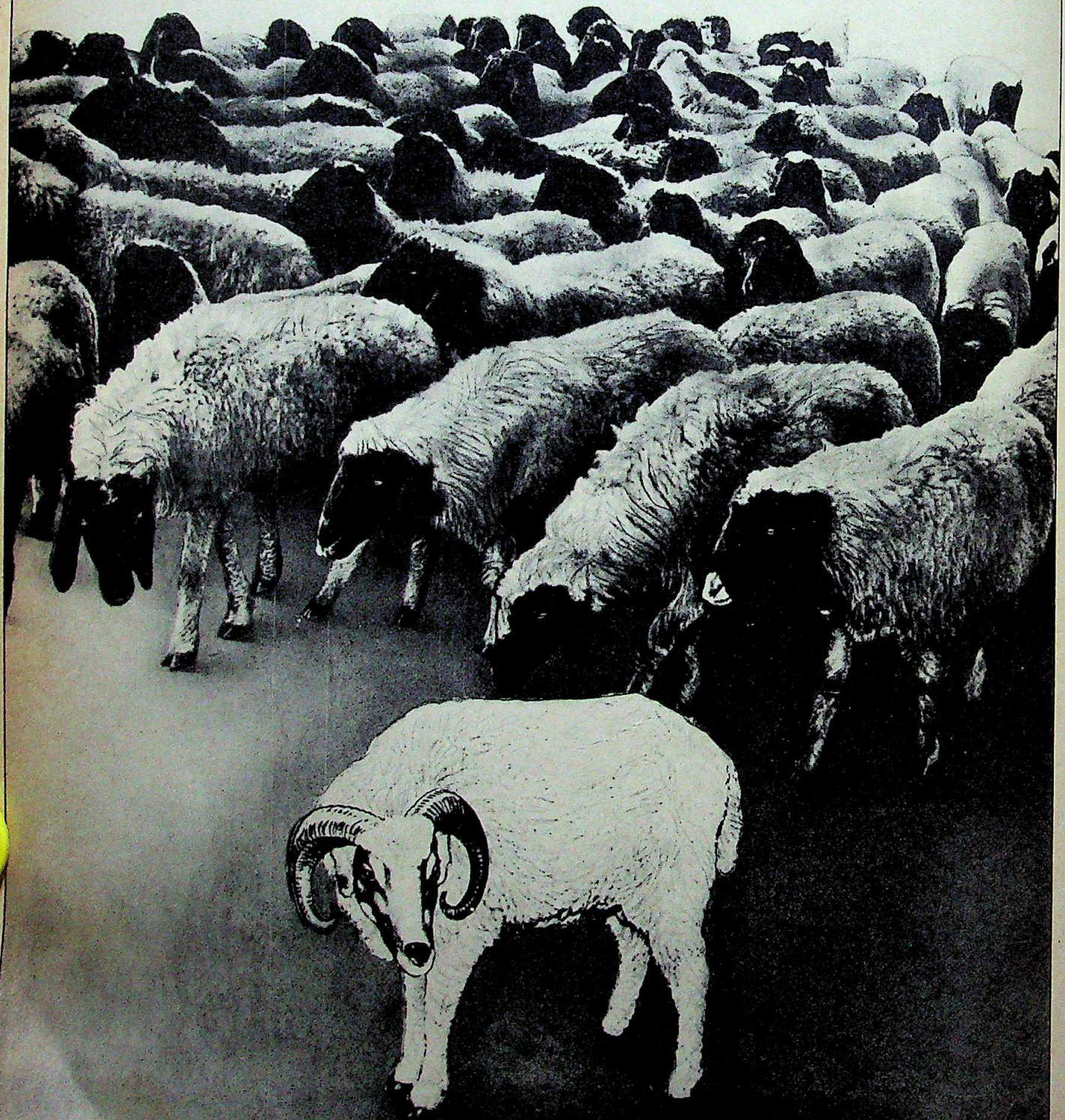
It's the exception that proves the rule!



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The rule of thumb in choosing a copier is features and price. But what takes the chance out of your choice is the secret of the Modi Xerox difference – the difference between buying just a box and getting the best out of it.

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In terms of price, the range starts with the 1025 1:1 – the lowest priced A-3 Size-to-Size copier in India.

"How do I know you're not selling me an outdated machine?"

Because the '10' Series of copiers is the current range marketed by Xerox Corporation worldwide. Indeed, Modi Xerox introduced the 1025 only 6 months after its international launch, making it the most modern copier available in India today.

Check the facts about how modern some of the 'latest' competitive models are!

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That's the Modi Xerox difference!

Getting the best from your copier means getting the most from your investment. That means maximising and enhancing copier usage.

"How on earth do you enhance copier usage?"

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"Computer Software I know, but Copier Software?"

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- Film Overlay System

These packages enable your copier to :

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– speed up information flow.

The Modi Xerox Duplicating Price Plan is another innovative enhancement tool.

"What is this Duplicating Price Plan?"

It is a unique scheme which combines the convenience, speed and copy quality of the Modi Xerox 1045 with the economy of more traditional methods of duplicating, such as stencils. Under this Plan the more copies you take from one original, the cheaper each copy becomes!

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"Fine. How do I maximise copier usage?"

- Maximising copier usage means that your copier must work when you want and for as long as you want. Modi Xerox has the largest service force in the industry, to ensure the highest possible uptime on your copier.
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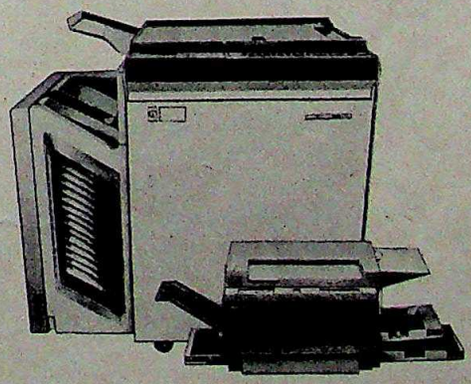

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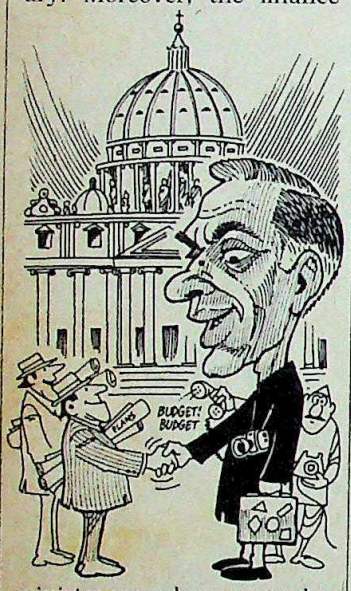
Mysterious Mission

● What was Minister of State for Finance Brahm Dutt doing for a whole week in Italy when by all logic he should have been the one person whose presence in New Delhi was most urgently required? Dutt had just joined the Finance Ministry after the latest cabinet shake-up in late January. Moreover, the finance



minister was also new to the job. And, most important, the details of the annual budget were in the process of being finalised. Yet, instead of familiarising himself with his new charge and the budget exercise, Dutt was visiting Milano, Florence and Rome and talking to Italian oil explorarion companies while files piled up in his North Block office in New Delhi. His absence from the capital led to rumours that he was sent on a mission to further strengthen the crucial Indo-Italian business connection—a connection which had substantially weakened during V.P. Singh's stay at the Finance Ministry. (It was during Singh's tenure that Italian companies lost the Rs 900-crore Hazira pipeline contract).

But Dutt insists that he had committed himself to the visit at the invitation of the chairman of the ENI group, the state-owned consortium that includes companies like Snamprogetti. Says Dutt: "I had accepted the invitation when I didn't know that I would be given this additional charge (of finance)." But officials in the Finance Ministry say that they expect some major deals to be signed with Italian companies following the Dutt visit.

Raids Reinforced

● The prime minister's office is desperately keen to dispel the general impression that the transfer of former finance minister V.P.Singh was not under pressure from industrialists upset with Singh's 'raid raj'. Last fortnight, special instructions went out from the prime minister's office to the revenue department of the finance minister ordering them to not only continue with raids on prominent business houses but also to publicise them as widely as possible. The directive to the Finance Ministry

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

clearly stated that special briefings should be held for the media on the raids and publicity should also be given to them on Doordarshan. Ironically, it was the prime minister's office which had earlier directed the Finance Ministry to refrain from publicising the raids till a formal chargesheet was filed against the businessmen involved. The instructions had been issued after the arrest of L.M. Thapar, chairman of the Thapar Group of Industries, was given very wide media publicity.

Calling Quits

● One major gripe of IAS officials is that while there is lateral movement in the service, upward mobility gets choked off because senior po-

sitions continue to be occupied after they should have fallen vacant—often because senior retirees manage to secure extensions or re-employment with their perks and powers intact.

Younger IAS officials want a change. Some recently made a recommendation to the IAS Officers Association asking for a special meeting at which they will seek a pledge from colleagues to abstain from seeking—and to turn down if offered—any new job with the Government after retirement. While it is not binding, the proposal will make senior IAS-wallahs on the brink of retirement and angling for slots, a little uncomfortable. Also, about-to-retire officials on the lookout for new assignments curry favour with ministerial bosses by bending over backwards. "Our proposal," said one official, "will not only clear the logjam at the top but also introduce more integrity."

Stormy Minutes

● The last thing Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi expected is that somebody was keeping minutes of last month's stormy meeting in which he flared up at two secretaries—D. Bandhopadhayay of rural development, and C.S. Sastry of agriculture—for unsatisfactory audio-visual programmes. But somebody did.

A few days later the officials present asked Serla Grewal, principal secretary to Rajiv, whether minutes of the meeting were going to be circulated. Grewal promptly shot down the idea. But sure enough, a Department of Science and Technology official had kept detailed notes, and the minutes were duly circulated to all concerned.

Grewal later received a gleeful call from an official, saying that he had got the minutes, after all. These con-

tained specific references to Rajiv warning that more secretarial heads would roll; that Bandhopadhayay and Sastry be transferred to their home states by 4 o' clock that afternoon; and other unsavoury utterances. An angry Grewal had all the copies recalled. So when the history of the Government under Rajiv is written, some saucy details will be missing.

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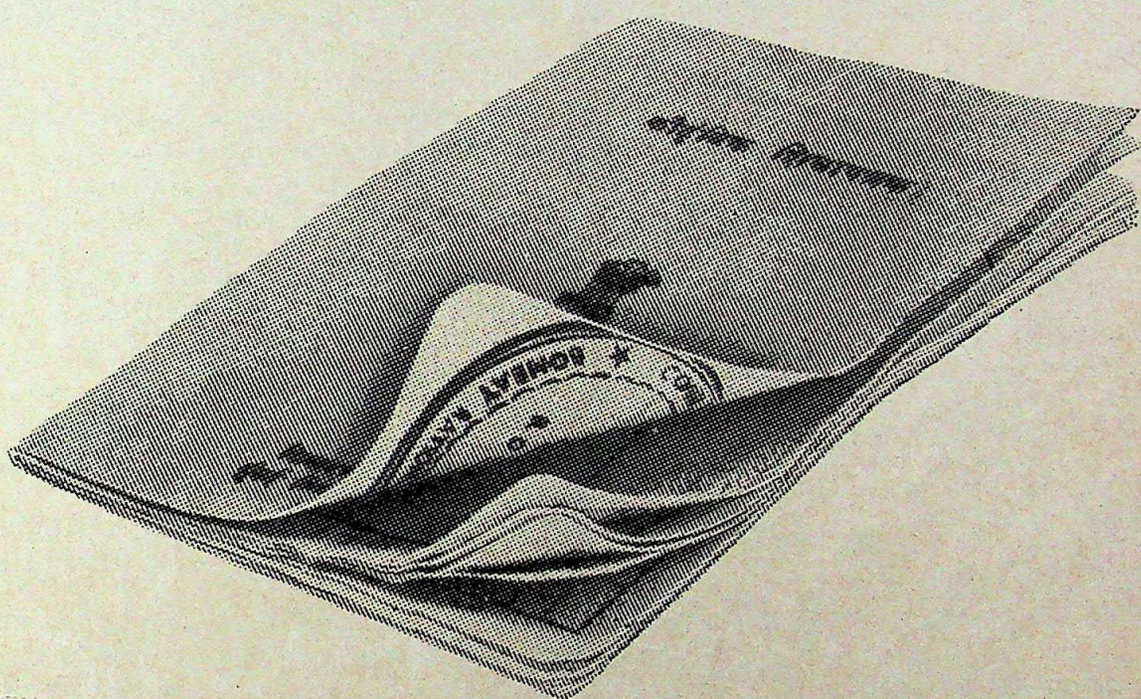

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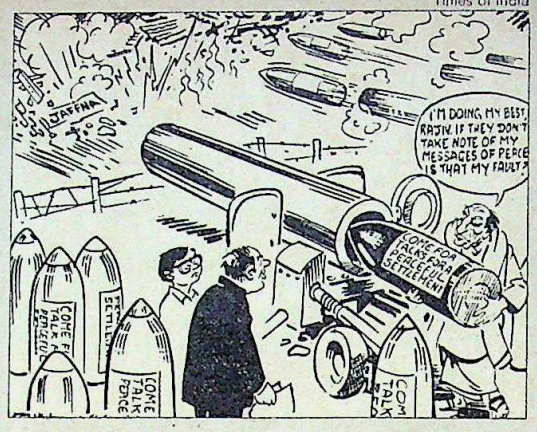

● *I thought I had been isolated because I am an outcaste. But thousands of people who come here to see me say I am a true Sikh.*

■ S.S. BARNALA, Punjab chief minister, after his excommunication.

● *One can deal with a problem in two ways—using the soft or the hard approach. I think the Centre and Barnala have used the first option for quite some time.*

■ RACHHPAL SINGH, of the Akali Dal (Master Tara Singh group) in *Sunday Observer*

● *The historic peace accord (has) proved how far the Congress(I) can rise above partisan considerations in the greater interest of the nation.*

■ RAJIV GANDHI while campaigning for the Mizoram Assembly polls

● *If I bear arms I will bear them for the integrity of India.*

■ LALDENGA on whether he would go underground if his party lost the elections, in *Patriot*

● *No state, no vote.*

■ SUBHAS GHISING announcing boycott of the West Bengal polls, in *The Telegraph*

● *The Left Front's failure to persuade the Election Commission to accept a date of its choice is evidence that some are more equal than others.*

■ Editorial in *The Statesman*

● *Call them permanent civil servants. Bureaucrat has become a pejorative term. If you want to denigrate somebody you say he is a bureaucrat.*

■ B.K.NEHRU in *Sunday Mail*

● *Rajiv has to manage a council of ministers with largely undistinguished men and women. It is an irony that the Congress(I) with its elephantine majority in Parliament does not yield talent that is the size of even a mouse.*

■ RGK in *The Week*

● *My best all round performance in Tests and I really thought that I would not be playing.*

■ ROGER BINNY after his first-inning six-wicket haul in the second Test, in *Indian Express*

● *Naseeruddin Shah fits the ape category—he totally conforms to the character he plays.*

■ H.R.F. KEATING, author of *A Perfect Murder* being filmed in India and starring Shah

● *When I have a face and a body why shouldn't I exhibit it? Other actresses have not been able to do (this) because they are not so gifted.*

■ JAYAPRADA in *Current*

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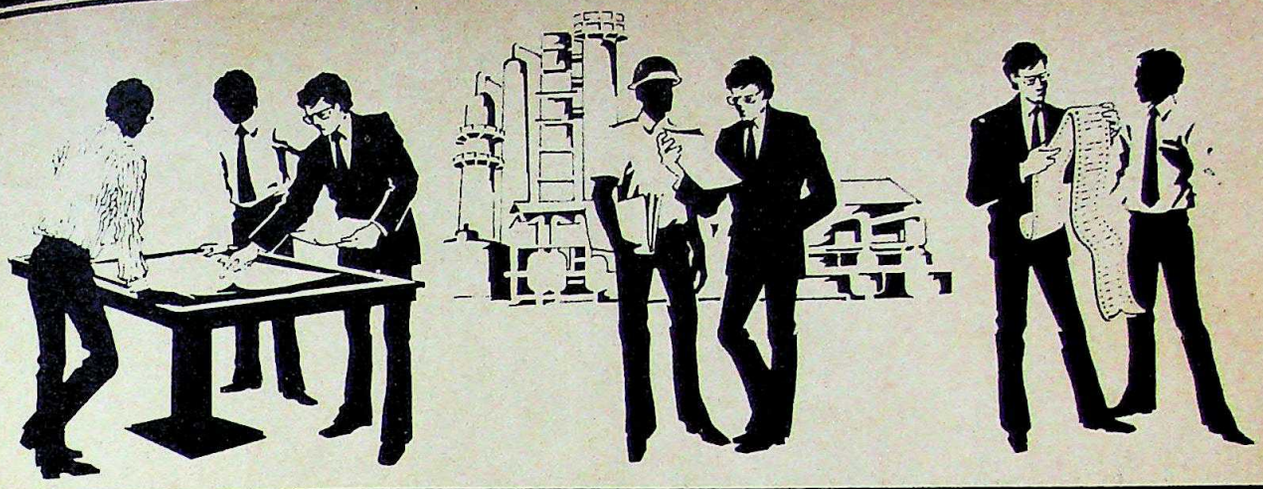

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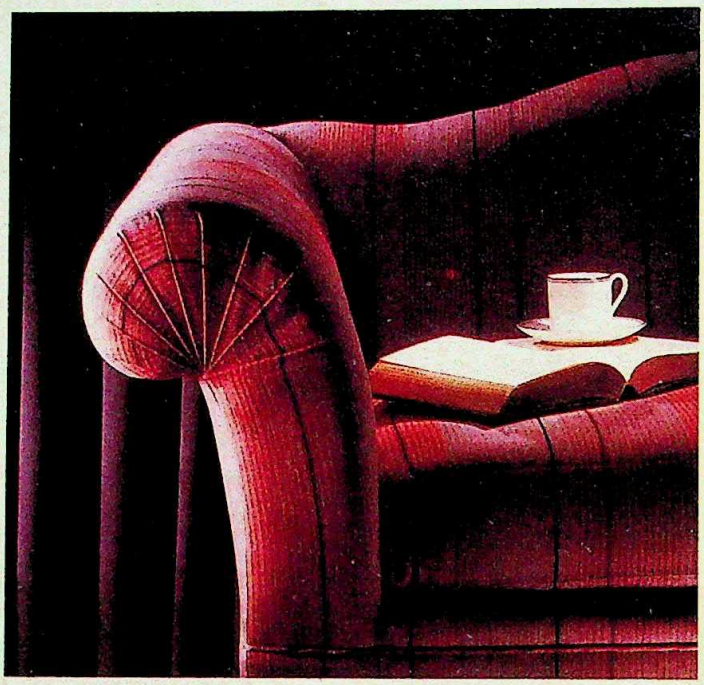

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NAKED DEFIANCE

■ The ideal aim of a custodian of law is to uncover various—and nefarious—criminal plans before they actually happen. But, one plot that the Bhind police did succeed in uncovering, only caused them acute embarrassment.

The episode began with a cop ordering a prisoner he was escorting to court, to uncover his face. When the prisoner refused, the policeman lost his shirt and prodded the unfortunate in the ribs. The prisoner was not tickled. To display his displeasure he decided to bare all—quite literally.

Before his dumbfounded escort could react, he had shed everything save his handcuffs. But worse was to come. In a chain reaction, his fellow inmates followed suit by staging a show of naked defiance. Soon, the court compound looked like a colony of nudists at a rag sale—on one side, a row of chained males in their birthday suits, on the other, a pile of discarded garments. Jail officials were hastily summoned. But despite threats, the prisoners refused to reattire. The officers finally had to discard their pride and beg their wards to reconsider. Having made their point, the prisoners relented and law and order was restored to Bhind.

FIGHTING BACK

■ In Calcutta, the oldest profession's world is one of exploitation and misery. The city's prolific prostitute community exists under the iron-fisted control of local toughs, or *mastans*, who strip them off all dignity—and most of their earnings. Having been pushed to the wall in more ways than one, they proved there is unity in depravity. They have formed 'defence committees' in the red-light areas to fight "the extortion of money, harassment and sexual exploitation" by the *mastans*.

The sisterhood of 1,000 prostitutes plan to organise various panels to coordinate the movement. Recently, they put the ball in the state Government's court. An appeal signed by 500 prostitutes was despatched to the chief minister to save them from the *mastans*. Meanwhile, they have been turning the screws on their self-appointed protectors by refusing to hand over their earnings as before. Committee spokeswomen say they are determined to wriggle out of the *mastans'* clutches and if they try and involve their traditional partners—the police, the committees still have a trick or two up their sleeves to deal with that eventuality.

THIEVING MATTER

■ Burglars are generally regarded as the dregs of criminal society—desperate people who will stoop to any level in pursuit of worldly gain. Which is precisely what Krishna, a Bangalore burglar did, and paid the price.

Krishna was undoubtedly a cut above his colleagues, as any of his many unlucky victims would gladly testify. But the Bangalore police were equally well aware of his reputation and kept a strict eye on his activities till a few months ago when Krishna went underground.

But the spate of thefts that carried his unmistakable stamp continued and the cops were completely baffled, having searched all his usual haunts. It was pure chance that they finally stumbled across the missing thief. A cop, responding to the call of nature near a deep excavation, accidentally dropped his rifle. Clambering down to retrieve it, he found himself face-to-face with a familiar face, framed in one of the large drainpipes littering the area. It was Krishna who had literally gone underground in a drain-pipe. He had cosily ensconsed himself, surrounded by an assortment of carpets, radios, ornaments and even kitchen utensils for cooking his ill-gotten meals.

ODD BEDMATES

■ Politics produces the odd bedfellows. Take the curious case of the two MLAs from Rajasthan who decided to take a brief holiday from their exertions. Both left within a day of each other, wives in tow, and went their respective ways, sure that their positions would get them accommodation wherever they halted. All went well, till the inevitable happened. Their paths met at a rural backwater which had only one rest-house with just two bedrooms, one already occupied by a prominent Jaipur journalist and his family.

Having arrived unannounced, and just minutes apart, both demanded the vacant room. The poor retainer of the rest-house was caught between the two. Since there was no phone, their respective godfathers couldn't be called upon to decide who was the weightier. The amused journalist suggested that the two wives use the large double bed while the two gents spread out on the floor. But political gamesmanship ruled that out. Finally, a compromise was reached. The two MLAs, their political pride intact, shared the bed while the wives had exclusive use of the floor.

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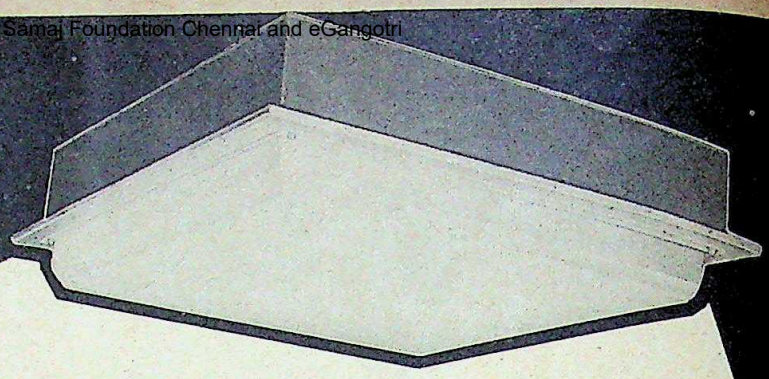

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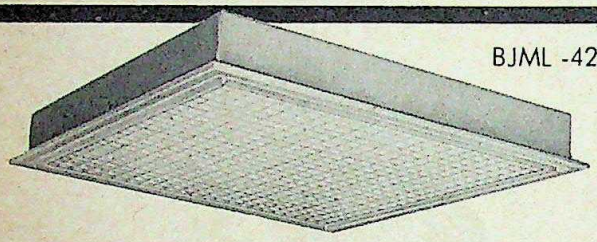

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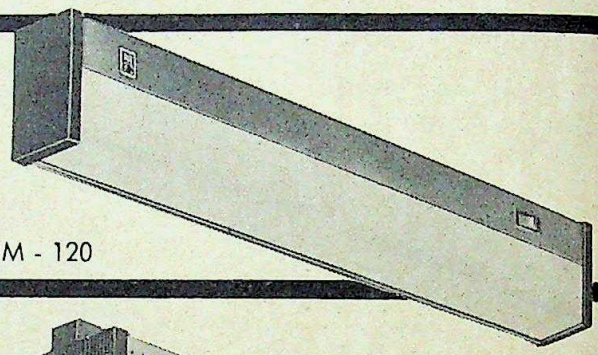

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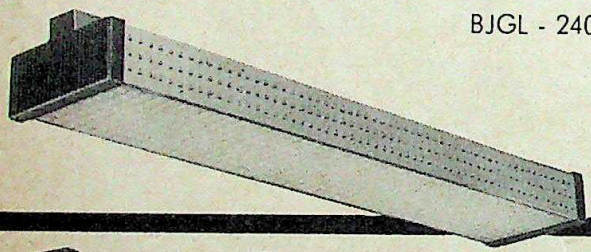

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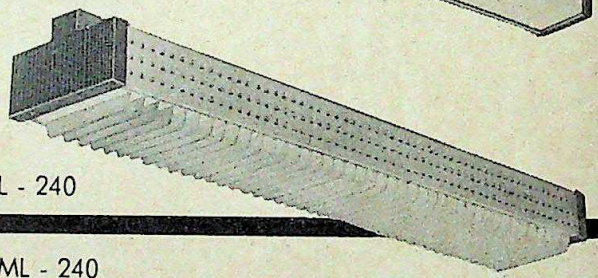

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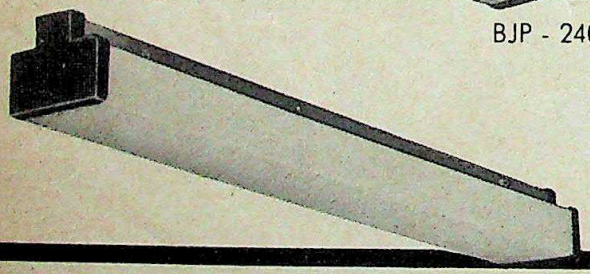

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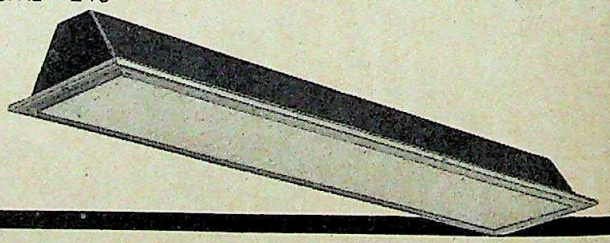

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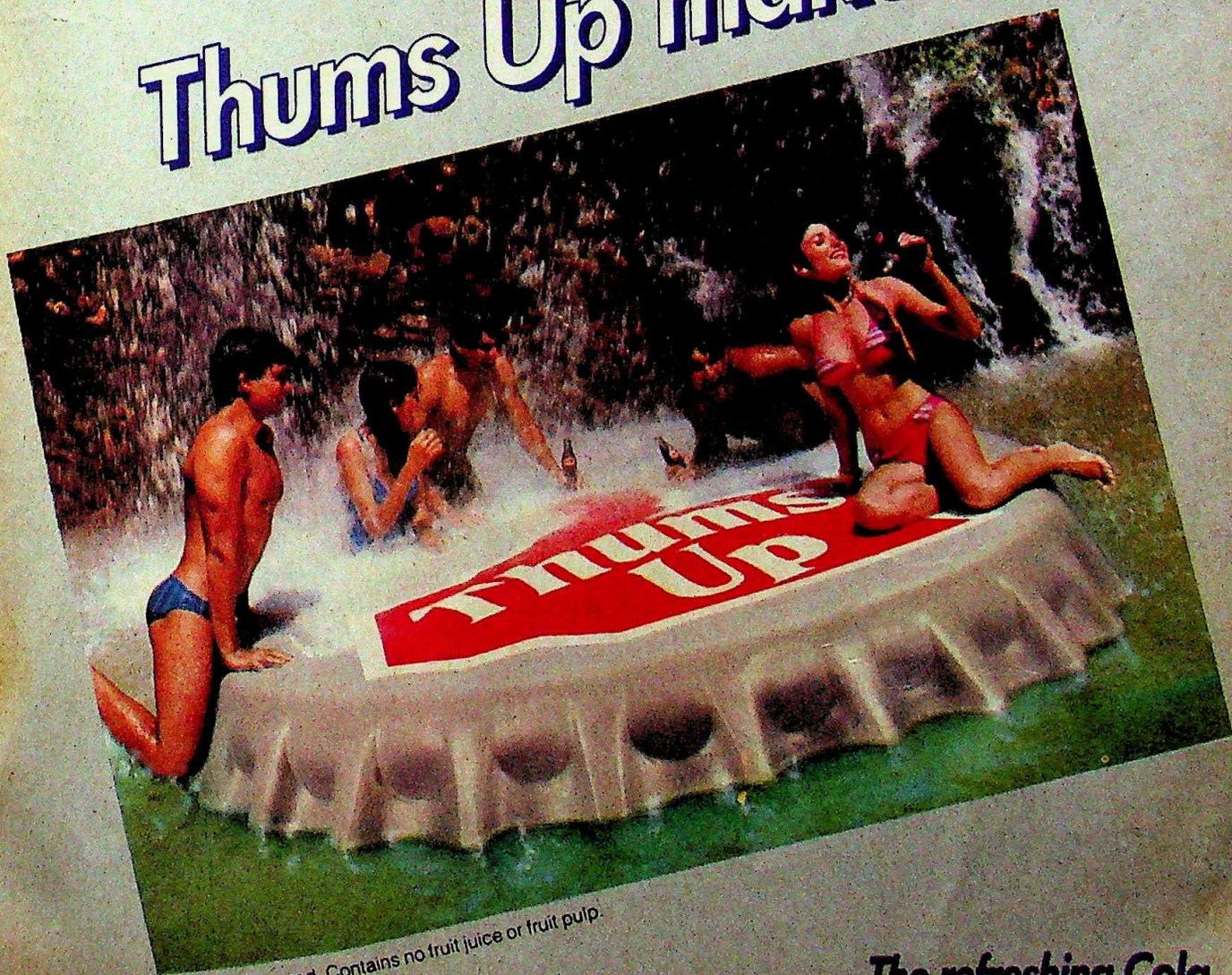

Artificially flavoured. Contains no fruit juice or fruit pulp.

The refreshing Cola

Thums Up

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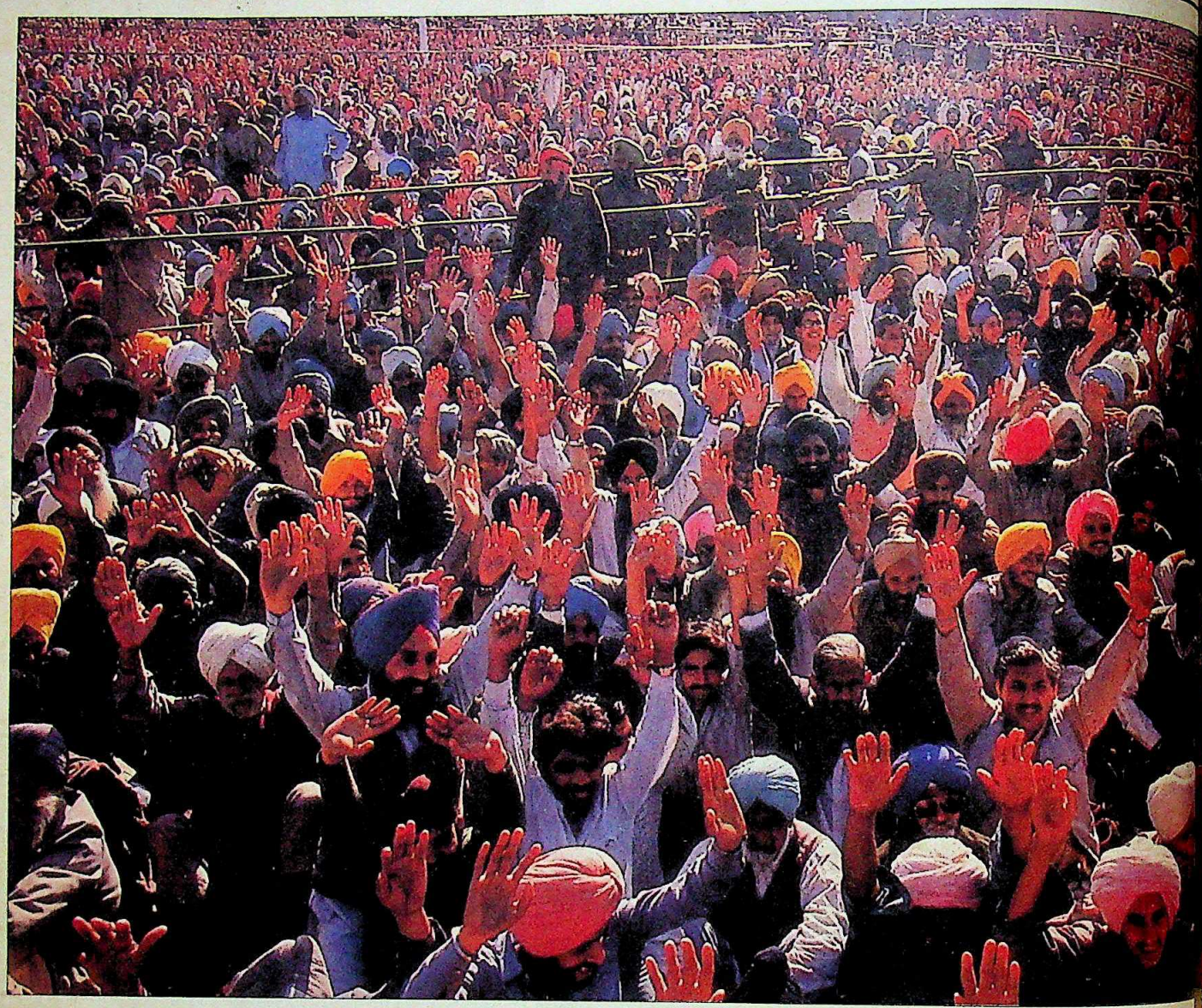

PUNJAB

Advantage Barnala

THE Sikhs love a fighter. And last fortnight they found one in the unlikely personage of Surjit Singh Barnala, the embattled Punjab chief minister who had decided to go it alone, if necessary, against the extremist-supported high priests of the Akal Takht. And almost overnight it seemed, Barnala was metamorphosed from a weak, vacillating and rudderless stooge of the Dilli Durbar into a national hero capable of mobilising moderate Sikh opinion and sentiment against terrorism and communally inspired secessionism.

They came in trucks, they came on tractors, they marched barefoot to Longowal village, about 20 km from Sangroor. They came from all over India—from Patna, from Kanpur, from Khatima, from Bareilly. And they came from all over Punjab, from the terrorist-infested areas of Ferozepur, Gurdaspur, Abohar, and from the moderate strongholds of Sangrur and Bhatinda. And by the time Barnala rose to address the Sikh convention on February 20, some four hours after it began, more than 2.5 lakh Sikhs had gathered peacefully in a *maidan* near the village gurudwara—the same *maidan* where the bhog ceremony for Sant Harchand Singh Longowal was held—and rejected the edict of the five high priests excommunicating Barnala.

The participants walked a thin line between rejecting the authority of the high priests as individuals and that of the Akal Takht as an institution. Not to accept the supremacy of the Takht would have been blasphemous. But there was a discernible and significant shift. Among the Sikhs, religion and politics have been inextricably intertwined. The convention, for the first time, challenged this tradition and opened it up to debate. Said Professor H.S. Mehta of Chandigarh University: "This is the first time in more than a year that the Sikhs have spoken out. They ignored terrorist threats and stood

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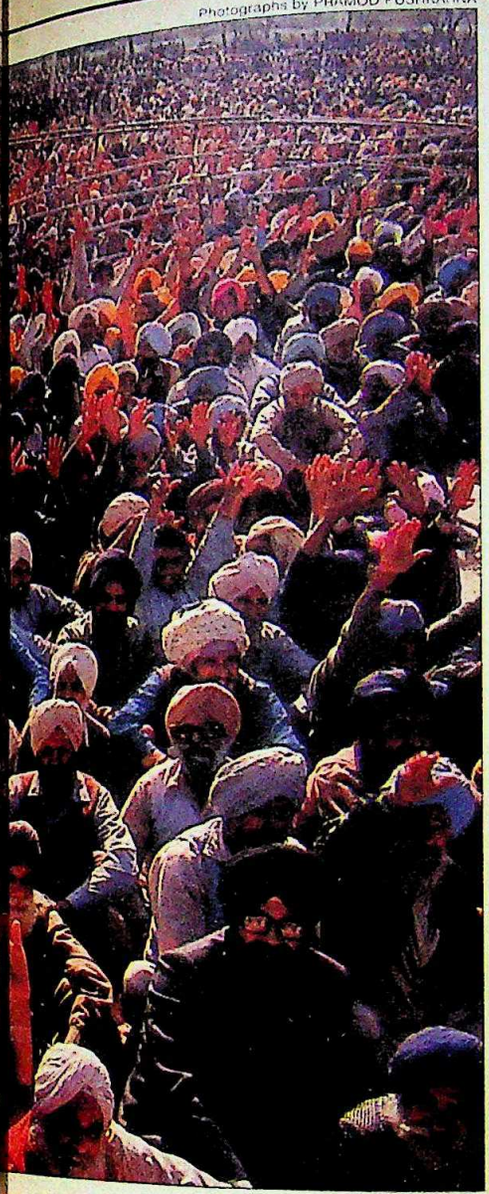
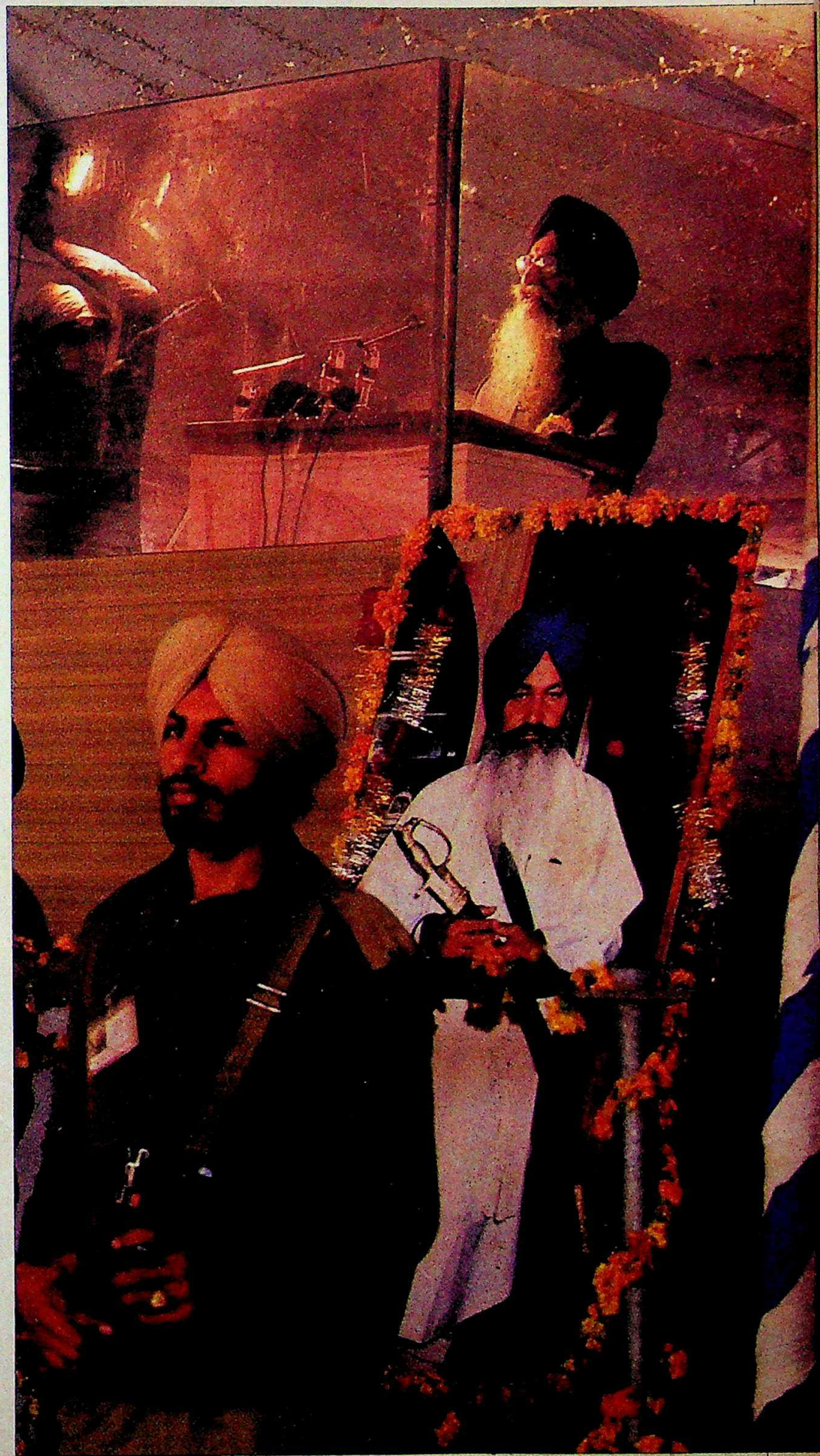
Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA





Sikh convention rejects priests' edict (right) Barnala addressing the gathering

up to be counted."

In orderly lines, they walked shoulder to shoulder down a six-km dirt road from make-shift parking areas near Sangroor and filed into their seating areas after going through gates equipped with metal detectors. About 1,000 policemen from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Punjab Police enforced security, politely but firmly.

A random sampling of opinion, from those who attended, strongly suggested that the Sikhs wanted to show their distaste for terrorism. They believed that Head Priest Darshan Singh Ragi was a captive of terrorists, and that the Akal Takht had acted unfairly with Barnala by not giving him a proper hearing before excommunicating him, and that Barnala had restored his honour by fighting back.

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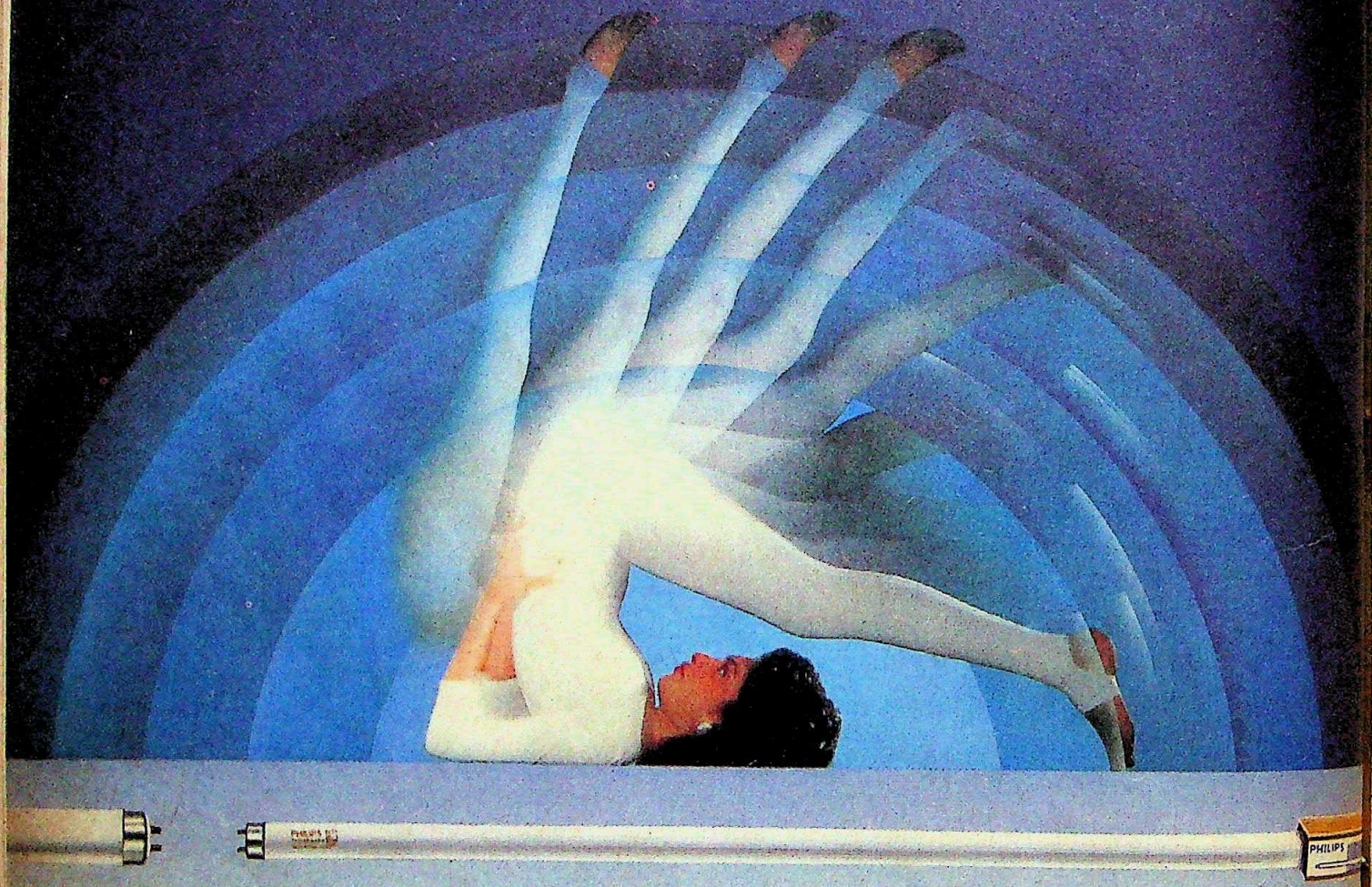
PHILIPS

Slim is beautiful



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"The 'unified' Akali Dal has been produced through the barrel of a gun."

BALWANT SINGH
Punjab finance minister

"At last the Sikhs have spoken out and have stood up to be counted."

H.S. MEHTA
professor, Punjab University

"The political lines in Punjab are more clearly defined than ever before."

KANWALJIT SINGH
Punjab home minister

As for the Sikhs who had come from outside Punjab, this was also their chance to express their revulsion against extremism with which the Takht is now so firmly linked. As Roshan Singh, pradhan of Nakatpura, a village in the Terai region of Uttar Pradesh, put it: "This hukumnama is against the panth. Barnala has spoken for all of us and he has spoken with courage. If I have to come here every month and demonstrate as a true Sikh, I will do so."

The message that Sikhs should start thinking afresh about the admixture of religion and politics had begun to penetrate even among the youth. As Gurmit Singh, 18, a student from Lokhra village near Bhatinda, put it: "The Akal Takht belongs to all Sikhs. There should be no political interference from it. I think Barnala was wrongly excommunicated because the priests are acting under pressure from terrorists." Added Harminder Singh, 19, a student from Sunam: "The Akal Takht has been unfair. Ragi Singh Sahib is acting under pressure from guns."

The ruling party also used the convention to demonstrate its strength and to dispel any notion that 19 MLAs had deserted the Akali Dal(L) and sworn allegiance to the new 'unified' Akali Dal. All ministers, except for Major Singh Uboke, were present, as were both Akali MPs, Balwant Singh Ramoowalia and Teja Singh Dardi. Altogether, 40 MLAs were present and participated actively in repeated shouting of *Jo Bole So Nihal Sat Sri Akal*. Among the Singh Sahibans present were Bhai Daya Singh, head priest, Sri Huzoor Sahib; Bhai Man Singh of Sri Patna Sahib; and Baba Lakha Singh, the former jathedar of Takht Sri Damdama Sahib. Besides, about 50 sants and jathedars from all over Punjab attended the convention. The speakers, a mixture of ministers and jathedars, were absolutely uncompromising in their tirade against the "injustice of the hukumnama" and the interference of the high priests in political matters.

JEEVAN Singh Umranagal, a jathedar from the Beas region and former vice-president of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), was all brim and fire as he charged that the high priests of the Akal Takht "are part and parcel of an extremist conspiracy to throw out Barnala". "They are a bunch of politicians," he alleged. Then Kabul Singh, the ex-president of the SGPC, firmly vowed to "make history from here and take the fight against extremism into all of Punjab". Perhaps the most hard-hitting speech was delivered by Finance Minister Balwant Singh who said that the new "'unified' Akali Dal has been produced through the barrel of a gun". He said that the Akal Takht jathedar is the spiritual head of the Sikh community and not the political head of the Akali Dal. And he directly attacked Darshan Singh Ragi for "behaving as if he is the president of the Akali Dal by directly appointing a new general secretary of that party to replace Manjit Singh Calcutta, who is now under detention".

And Barnala minced no words in saying that some of the actions emanating from the Golden Temple "are the work of people who support Khalistan. The Shiromani Akali Dal has never and will never support Khalistan because this would be harmful to the interests of all Sikhs." The resolution opposing the hukumnama was formally proposed, ironically, by Baldev Singh Khiala, the development minister, who, according to several accounts, had defected to the 'unified' Akali Dal along with 19 MLAs the previous day. In blunt language, the resolution "condemned the activities of the extremists and secessionist forces and of those forces which are working against the interests of Punjab and the nation and pledges to fight unitedly against these forces".

The convention was clearly one more turning point in Punjab politics with the momentum—for the time being—passing into the hands of the moderates. It was the first, long-awaited peaceful jatha organised by the ruling Akali party with the help of other parties and the government machinery. It also showed that Barnala had suddenly found a grip over the Government and administration. Besides, most of those who attended did so despite widespread threats from terrorist organisations that they would be put on hit lists and that their buses and trucks would be blown up. Many of them openly admitted that they were afraid. Yet they came.

In fact, barely 20 km away, in Bhawanigarh, another convention was being held simultaneously. This convention, called the Shaheedi Samagam, had been organised by the Gurjeet Singh faction of the All-India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) and it was attended by

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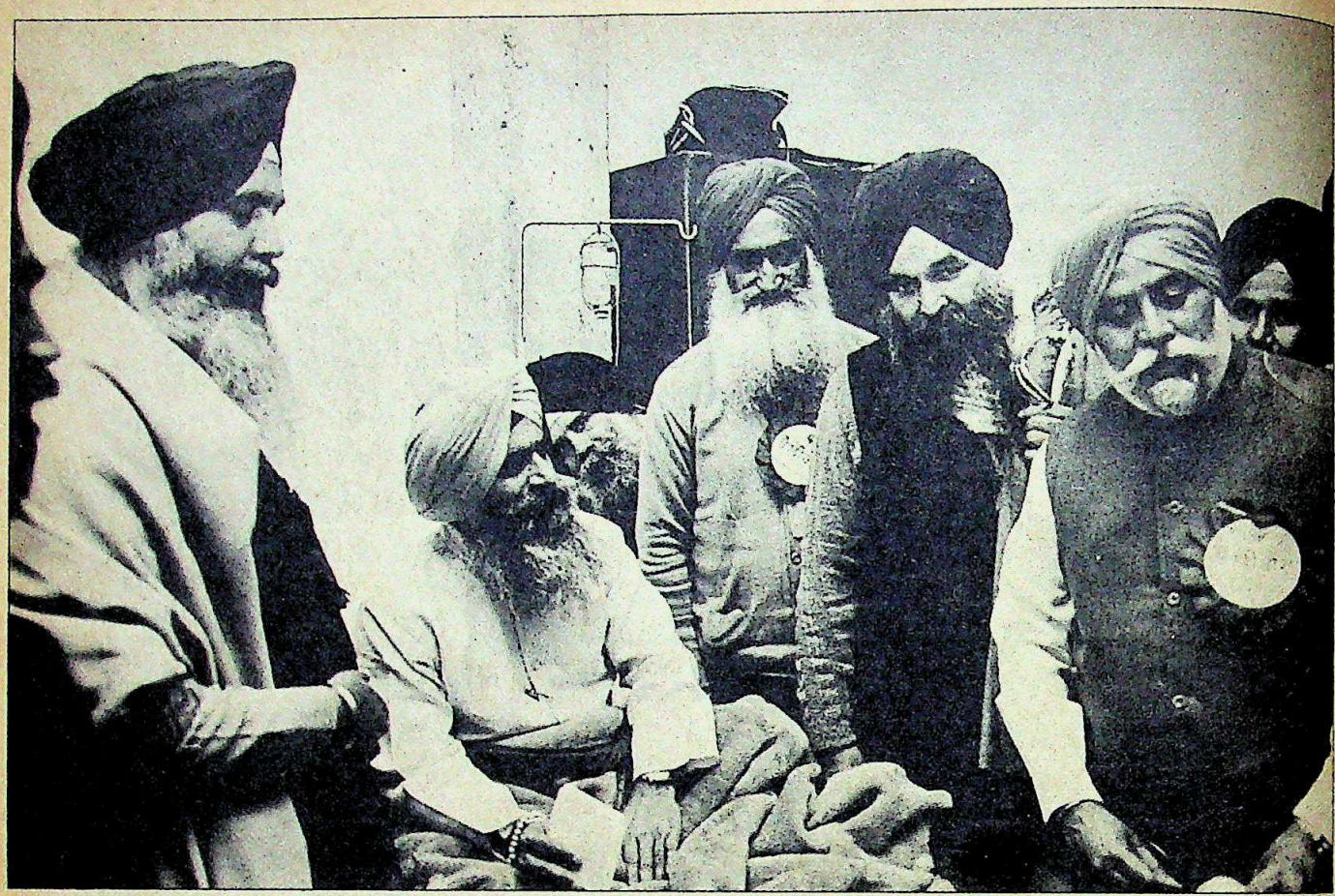

Four ministers from Barnala group offer allegiance to Ragi (seated)

three jathedars—Savinder Singh, Jaswant Singh, and Kashmir Singh. Here the emphasis was on the formation of Khalistan and the issuance of dire warnings to Barnala and others who dared defy the Takht. In attendance were about 200 people. But as Harinder Singh, 19, at the Barnala rally said: "The whole nation thinks that all Sikhs are terrorists. We have to demonstrate otherwise."

The defiance of the Akal Takht and simultaneously that of terrorism was more than symbolic. The convention had gathered to rub shoulders with Barnala, an excommunicated man. For an amritdhari Sikh, excommunication is a terrible psychological burden. As the saying goes *Innan de nal roti aur beti da rishta nahin hona chaida* (you can neither eat with nor offer your daughter in marriage to an excommunicated Sikh). Yet it was to the side of the excommunicated Barnala that lakhs of Sikhs flocked that day. "All of us who have come here," noted Home Minister Kanwaljit Singh, "are prepared to be excommunicated. This is our assertion that things have not been done fairly."

"The political lines in Punjab are more clearly defined than ever before," says Kanwaljit Singh. One group, backed by the Taksal and AISSF and represented by the new, 'unified' Akali Dal supports violence and secession. Even though the constitution of this new group, drafted by the Taksal as well as the high priests, does not overtly call for Khalistan, a key clause in its preamble makes it mandatory for the party to provide constitutional, legal and other types of aid to the AISSF whenever called upon to do so. "In other words," says Singh "the federation makes the demand and the Akali Dal becomes subservient to it." Both factions of the AISSF have made the declaration of Khalistan their political goal.

The defiance of the Akal Takht and of terrorism was more than symbolic. For, Sikhs had gathered to rub shoulders with Barnala, an excommunicated man.

The other group—moderate and nationalist—headed by Barnala has as its aim the achievement of greater autonomy within India and the speedy implementation of the Punjab accord. In between these two groups, Singh says, "there can be no third force or alternative. The group represented by Badal and Amarinder Singh has now been rendered irrelevant". In fact one of the radical student groups has just issued a warning to members of the Badal group, including Amarinder Singh, that it will not tolerate their using the Akal Takht and the new party as vehicles to form a government by drawing extremist groups into the political process, because the only aim of the new party should be that of creating Khalistan. People in the new party supporting anything less as a goal, the message declared, will be treated as expendable.

It would be an exaggeration to say that the Barnala convention has radically altered Punjab politics overnight or that Barnala has turned the tide against the extremists. But what it does signify is that the chief minister has taken an overwhelmingly successful step in drawing the silent majority of mainstream Sikhs into a political process which has begun once again to roll after a long period of

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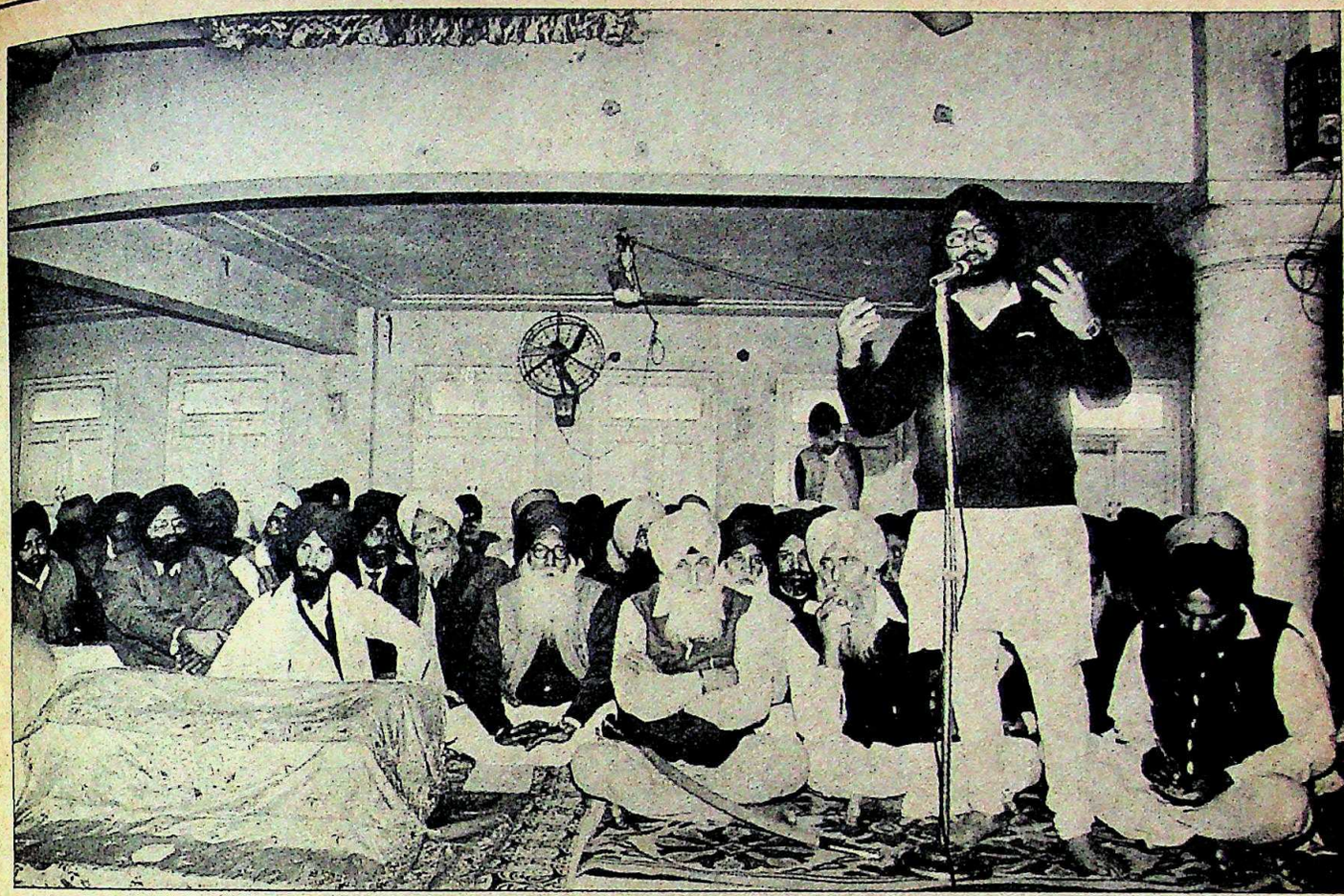

Amarinder Singh addressing delegates of newly formed 'united' Akali Dal

uncertainty and stagnation. It is in a sense a continuation of the peace process that started after the Rajiv-Longowal accord, in which masses of Sikhs placed their faith during the 1985 elections when they ignored terrorist threats as well as Baba Joginder Singh's call for a boycott and cast their votes in droves.

In between the 1985 elections and last fortnight's convention the extremists had resorted to almost every tool available in their armamentarium—bombs, guns, the slaughter of innocents, selective killings of informers, policemen, judges, jail officials, members of the Communist Party. Bullets went hand-in-hand with religious blackmail. And ultimately the extremists tried to hijack the political organisation of the Sikhs—the Akali Dal—and use it for their own purposes. But the terrorist arithmetic made one grave miscalculation—it did not gauge correctly the resilience and the inner strength of Barnala to tough it out. They had figured that, following the hukumnama, Barnala would capitulate or that most of his 45 MLAs, whose only loyalty to Barnala stems from their being ministers and job holders, would ditch him. The fall of Barnala would most certainly have led to President's rule and a situation in which perhaps the army

The softening of the extremist stand is aimed at buying time to regroup their forces in the face of several successful rounds of the police against them.

would once again have been pitted against the Akal Takht.

And they chose to hit Barnala when everything was going against him. He was not certain of the role his own MLAs—including his Finance Minister Balwant Singh—would play. Punjab Governor S.S. Ray had already sent three notes to the prime minister recommending dismissal of the Barnala Ministry. The law and order problem remained intractable. And the pressure on Balwant Singh was immense. He received several threatening messages that the *baraat* accompanying his son for his soon-to-be-held wedding would be massacred. But what seriously jarred both Balwant Singh and Barnala was a PCC(I) meeting, attended by party President Beant Singh on January 27 at which it was decided to recommend withdrawing support of the 31 Congress(I) state legislators from Barnala. A two-page memo issued by the PCC(I) severely attacked Barnala's performance.

What stunned Akali circles was the fact that on January 16, the prime minister had personally assured Barnala of his support. And on January 20 he had stated that he was against declaring President's rule in Punjab. A week later, in an apparent disregard for the prime minister's position, his own state party recommended withdrawing support. Akali circles were unsure whether such an important resolution had the backing of Rajiv Gandhi. Several prominent Punjab politicians said that the move appeared to have the backing of Home Minister Buta Singh, who commands considerable influence over Beant Singh and has privately supported imposing Central rule in Punjab.

Akali leaders have been distrustful of past moves by the Home Ministry, particularly its alleged role in influencing several

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out-of-Punjab delegates to vote against the Barnala candidate during the recent SGPC elections in which Gurcharan Singh Tohra won and was able to set the stage for the appointment of the new extremist-backed high priests. Buta Singh has vehemently denied that he played any role in influencing the SGPC elections. But Barnala personally took up this matter with the prime minister and also bitterly complained about it in a letter that he sent to him.

Once again, it seemed, the signals from Delhi were unclear, and the ruling Akalis were uncertain whether the PCC(I) resolution reflected Rajiv's own thinking. By the time the February 3 hukumnama was issued dissolving all factions of the Akali Dal, Barnala's MLAs were teetering on the brink of physical and political collapse. In fact, Jathedar Tota Singh of Faridkot, chairman of the agriculture marketing board, and a close Barnala confidant reflected the thinking of a large section of the ruling Akalis when, under the continued threats of excommunication emanating from the Akal Takht, he begged Barnala to capitulate with the words: *Assi ta khatm ho gaye. Sannu kicchar khana payega* (We are finished. We will have to eat dirt). But some of the younger MLAs, in particular Kanwaljit Singh, continued to urge Barnala not to buckle under. "We all went through hell," he said. "I told Barnala: 'I know this is a terrible decision you have to make, but are we to be judged by history for not fighting for what we hold dear?'"

Ultimately what shored up Barnala was a personal assurance from Rajiv Gandhi during two one-hour meetings, as well as from Arjun Singh, who is still handling Punjab affairs on behalf of the prime minister, that the Congress Party would continue to support Barnala even if 19 of his MLAs—who were rumoured to have given pledges to join the 'unified' Akali Dal—deserted him. "But what kept me fighting was also my deep faith in God. I prayed continuously and appealed to God to give me wisdom in those days."

Barnala is a man slow in reflexes but honest in instinct. The crisis he recently weathered, he says, was similar to the one last year when he sent the police into the Golden Temple after extremists had declared Khalistan from there and caused a split in his own party. "I was tormented about what to do. But I knew if I did not take any action I would be dubbed a Khalistani and every Sikh in the nation would be treated as a traitor."

Meanwhile, in the Golden Temple, the press secretary of the Akali Dal(L), S.S. Sokhi, and three former ministers of the Barnala Government—Harbhajan Singh Sandhu, Harbans Singh Ghuman and Beasant Singh Khalsa—were formally pledging their allegiance to the new Akali Dal at a convention of party delegates. People gathered there were unwilling to take Barnala's show of strength in Longowal seriously. It was being dismissed by the spokesmen for the various extremist groups headquartered there as a meeting of "Hindus and excommunicated Sikhs". Amarinder Singh dismissed the Longowal gathering as a Congress-inspired show representing not even 1 per cent of the Sikhs. He is convinced that "Delhi must stop supporting Barnala because (in the mind of most Sikhs) he is like a red rag to a bull".

An indication of how much separates what happened in the village of Longowal on February 20 from events in the Golden Temple was a funeral prayer service in the temple that same day for Manjit Singh Khajala, believed to be one of the main killers in the massacre of the 24 bus passengers near Khuda last November. Speeches, between prayers, extolled Khajala's virtues and described him as a man who had died in the service of the "panth".

Although the Khalistan Commando Force, the Khalistan Liberation Force and the Babbar Khalsa which are the main terrorist groups operating in the state do not have their own offices at the Golden Temple complex they work in conjunction with the Damdami Taksal and the two factions of the AISSF (Gurjeet and Manjit) which do have offices. In the past, the AISSF has attempted to conceal its links with the extremists but now they have no qualms in admitting openly what the links are.

The two main leaders of the Gurjeet faction are Gurjeet himself, who is Bhindranwale's nephew and is believed to have spent some time in Pakistan after Operation Bluestar, and 'General' Labh Singh of the Khalistan Commando Force. Labh Singh, a dismissed policeman and believed to be among the most committed Khalistanis, is at the top of the list of wanted terrorists. The AISSF (Gurjeet) also considers the Panthic Committee, the underground terrorist organisation, consisting of Bhai Gurbachan Singh Manochahal, Bhai Wassan Singh, Bhai Gurdev Singh Asmanpura, Bhai Uday Singh and Bhai Shabeg Singh, as a leader. At the moment it speaks also for the Damdami Taksal, most of whose members have vanished underground because of 'police persecution'.

The convention signifies that Barnala has taken a successful step in drawing the silent majority of mainstream Sikhs into the political process.

Politically, of the two AISSF factions (Gurjeet and Manjit), the Manjit faction is more open about its links with the newly formed Akali Dal, accepts Simranjit Singh Mann as a leader, and also recognises the authority of the Akal Takht jathedar. While the Gurjeet faction disclaims links with the new party, it recognises the authority of Professor Darshan Singh Ragi and states that he is doing a good

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MLAs and jathedars gather at Barnala's residence: show of unity

thing by trying "to get the panth together". One of the more vocal members of the group, Harcharan Singh Randhawa, however, stated: "We accept the authority of the jathedar of the Akal Takht only as long as we feel that he is doing genuine work for the panth but if we feel that he isn't then the Panthic Committee has the right to choose new jathedars."

According to high level police sources in Amritsar a noticeable softening—no matter how slight—in the extremist stand, as evidenced by their recent offer of a ceasefire, and their association with the new Akali party could be motivated by their desire to buy time to regroup their forces in the face of several successful rounds the police has scored against them in the last month or so. Several major terrorists have been either killed or arrested in the past few weeks.

In this situation extremist groups have sought the backing of the new Akali Dal. In addition to being able to conduct their own propaganda from the gurudwaras they control through the SGPC, the extremists now also have the new Akali Dal to do this for them. At the delegates' session that the new party called in the Golden Temple on January 22—and at a meeting later the same day of the party's MPs and MLAs—most speakers pleaded the extremist cause. Throughout the meetings there were references to those who had died for Sikhism. Said Surjit Singh Sokhi, the party's new press secretary: "There are some people who want to bow before the rulers of Delhi even when young Sikhs are being killed in false encounters."

Amarinder Singh goes a step further than merely defending them. According to him the demand for Khalistan has arisen only out of anger and bitterness on the part of the youth. If his party comes to power in Punjab, he says, it will try and draw the extremists into the political mainstream by starting an upper house in the state and nominating representatives of the various groups to it.

But right now the political mainstream appears to be in Barnala's camp. If the momentum generated by his peace initiative can be maintained it will continue—hand-in-glove with the successes of the police—to put pressure on the extremists. Barnala is unlikely to take any precipitous action to rid the Golden Temple of extremist elements but rather will keep sending them messages, and show-cause notices to clarify their position on matters such as sedition and anti-national activities. The main battle, however, will continue to be waged in the arena of public opinion. The extremist groups have already drawn up elaborate plans for *amrit prachar* ceremonies at which they will preach their gospel from village to village. To counter this, the Barnala Government is determined to organise small and large rallies throughout the state, starting with one in Hindu-dominated Ludhiana to draw more and more people into his peace offensive.

Meanwhile he has received a clear message from the prime minister that notwithstanding confusing signals from within the Congress(I), he will stand staunchly by Barnala and ensure that all Punjab initiatives are not imposed by the Centre but rather are backed by it. In order to demonstrate that the spirit of the Punjab accord is not dead, New Delhi has already agreed to follow up the Mishra Commission, and inquire into the dereliction of duty by the police during the November anti-Sikh riots in the capital. And the Centre is soon expected to announce a timetable for the transfer of Chandigarh as well as the orderly release of innocent Sikhs detained in the Jodhpur jail, two of the Sikhs' main demands. Only then will Barnala be able to say convincingly to the Sikh masses he is trying to mobilise through his *jathas*, that he has been able to achieve through negotiations what the terrorists could not attain through violence. Barnala has already taken a giant step but this new chance for peace still hangs by a slender thread. A new and brutal massacre by the terrorists could again revive demands for President's rule and sending in the army. Public opinion has once again begun to crystallise in Punjab and now, more than ever before, the situation demands patience, perseverance and restraint.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR with TAVLEEN SINGH in Punjab

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ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Crucial Contests

THE approaching state elections in Kerala, West Bengal and Jammu & Kashmir are viewed as the first major political test for Rajiv Gandhi and the ruling party. Over four crore voters will go to the polls to elect 510 MLAs out of over 3,000 candidates. In addition, the electorate of Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Pondicherry will choose three Lok Sabha and eight assembly members.

The ruling party is not taking any chances. It has dropped every second sitting MLA in all the three states to give the party a new look, has selected younger people as candidates and also nominated Chief Minister S.B. Chavan's son Ashok Chavan for the Nanded Lok Sabha seat in Maharashtra and AICC(I) general secretary T. Anjiah's widow, Mannamma Anjiah, for the Secundrabad Lok Sabha seat in Andhra Pradesh. On the eve of the polls, however, the ruling party was engaged in battling rebels in its ranks while its opponents were clearly more united. To gauge the pre-poll scenario PRABHU CHAWLA, SREEDHAR PILLAI and INDRANIL BANERJIE report:

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Allies on Trial

THE end of winter heralds for Jammu & Kashmir not just warmer weather but hotter politics. In preparation for the upcoming elections, a staggering 600 candidates had filed their nominations for the state's 76 assembly seats by last fortnight. It is now abundantly clear that each constituency is going to witness multicornered battles. The centre stage, however, is occupied by the coalition between the National Conference (NC) of Farooq Abdullah and the Congress(I). Even though these two parties have run coalition governments in the past, this is the first time that they are preparing for a major election as allies.

The J&K elections will be the testing ground to decide whether Rajiv's politics of accords with regional parties can be carried to its logical culmination. Of the four accords he has signed—including J&K—three (Assam, Mizoram and Punjab) have disintegrated into political animosities in which the Congress(I) has found itself at electoral loggerheads with the very regional parties with which the accords were signed. And in each case the Congress(I) lost the elections. But in J&K, the election scenario seems to favour the NC(F)-Congress(I) coalition.

The thorny question of the distribution of seats between both parties was resolved amicably and Rajiv and Farooq have decided to campaign together. Said Najma Heptullah, the AICC(I) general secretary incharge of the state: "The entire issue was sorted out on the basis of mutual accommodation. Both of us have decided to fight for national integrity." While the NC(F) will contest 45 seats—eight in Jammu, 36 in the valley and one in Leh, the Congress(I) will fight for 31 seats including seven in the valley.

But, typically for the Congress(I), it struggled for an intra-party consensus on the 31 candidates till the last minute. Factional fights between Kashmir Congress(I) leaders at the Centre and at the state level held up the finalisation of the list. Finally, 11 of the sitting MLAs including the leader of the Congress(I) Legislature Party, Maulvi Iftiquar Hussain Ansari, were dropped. The party's emphasis was on fielding candiates with a clean image so that it could ward off the BJP's formidable challenge in Jammu. The Congress(I) had won 23 of the 32 seats in the Jammu region in 1982.

Rajiv with Farooq: coalition politics

YOG JOY

The issues in the election have also been clearly delineated. The Opposition, particularly the BJP, is seeking votes by attacking the accord which it alleges is based on opportunism. The Congress(I)-NC(F) alliance is determined to blunt this thrust by firmly stating that the accord will ensure the unity of the country. Said Farooq: "By contesting the election as partners we are determined to prove that not only can we retain our own Kashmir identity but be part of the national mainstream as well."

But the selection of candidates by Farooq raises some troubling questions about the future stability of the coalition. Among those he has nominated are P.L. Handoo, Mohammad Shafi and Abdul Rahim, all former ministers, who were dropped from the state cabinet by Farooq himself because they were considered to be hawks and against any accord with the Centre.

At the same time Farooq has annoyed a section of the Congress Party by withdrawing most of the development and reform schemes initiated by Governor

> The J&K elections will be the testing ground to decide whether Rajiv's politics of accords with regional parties can be carried to its logical culmination.

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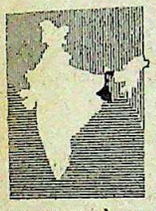
Jagmohan during the period of Central rule in the state. Many of these programmes had benefitted Congress(I)-held constituencies. In addition, Farooq has reappointed the ad hoc district recruitment panels which are the primary vehicles for providing jobs and patronage for NC workers. These actions have revived the age-old charge from Congressmen that the NC programme is essentially a communal scheme to help the majority community in the valley. The coalition may be a stable one in the short run but the danger signals for trouble ahead have already begun manifesting themselves.

WEST BENGAL

Odds on Left



BENGALIS appreciate a closely-fought election as much as they do a good football match. But this year, with the Congress(I) still to put its act together, the odds appear to heavily favour the CPI(M)-led Left Front team for the March 23 Assembly clash.

The nomination process last fortnight was punctuated by allegations of blatant partisanship against state Congress(I) President Priya Ranjan Das Munshi. Over 3,000 prospective candidates submitted applications and a third of them were interviewed in Calcutta by a four-member All-India Congress Committee(I) team.

But most Congressmen dismissed the procedure as a farce. Das Munshi, backed by four lieutenants in the 11-member state election committee, reportedly pushed in about 170 candidates of his own choice into the 294-member Congress(I) poll list. The bulk of the remaining seats went to supporters of Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Ajit Panja and Union Law Minister Asoke Sen. Other party bigwigs secured barely half-a-dozen tickets each for their supporters.

The first to revolt were Congress(I) councillors of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, who had learnt that Das Munshi did not intend giving tickets to any of them. They protested by voting against the party candidate for mayor's post and the Left Front candidate Kamal Basu—who had been forced to resign from the mayoral post due to the defection of a key councillor to the Congress(I) fold—was re-elected. Ultimately, Das Munshi had to nominate a few of them.

Many Congress(I) leaders claim that the chief reason for the growing indiscipline is the preferential treatment Das Munshi gives to his former Congress(S) cronies. Indeed, even a number of safe Congress(I) seats with sitting MLAs have been transferred to them.

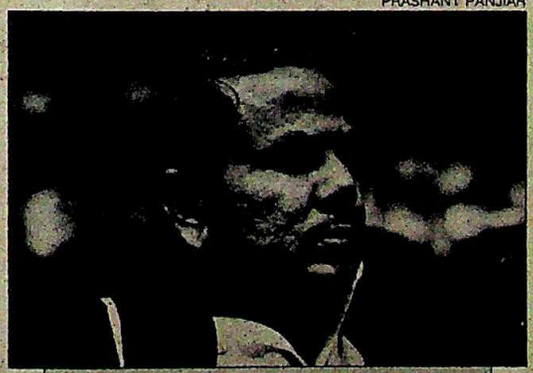
"It is going to be difficult to get our party machinery to start functioning again to catch the floating votes," admits the state organisational chief Subrata Mukherjee. As it is, the party is very far behind the Left Front in election campaigning. And with Das Munshi's obvious favouritism, several resentful party workers may well work against the official candidates.

Decisions like the dropping of veteran Congressman Rauf Ansari and the fact that the Congress(I) has fielded only 46 Muslim candidates—against the expected 60—will also put the party at a serious disadvantage with the Muslims who constitute more than 20 per cent of the state's population. Moreover, the Left Front is already suggesting that the Centre, despite passing the Muslim Personal Law Bill, is now trying to nullify it by initiating a debate on a uniform civil code. The collapse of faith in the party's state leadership therefore comes at a time when, according to Central intelligence agencies, there is swelling support for the Congress(I) in rural areas—for years considered a left preserve.

The Left Front's advantages are still its excellent organisation, composed of ideologically oriented cadres. Former finance minister Pranab Mukherjee's Rashtriya Samajbadi Congress, flooded with disgruntled Congressmen, could wreck the Congress(I)'s prospects, if it were to wean away even 5 per cent of its traditional votes.

On the debit side, the Left Front has a number of MLAs and ministers, whose arrogance and inaccessibility has alienated not merely left voters but lower-level party workers as well. But at least the Front, which had submitted its poll list way back in September last year, is prepared for the election match. If the Congress(I) can't get on with the game, it will receive as many brickbats as it will lose votes.

PRASHANT PANJIAR



Discontent in the state Congress(I) over Das Munshi's obvious favouritism may benefit the Left Front.

KERALA

Front Politics

AS Kerala readied for the start of electioneering, the rival camps could hardly have appeared more different. On the one hand was the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF), a Congress(I)-headed ragtag band of communal and casteist parties, riddled with infighting. On the other, was the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF), bereft of all sectarian parties for the first time, its seat-distribution producing barely a ripple and its image refurbished by a substantial allocation for youthful candidates. As least 25 of the CPI(M)'s 79 candidates are youth and student leaders. For the chief ministership, the Front is projecting K.R. Gowri, an able administrator, hailing from the Ezhava community, the single largest in the state.

A virtual mutiny gripped the Congress(I) after it decided to deny tickets to three ministers including Thachady Prabhakaran—Kerala's V.P. Singh—and M.P. Gangadharan, the controversial former irrigation minister. Particularly shocking was the dumping of Prabhakaran, who, after getting election posters printed, was ready to set off for his home constituency of Kayangulam in Alleppey district, when he was given the news. Said a deeply-hurt Prabhakaran: "They should have warned me at least a day before the list was announced so that I could have told my followers that I would not be contesting. It would have saved me much embarrassment."

Prabhakaran's case is instructive: he was a victim of intra-caste rivalry. He is an Ezhava who alarmed all other important

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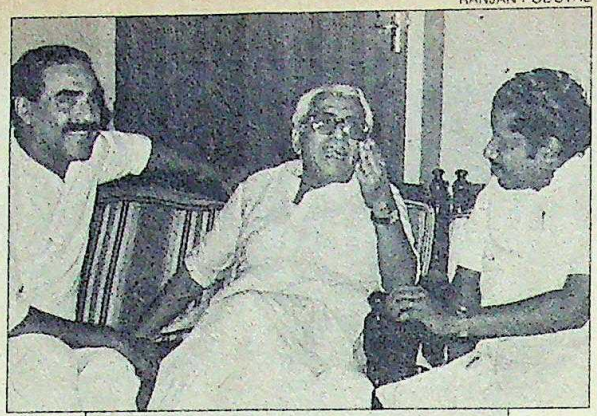
Ezhava leaders in the Congress(I) by acquiring an enviable public image for himself in the short time that he was finance minister. Former home minister Vyalar Ravi, Speaker V.M. Sudheeran, state party chief C.V. Padmarajan and M.K. Raghavan, the president of the Ezhavas' social organisation, all have varied loyalties within the Congress(I) but with Prabhakaran emerging as a possible Ezhava claimant for the chief ministership, they all agreed that he had to go.

Now Prabhakaran's irate supporters have vowed to defeat Gopinath and Vyalar Ravi in Shertallai. Similarly, Gangadharan, who is still fighting court cases over his minor daughter's marriage, is known to be behind 10 rebel candidates in Malappuram district, though he naturally denies it. Also upset, the office-bearers of the state unit of the Youth Congress(I), resigned en masse to register their protest against the seat allocation. Grumbled Cheriyan Philip, general secretary: "The old men in the CPI(M) have given nearly 33 per cent of the seats to the youth while our party has been given hardly five seats."

RANJAN PODUVAL



Mani, Karunakaran and Jacob

The Kerala voter has, for the first time, a clear-cut choice: Congress(I)-led group of parties or CPI(M)-led front.

Meanwhile, the Kerala Congress, a UDF partner, split between the factions of Irrigation Minister K.M. Mani and that of Revenue Minister P.J. Joseph over the question of the allotment of 24 seats, the party's share. The issue exploded when Joseph unilaterally announced the names of 15 candidates. Mani accused him of disregarding an earlier formula under which each of the factions was to share the allotted number of seats equally and said his group would fight in a dozen constituencies. Though soon after the break came, both claimed they would continue in the UDF, the bad blood between the two does not augur well for the ruling front.

In the last elections in May 1982, there was a bare difference of 1 per cent in the votes polled by the two fronts—48.23 per cent for the UDF against 47.24 for the LDF. The elections due to be held on March 23 may well prove that the UDF list—finely tuned by the Congress(I) to meet communal and caste considerations—shows greater sensitivity to ground conditions but at least one thing is definite: the Kerala voter has been presented with a clear choice.

PREM NAZIR

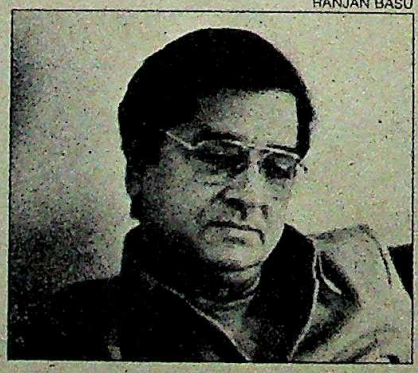
Star Power

TAKE a star on the decline, clothe him in khadi, and watch the crowds come. The Congress(I) used this simple logic twice last month in inducting film stars Rajesh Khanna and Prem Nazir into the party.

Nazir's induction is striking, more so, considering the forthcoming elections in Kerala, to which he belongs. Chief Minister K. Karunakaran's camp obviously feels that his screen fame spanning many years can be translated into votes. Nazir alias Abdul Khadar, 57, has starred in 636 Malyalam films, something that has brought him mention in the Guinness Book.

The ageing star is out to ensure that he can't be accused of not trying to grow into his new role. Gone were his flashy clothes and fancy dark glasses, to be replaced by a khadi safari suit and spectacles with a simple frame. The dialogue too changed after meeting Rajiv in New Delhi. Nazir, who says he is "not crazy about assuming power"—he won't be contesting himself—now talks of "being a spokesman of the poor" and of getting "a chance to serve them". Though he is going to campaign for the Congress(I) in politically aware Kerala, he isn't even sure of party ideology: he feels it stands for "growth through scientific methods".

RANJAN BASU



Nazir: vote gathering

Ideology or not, Nazir's inclusion has much to do with the Congress(I)'s current reliance on the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), a coalition partner in the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF). In Kerala, the Congress(I) is seen as granting too many concessions to the IUML at the cost of other allies. On this score, the National Democratic Front (NDF) had recently, briefly walked out from the UDF on the reservation issue. Party bosses hope Nazir will be able to draw a sizeable number of Muslim votes. If the ploy works, it could lead to the party cutting the IUML down to size.

But will it? Nazir himself admits that he was advised against floating an independent party: "Kerala is not Tamil Nadu or Andhra Pradesh where people lap up film stars." Kerala's Agriculture Minister Ramesh Chennithala symbolises one view point: "He is an evergreen hero and will be a great crowd puller." But others have severe doubts. Says former home minister Vyalar Ravi: "He's a nice man and there is nothing wrong if he joins our party. But if we use Nazir in a Kerala election campaign, it will backfire on us." This time Nazir's performance won't be judged by critics. It will show when election results are announced in less than a month's time.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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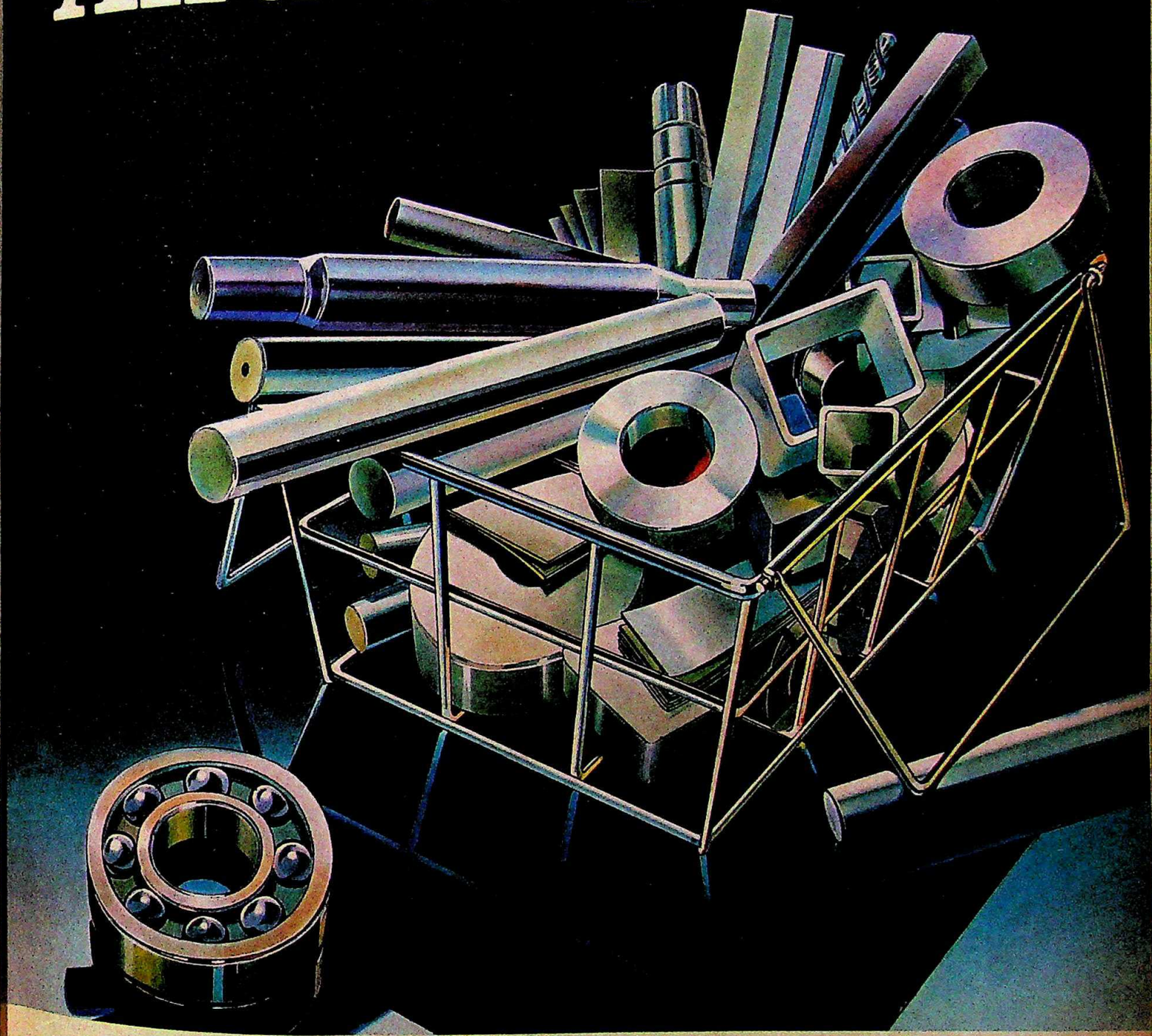

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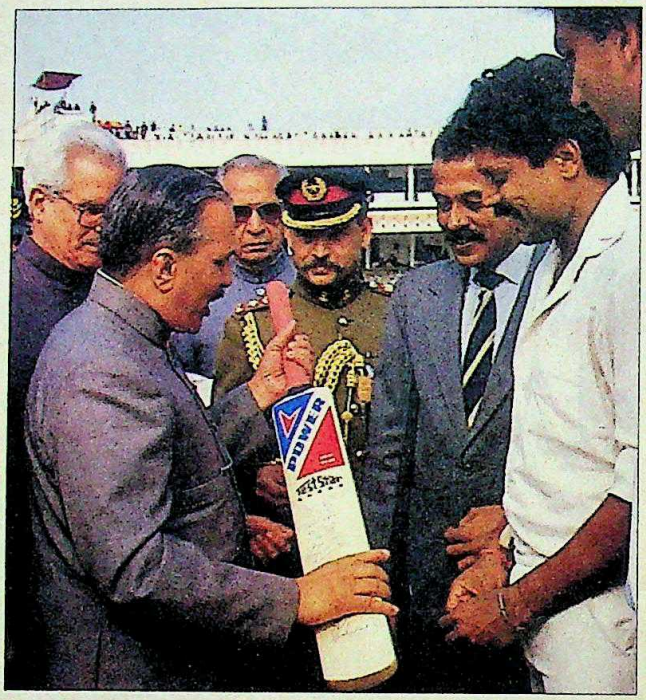
GENERAL ZIA-UL-HAQ

Playing to the Gallery

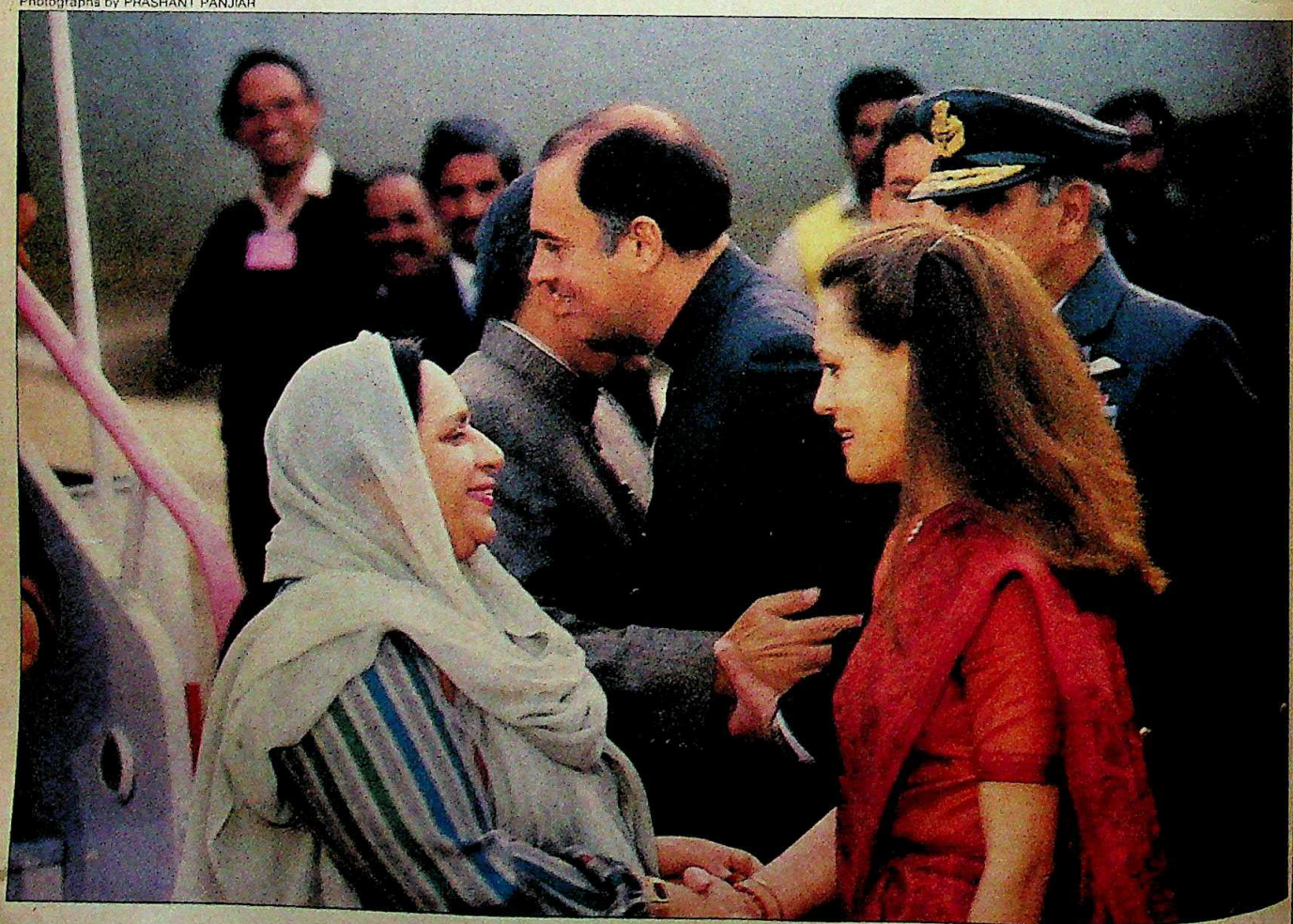
HE accepted the invitation in a jiffy. Twenty two days after being invited by the Board of Cricket Control for India (BCCI) to come and see a Test match, he was in India. Oblivious of the cold glares of his reticent hosts, President Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan came to Jaipur, saw some cricket and conquered the media. As an exercise in public relations his whirlwind, unofficial, "cricket for peace" tour paid rich dividends. By the time he left Jaipur's Sanganer Airport for Islamabad, newspaper headlines had for three days emblazoned his claim that he had come to restore communications and defuse tension. In protocol terms, the reception and hospitality he received from his Indian hosts, including the prime minister, was cool but correct. But after a 40-minute exchange on bilateral issues at a dinner by Rajiv Gandhi at Delhi's palatial Hyderabad House, Zia went over the heads of his hosts and sought a larger audience through the press. As he told INDIA TODAY in an interview *(see box)*: "Peace is not a button you can press....It has to be pursued at all levels....If you take on the level that is up to you, half the problem will be resolved." And the External Affairs Ministry mandarins, told to downplay the visit, were left sulking in churlish annoyance as Zia side-stepped their plans to insulate him from the media.

The Government's motives



With Kapil Dev; and (below) being received at airport: different strokes

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR



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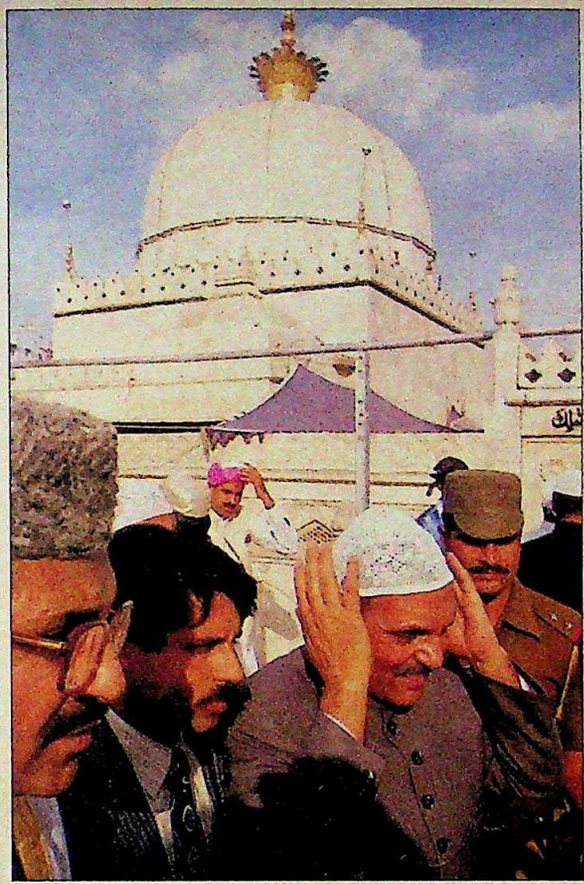
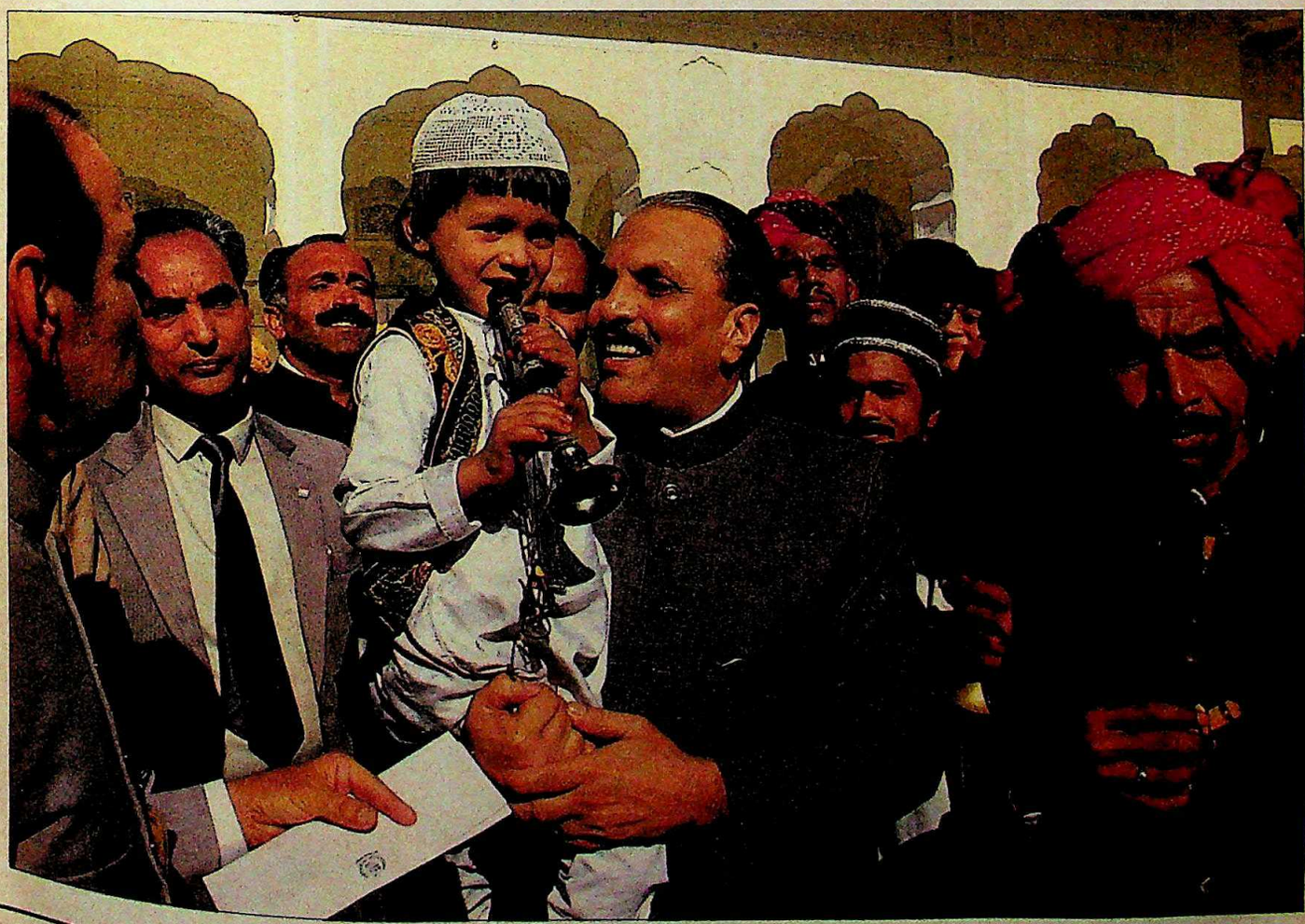
were transparent the day the Pakistani President arrived at Delhi. At the airport the press was herded into a glass-paned lounge; Zia acknowledged their presence with a wave before driving to Rashtrapati Bhawan for a hugginglycordial meeting with President Zail Singh. But from the moment he touched down at Jaipur the next morning, Zia played the game his way. Whether at the airport or at the cricket ground, he welcomed pressmen, met them in groups and individually as officials complained that though he was here to watch cricket, Zia had spent over one-and-a-half hours out of two practising PR. Newsmen emerging from a meeting with Zia were reminded that tension had been defused and the date set for the followup, the foreign secretaries meeting in Islamabad, well before Zia arrived in Jaipur.

The city had prepared for Zia a grand reception. Colourfully-caparisoned elephants and camels were brought in to line the drive of the Rambagh Palace Hotel and *shehnai* players wearing *baandhni saafas* had been stationed on the terrace to serenade the arriving President. But the evening before Zia arrived, the state authorities instructed the hotel management to make it a low-key reception. The camels and elephants were sent packing and five pretty girls in richly-embroidered Rajasthani *ghaghras* received Zia as *shehnai walas* played *Damadam mast kalandar*. No officials of the Rajasthan Cricket Association (RCA) or the BCCI accompanied him to the hotel, despite receiving him at the airport. Later, Doordarshan used Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck to upstage Zia; it showed the cartoons as he was meeting the cricket teams at the Sawai Man Singh Stadium. And just then, the second channel transmitter at Jaipur went dead briefly due to power failure. But Zia was unfazed. He called in the BBC and Voice of America correspondents and aired his views.

Even the elements conspired



Praying at Ajmer; and (below) with *shehnai* player: exercise in public relations



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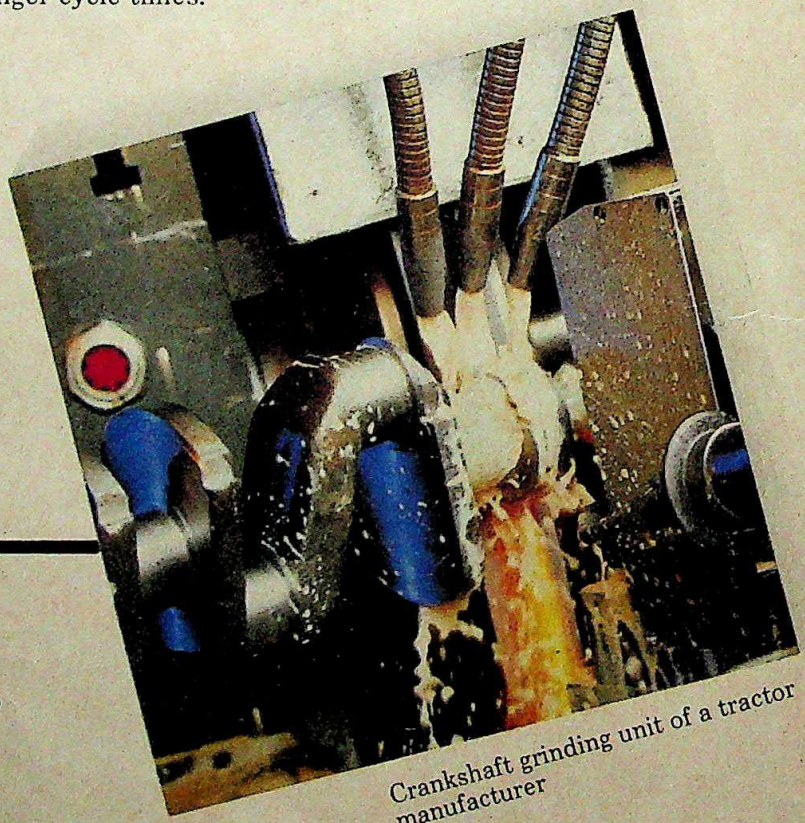

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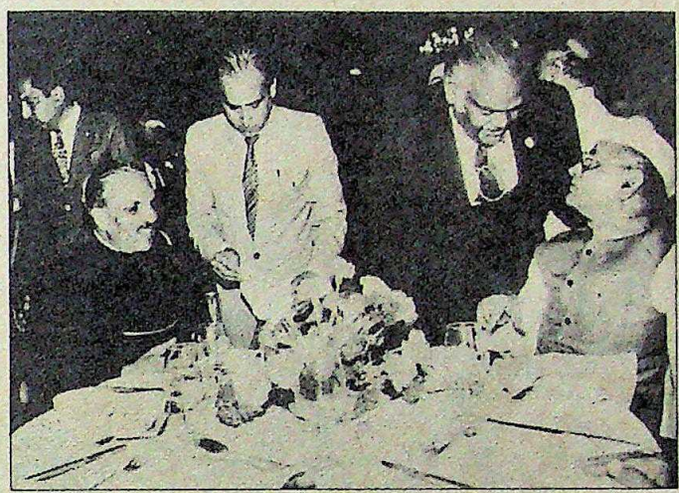
against the visiting dignitary. The Rambagh Palace had made elaborate arrangements for an outdoor banquet in Zia's honour hosted by the RCA, but they were washed out by the rain which came pouring down an hour before the banquet. The guests were accommodated in the verandah as the harried staff cleared the large dining hall of tourists. The fare was regal and the meat tender: nearly 40 baby lambs had been slaughtered the previous day to provide fresh meat for Chef Arvind Bhargava's carefully marinated main dishes—*Akbari Raan* and *Safed Mans* which competed with Saute Chicken Basquaise and *Murg Musallam* to tickle the palate of the guests—at a mere Rs 150 per head. But though the downpour doused the preparations, the banquet served to unite many old cricketers. Zia had brought veteran pace bowler Fazal Mehmood and former wicket keeper Imtiaz with him. Fazal warmly greeted Lala Amarnath. "His was the first wicket I took in the Ranji trophy in 1943," he recalled. Zia enveloped Bishen Singh Bedi in a bear-hug while other cricketers, past and present, mingled in bonhomie. "The President has agreed to open up the Wagah border for unrestricted entry during the World Cup matches in Pakistan. Its now up to India to reciprocate," said the president of the Pakistan Cricket Control Board Lt-General G. Safdar Butt.

No snafus affected the splendour of the Rs 3,000-a-day Maharani Suite that the President occupied with his wife, Begum Shafiq Zia. The ornate oval bathroom, twice the size of a five-star hotel room, featured heated towel racks and a marble shower stall with multi-directional shower jets that smother one from five directions, rather like being caught in the enveloping spray of a waterfall.



Zia at banquet: playing friends

Senior hotel staff had spent a whole day scouring the city's masjids to borrow used copies of the Quran to place in the President's room. Others procured small Kashmiri carpets to serve as prayer mats for the visitors. No pork entered the hotel kitchens 24 hours prior to Zia's arrival. A devout Muslim, Zia recites *namaaz* five times a day. What would the hotel do with the prayer mats later? "They can take them if they want," said General Manager Vikram Singh. Zia didn't.

The visit wasn't all cricket. There were pleasant contacts to renew: Bhawani Singh of the Jaipur royal house called on Zia and the following day Rajmata Gayatri Devi strolled with Begum Zia in the garden. To emphasize the cricket connection, the last visitor to call on Zia before he left was the athletic Imran Khan. On Rajiv Gandhi's advice, Zia altered his plans to fit in a visit to the Amber Fort, Jaipur's main tourist attraction. And later he went to pay his respects at the Ajmer Dargah of Sufi saint Moinuddin Chishti. There too he came to the rescue of press photographers being pushed around by the police. On the morning of his departure Zia expressed a desire to see the city palace museum but he was told that the schedule of the governor and the chief minister who had to attend the inaugural sitting of the state assembly's budget session would be upset if he delayed his departure. Zia left on schedule, "sadly and with mixed feelings". And in departing too, he scored a cheeky single: he said he hoped to come back and revisit "in a much better atmosphere, the kind of atmosphere an idealist like me looks forward to". —RAMINDAR SINGH in Jaipur

INTERVIEW

"I have no inhibitions"

HE came to cheer the Pakistani cricketers but ended up applauding Mohammed Azharuddin's superb batting. His proclaimed mission was "cricket for peace", and while fiery Pakistani paceman Imran Khan hurled bouncer after bouncer at the Indian batsmen, "peaceman" Zia lobbed some rather friendly over(ture)s to Rajiv Gandhi and to India. He admitted he could not tell a googly from an off-spinner, but then he could spot a good player. Zia himself turned out to be the best player on view though he played mainly to the gallery. Indian officials fretted and fumed while the visiting Pakistani President extracted full media mileage from his unofficial, unscheduled tour. President Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan, in between watching the third India-Pakistan Test at Jaipur's Sawai Man Singh Stadium, managed to give a relaxed 20-minute interview to INDIA TODAY *Special Correspondent* RAMINDAR SINGH. *Excerpts from the interview:*

Q. *Have you managed to ease the situation on the border in your talks with Mr Rajiv Gandhi?*

A. The credit must go to him and Prime Minister Junejo for having broken the ice on the telephone on January 26, as a result of which the two delegations met and were able to arrive on February 4 at a very useful agreement on de-escalation and withdrawal of troops. I am sure the spirit which has been inculcated will now move along to the rest of the area and also (help) in reducing the tension.

Q. *How would you assess your talks with the prime minister. Did you break any new ground after what Mr Junejo had started?*

A. Yes I took it from there. It was heartening to see that feelings on both sides were the same. We were both keen to find out how the tension built up. The success of the mission is not only in identifying it but in preventing it from happening again. In this the two leaders must get the tribute. Otherwise I wouldn't have been sitting here watching the match today.

Q. *What causes did you identify and what steps have you thought of to prevent a recurrence?*

A. We didn't go into the background. I thought it wasn't worthwhile doing a post-mortem. But we certainly shared a common perception that both sides

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must do something more in order to reduce the tension. After de-escalation, when the troops go back the environment must be so conducive that a repetition should not occur.

Q. *What do you expect will happen after your meeting with the prime minister?*

A. My meeting with the prime minister is only a link in the chain. I won't grade it as a breaking of the ice or as something so significant.

Q. *Is there going to be another meeting soon, like the prime minister's visit to Pakistan?*

A. I have renewed my invitation. No, he has not set a date and I have not insisted. From myself, the prime minister, the people and Government of Pakistan, I have renewed the invitation to both President Zail Singh and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Q. *Do you expect it to happen this year?*

A. We hope so.The visit of the Indian prime minister to Pakistan must bring in some concrete results. It's different with me. I will come 12 times more to India. I have no inhibitions. I do not wait for invitations, I look for an opportunity for any renewed contact, or even, if nothing else, to come and watch cricket. From my point of view, this is also important.

Q. *You have been invited for the World Cup matches and for the finals. Are you planning to come again?*

A. I hear so. Oh yes. If I get the invitation... or as I said I don't need an invitation. I hope we can invite some dignitaries to Pakistan also to watch cricket, or hockey or anything like that. Because inhibitions must be removed , and reservations.... Those who are in positions of importance on both sides should have less reservations about visiting each other's country. It is the generation, between 40 and 50 which must be exposed (to each other).

Q. *When you take such a step as coming on your own, do you find the reception cordial, warm?*

A. Most heartwarming. I wish I could convey this spirit to the people of Pakistan. Which I will. I am sure they are watching television today. I will tell them how I felt and how people appreciate the visit of the President of Pakistan.

Q. *Apart from showing your interest in sporting ties, there have been reports that your visit may have something to do with your talks with the Soviet Union on Afghanistan. Did this come up during your exchange with the prime minister?*

A. I explained it in passing but that was not the main purpose of this visit. We have always kept India informed, we have always shared our views on Afghanistan and on our relationship with the Soviet Union. The last time the two prime ministers discussed it was at the SAARC summit at Bangalore. We have always had political support from India except that India has not come out openly, boldly, and we understand the reasons. We now expect India to play a bolder and more vital role.

Zia and daughter: cricket diplomacy

"Can't we close the chapter of our animosity?....Peace is not a button you can press and the light will come on. It has to be pursued at all levels."

Q. *Such as what?*

A. The Soviet Union has taken a very bold step, a positive step. But they want some reassurance. If Pakistan gives that reassurance, the Soviet Union can misread it, but if India gives it—I have not suggested it as yet—but if India does it the Soviet Union will be reassured.

Q. *What kind of a reassurance would the Soviet Union expect which would be acceptable to Pakistan as well?*

A. The solution must resolve the problems of the people of Afghanistan. Withdrawal of troops, return of refugees (3 million) and returning Afghanistan's status as a non-aligned, independent, neutral state.

Q. *Do you expect that to happen in the next few months as a result of the talks?*

A. If not in the next few months then at least in the near future. I am a very optimistic man.

Q. *You had said Afghanistan was not the main purpose of your visit. What was the main purpose?*

A. To encourage cricket and in the process, to bring the people of the country (together). Because I think communication, dialogue is the most important thing. Once that breaks down everything breaks down.

Q. *Will you visit only for cricket?*

A. I have never played cricket. I am a football player.

Q. *So next we can expect you at a football match?*

A. Maybe not so soon. But if ever there's a good match I will be there.

Q. *How would you sum up the result of your visit?*

A. My visit has been very useful both in the field of cricket and in the field of diplomacy. The people have goodwill. The leadership wants to make it up. Who is in between? If Germany and France and many nations which have fought for centuries can do it, can't we also close the chapter of our animosity? We are only 40 years old: I think it can be done. Peace is not a button which you can press and a light will come on. It has to be (pursued) at all levels—at my level, at your level and the common man's level. If you take on the level that is up to you, half of the problem will be resolved.

Q. *Do you see any external influence?*

A. If we are determined and we have our own house in order nothing outside can influence us. I speak from 10 years experience. You can have all the goodwill externally but if you are weak internally you can't do a thing.

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CONGRESS (I)

The Old Hold

IT IS a resurrection that, in political terms, could well compare with a biblical miracle. A month ago, he was just another octogenarian politician pasturing in oblivion, content in peaceful retirement. His last period of active political life was almost a decade ago and his last sinecure was as governor of West Bengal—a post from which he sought voluntary retirement because, as he said at that time: "I wanted to spend the most part of my old age with my son and daughter-in-law in Delhi."

But miracles, under the new dispensation, never cease. To the stunned surprise of political observers, Uma Shanker Dixit, 86, was yanked out from the wilderness and appointed member of the Congress(I) Working Committee and chairman of the three-member panel to scrutinise party membership lists. He has also been asked to suggest changes in the party constitution.

The objective of Rajiv's exercise is quite baffling, specially at a time when the party needs strong and vigorous leaders at the helm to stem the internal rot—and the growing dissidence. Dixit's advanced age is bound to be a major handicap. Yet, such is the Congress culture that he is suddenly the new political lodestar. His residence in New Delhi's Diplomatic Enclave where he lives with daughter-in-law, Shiela Dixit, Union minister of state for parliamentary affairs, is now the new Mecca for party workers who view him as the latest conduit to Rajiv.

The veteran politician has returned to the centre-stage of politics after almost a decade. In the past he has held important party and government posts. But the manner and timing of his resurrection would seem to indicate that it was another of Rajiv's impulsive, off-the-cuff moves. According to a section of the Congress(I), Rajiv had gone to visit Dixit to console him on the recent death of his son, Vinod Dixit, a senior IAS officer when he asked Rajiv to give him 'some' political work. Dixit's statements seem to indicate that the job he was offered came as much as a surprise to him as to anybody else. He admits: "I am not a full-time politician. I have neither the time nor the capacity to do that. But I want to be and do whatever job is given to me."

Whether he can—and effectively enough—is quite another matter. In fact, one of Dixit's first assignments was to travel to Orissa to prepare a report on dissident activities against Chief Minister Janaki Ballabh Patnaik. He returned without having resolved the issue either way. In conversation, Dixit still seems to have his wits about him. He speaks haltingly and carefully but his words fail to carry conviction and he seems confused on crucial issues concerning the party or on his own political philosophy.

While admitting that the party is full of various groups who are trying to weaken the Congress at this crucial stage he glosses over the problem by saying that "in a democratic party it is bound to happen". His indecisiveness is reflected in his attitude towards the question of bogus membership, the thorny issue which almost led to a minor revolt. He admits that within the existing constitution it is not possible to hold fair elections: "There are some defects in the Congress constitution which create problems like bogus membership. In the absence of any previous records it is difficult to find whether a member is bogus or genuine." But he also refuses to concede Kamalapati Tripathi's allegation about bogus membership. "Tripathi is both right and wrong," he says, not elaborating further. Significantly, six weeks after his appointment, he has not made even a preliminary study of the problem. Dixit dodges the issue by saying: "The committee is too small to handle such a tall order. I have requested the prime minister to give me the power to nominate more members who may not necessarily be from the Congress."

PRASHANT PANJIAR

Octagenarian Uma Shanker Dixit's political resurrection is a baffling move at a time when strong leaders are needed to stem the growing internal dissidence.

Dixit is trying hard to project himself as an independent Congressman committed to Rajiv's leadership. But while he insists that he is "a great admirer of Rajiv Gandhi", when pressed, he says that the prime minister's policies are "neither bad nor better" (than Mrs Gandhi's) and adds: "Rajiv is after all a human being. He has both good and not-so-good qualities."

Rajiv's decision to induct Dixit may have been due to caste considerations—he needed a veteran Brahmin to balance the ouster of Tripathi and placate the Brahmin lobby. Dixit insists that he hates the existence of casteism in the party but admits that the Thakurs and the Brahmins are feeling threatened, saying: "As the roots of democracy are being strengthened, the Thakurs and Brahmins are losing out and they want to retain power."

But in trying to avoid a direct confrontation with any of the major caste groups, Dixit has already made some clumsy gaffes. While seeking expansion of the committee on bogus membership, he said that neither of the two other members K.N. Joshi and M. Chandrashekher were representative enough to deal with the question. He opposed Joshi because he was too junior in the party hierarchy and Chandrashekher, he felt, was not a true representative of the south. This led to a minor revolt and he had to hastily retract his earlier stand. Says Dixit: "I now realise that I should not have made that statement. I told the prime minister also."

He is also out of tune with the changes the party has gone through. As he says: "During independence our party was a sort of umbrella organisation. We did not discriminate between a mill-owner and a worker, between a maharaja and an ordinary person. But the dilemma in which I find myself is that the Congress is no more a broad national front. It has undergone changes." But whether he will be able to adapt to the changes—or introduce any of his own—is quite debatable. —PRABHU CHAWLA

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MIZORAM

The Rebel's Rule

FOR former insurgent and Mizo National Front (MNF) strongman, Laldenga, the ballot has proved more powerful than the barrel of a gun. At the end of his first essay in electoral politics, he found himself holding a prize he has coveted for more than three decades: command of the rugged 21,081 sq km territory of Mizoram and its six lakh people. Laldenga is not just Mizoram's fourth chief minister; for his supporters he is the "Hnampa" (father of the nation). For them, the significance of his victory lies in the fact that 15 years after Mizoram was separated from Assam, it will finally be ruled by a truly Mizo leadership. "Mizos have finally won and we will rule," shouted a bright-eyed Mizo youth, Thangliana, echoing the sentiments of his youthful compatriots, standing with sky-blue MNF banners near Aizawl Club, where votes from Aizawl district were being counted on the night after the elections.

Lending stature to Laldenga's victory was Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Aizawl, even though the Congress(I) lost, for officially installing Laldenga as the leader of the country's 23rd state. Laldenga reciprocated by conferring on the prime minister the title of "Thangchhuah", the highest Mizo honour granted only to persons of exceptional courage.

But getting there wasn't easy for Laldenga. And neither was the victory of the MNF quite as impressive as suggested by its tally of 24 in the state's Assembly of 40. It won largely because its rivals split their votes: it totalled a bare 36.5 per cent of the votes polled. The average number of voters in each Mizoram constituency was 8,000 and in most cases its candidates won by margins of around 500.

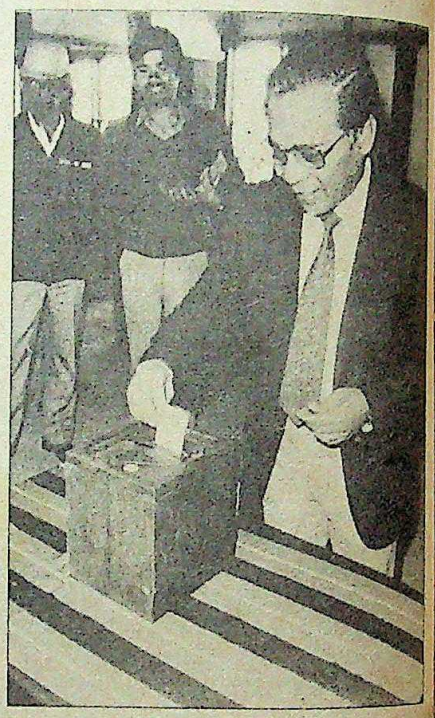
The greatest help to the MNF was rendered by the two regional parties—the newly-formed Mizo National Union (MNU) and the People's Conference. They fared poorly themselves but by taking away the crucial 500 to 1,000 votes in various constituencies, made the difference between the Congress(I) and the MNF.

The MNU robbed the Congress(I) of a crucial few hundred votes in at least two Aizawl constituencies even though it did not win a single seat and its candidates lost their security deposits in most contests. Similarly, Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo's People's Conference saw its own strength dwindle from eight to three but by drawing 23.7 per cent votes, it managed to thwart Congress(I) prospects in several constituencies. Lamented Congress(I) state party chief Lalthanhawla: "We knew the votes would be divided but poll alliances proved impossible as every other party was opposed to us."

The strength of the Congress(I), which had won 20 seats in the 30-member Assembly in 1984, was reduced to 13 this time though the percentage of votes polled by the Congress(I) was a bare 3.5 per cent less than the MNF's. Even compared to the last poll, the swing away was not too much—from 40 per cent in 1984 to 33 per cent this time—considering that the MNF was not in the fray the last time.

Yet, the election had its humiliating moments for the Congress(I). With the exception of Lalthanhawla, every other major Congress(I) leader, including stalwarts like Saighaka, R. Thangliana and Vaivenga, lost his seat. Moreover, the prime minister's campaign appears to have boomeranged badly: the party candidate lost in every constituency visited by him during his two-day campaign.

Essentially, the split in votes worked in Laldenga's favour because of two factors. One, enough Mizos wanted a change and felt that the charismatic Laldenga deserved a chance. And two, Laldenga was successful in wooing the crucial youth vote. Margaret Ruayalpa, a state govern-



Jubilant MNF supporters; and (right) Laldenga casting vote: sweet victory

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ment clerk, typified the MNF supporters reasoning when she said: "The MNF are different. They may not be educated but they have got practical degrees and they will show how to take Mizoram to an advanced stage."

For Laldenga, as he repeatedly reminded voters, the battle of the ballot does not mean a total jettisoning of the original ideals that had forced Mizos to take to arms. The aim, as the MNF strongman assured voters, remained similar to what the insurgents had stood for: a Mizoram for the Mizos: for their culture, religion, language, and, most important, for political power without Central strings attached. The state Congress(I) stands for the intensely-disliked *vai* (plains people), MNF leaders reiterated, whereas the MNF stands for *zoram* (the local name for Mizoram) and self-rule.

The other two regional parties, the People's Conference and the MNU, played a similar tune but unlike the MNF, failed to mobilise the support of the state's 47 per cent youth. Laldenga went about this in a methodical manner. In early January, the Mizoram Government issued an order allowing unregistered voters to get their names included in the voters' list by simply paying 10 paisa. Between January 2 and 15, the MNF helped register thousands of young girls and boys. When this process of summary revision of electoral rolls was completed, it was found that the number of voters had registered a dramatic 28.2 per cent rise in three years—from about 2.5 lakh voters to 3.22 lakh.

Considering that Mizoram's population is estimated at about 5.9 lakh, an electorate of 3.22 lakh implies that 54.6 per cent of the population is of voting age—easily a national record. Moreover, according to census figures, only 47 per cent of the population should be of voting age. Revealed a state Home Department official: "Other political parties did not complain about underage voters because most of them were busy trying to get their own supporters in."

EVENTUALLY, Laldenga proved to be the pied piper luring the young to his camp. "Most youngsters had never seen Laldenga before and from the stories they had heard, he was a legend," explains young businessman Patrick Houhnar. To a generation weaned on western movies, fast music and motor-cycles, Laldenga was a hero they could identify with, unlike the stuffy Congress(I) or People's Conference leaders.

Some Congressmen suggest that intimidation by uniformed MNF guerrillas had kept away many of their supporters, chiefly non-Mizos, from polling booths. Yet, even Mizos opposed to Laldenga concede that the election results reflect the people's mood. Said Lalthanhawla: "I have to accept the MNF victory since it appears that the people of Mizoram wanted change and wanted to give Laldenga a chance to rule."

But Laldenga will have problems enough. The first will be to resolve the contradiction in his own stance. He has made it a point to stress that Mizos will have to learn to be self-reliant. "We don't want any *vai* money," he stated during the campaign but the fact is that Mizoram continues to be hopelessly dependent on Central aid. As long as it was a Union territory, its plan was more or less entirely funded by the Centre. This may have to change now: a state's plan outlays depend directly on the level of the state's own resource generation. But so far, the only tax Mizos pay is land revenue. Laldenga's Government may well have to introduce many new taxes.

Laldenga realises the importance of continued Central munificence and has spared no effort in ingratiating himself with Rajiv. Yet, if the Centre decides to tighten the financial screws, the MNF will not be in a position to complain as Laldenga himself has been decrying how the Congress(I) has made "beggars" out of the Mizos by making them dependent on Central funds.

Intelligence officials point to another danger: Laldenga's electioneering promise to get money and rice from the United Nations and foreign companies if the Centre proves pusillanimous. These statements—which Laldenga dismisses as being "childish" accusations—nevertheless constitute a veiled hint, as even MNF supporters acknowledge that their leader had repeatedly made such statements.

Laldenga's crucial test, however, will be the challenge posed by the 20 leading Mizo families who control the levers of the state's economy. They are behind most businesses, agencies and contracts and many relatives of these families are in key positions in the state bureaucracy. And since they have fattened on the Centre's largesse, they are fiercely loyal to the Congress(I). In fact, one from among the families—Rokhamlowa—even won on the Congress(I) ticket from an Aizawl constituency.

The question is: will Laldenga take them on or will he join them? He has promised to wage a war on corruption but should he resile and make peace with the powerful 20, then nothing much will change in Mizoram. But if he decides to oppose them, he could alienate the bureaucracy. Said an Aizawl businessman: "This is the last chance for Mizos. If Laldenga fails, they will lose hope for a better future. Mizos will have to accept anything that comes their way." —INDRANIL BANERJIE

Rajiv campaigning: another debacle

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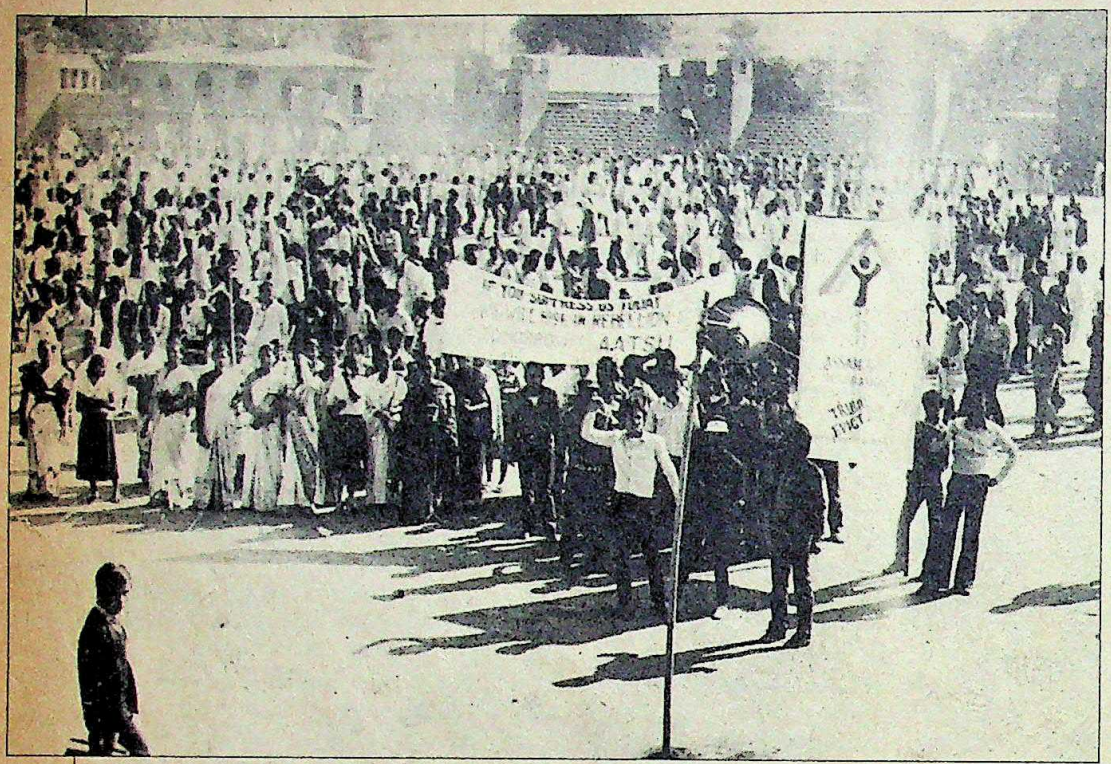

Tribals rally in Guwahati: growing militancy

ASSAM

Warning Signs

IT was hardly a fortnight that Assam Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta would want to remember. For the first time since the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) came to power, there were massive rallies in Guwahati aimed directly against his party and its policies. Just over a year since the AGP stormed into power amidst scenes of state-wide jubilation, it was under serious and sustained siege.

The rallies were easily the biggest held in Assam in recent times, clearly indicating that fear and anger among various sections in the state—predominantly the minorities—was on the rise. Organised by tribals and farmers' organisations and the CPI, the demonstrators sounded a warning to the Mahanta Government against the recent large-scale evictions ordered by it, rendering about 60,000 people from 12,000 families homeless in the state.

The evictions have caused much resentment among farmers who have been tilling the fertile riverine land of the Brahmaputra for decades. The land, locally known as "char", is mainly cultivated by immigrant Muslims, Bengalis and tribals. Alleged A.F. Golam Osmani, United Minorities Front (UMF) secretary: "Assamese chauvinism has started harassing the minorities."

The farmers rally last fortnight demanded that land could not be taken away from the tribals without alternate provisions being made. It also called for land reforms designed to benefit poor peasants and agricultural labour and said that in the name of implementing the Assam accord, legitimate residents who have been living in the state for many years should not be harassed.

The UMF, a party born out of the insecurity among minorities, stated at its Goalpara conference last fortnight that the AGP was uprooting the religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities in the name of eviction. It also wanted the Assam accord annulled as it was not in the interests of the minorities.

Clearly, the UMF was making political capital out of the current situation. It is commonly known that thousands of people who have settled on the dry Brahmaputra bed are Bangladeshis who have come after 1971, the cut-off year in the accord. Said Pramode Gogoi, general secretary of the state unit of the CPI: "The UMF does not want to stop the inflow of Bangladeshis into Assam." State Home Minister Bhrigu Phukan says his government is determined to evict encroachers and would not shy away from the policy though some groups were trying to politicise the issue.

But the UMF was not the only party storming the AGP citadel. CPI leaders have been openly critical of the delays in the implementation of the Assam accord. At a rally of party workers drawn from all over the state, they accused both the Centre and the state of lack of sincerity. Now, the Congress(I) has also jumped on the bandwagon. Last fortnight, the party gave memorandums to each district collector in the state pointing out the deteriorating law and order situation. The fact that there have been 10 political murders in the last 13 months in which the victims have been arch-rivals or critics of the AGP, has thrown up an embarrassing situation for the ruling party. The state Congress(I) unit is now busy preparing a list of names of party activists who have been assaulted in the last few months.

Communal attacks against non-Assamese have also shown a dangerous rise. Antisocials last fortnight forcefully evicted 137 Muslim families from Darrang district in Mangaldoi subdivision. Most of them had settled in Assam almost three decades ago after migrating from the erstwhile East Pakistan. The terrified Muslims have fled leaving standing crops behind. Pointed out Golok Rajvanshi, leader of the Opposition in the Assembly: "We cannot alienate the non-Assamese. After all, they also contributed in building the state."

The UMF also came out with the allegation that many legitimate Indians were being struck off the electoral rolls. This, they feared, would halt any attempt at bringing different communities in the state together and create even greater divides. One of the names which had been struck off was of Foyjan Nessa, wife of Idris Ali, a former MLA. Says Ali: "This is a deliberate attempt, with obvious intentions, to ensure that the Muslims do not vote."

One thing is certain. The euphoria that Mahanta and his team had aroused 13 months ago is fading, and fading fast. If the AGP lets communal forces take the upper hand just to placate regional sentiments, the state may return to the same bloody path it traversed in 1983.

—RAMESH MENON in Guwahati

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UTTAR PRADESH

Student Games

ARSON and violence cut a swathe through a dozen districts of Uttar Pradesh last month as militant students took to the streets. Even as beleagured administrations and the police slowly brought the situation under control, the question uppermost on everybody's minds was: why? While the mayhem had apparently spread in sympathy for the ongoing agitation at the Benaras Hindu University (BHU)—over the suspension of the students' union—by the fortnight's end, the state Government claimed to have specific information about the political involvement of Congressmen in aiding it.

The scale and ferocity of the violence took the authorities totally by surprise. Students in Varanasi turned the 14 sq-km BHU campus into a virtual battlefield: more than 25 bombs exploded, vehicles were set ablaze and academic life was paralysed for over a week. Lucknow, Allahabad, Ballia, Azamgarh, Deoria, Kanpur, Faizabad, Jaunpur—the list was long—saw students halting trains, pelting stones at the police, and testing the resources of the local administrations to their limits. And late last fortnight, students in Lucknow stoned to death Deputy Police Superintendent V.S. Sirohi. Confessed Home Minister Gopinath Dixit: "The violence was so spontaneous and mindless that we were kept guessing. But we finally controlled the situation."

By the time the fires died down, government officials claimed to have definite information about the involvement of supporters of the Congress(I) former working president Kamalapati Tripathi. A statement by Chandra Tripathi, MP, justifying the students' stance and asking for the fulfilment of their demands only served to strengthen the Government's argument. Chandra is Kamalapati's daughter-in-law and wife of state Health Minister Lokpati Tripathi. Interestingly, Varanasi Congress(I) MP Shyam Lal Yadav followed suit—and the silence on the part of Kamalapati himself spoke volumes. Said a district official bluntly: "Even if this group did not light the spark, it has certainly added fuel to a volatile situation."

The agitation took off when police prevented BHU students from holding a parallel celebration of the university's foundation day—boycotting the official function—on February 3, Basant Panchami. The students had been boycotting official functions since last year to press their demand for elections to the students union, which should have been held on February 14, 1986, but had to be postponed following communal riots that day. And there had been clashes with the police ever since.

But the police lathicharge on unruly students and the arrest of 23 of them on February 3 was infinitely more serious. Bombs were found adjacent to the Malviya Hall on the campus where the function was going on and the brickbatting became intense, forcing the police to act. District officials, in fact, had harboured apprehensions of a breach of peace since the chief guest at the celebrations was former vice-chancellor Dr Karan Singh, a detractor of Kamalapati. "We had well-substantiated information that the students might pose a security risk to the chief guest and Vice-Chancellor Dr R.P. Rastogi," said an official. More important, Anil Kumar Srivastava, president of the suspended union, was a known confidant of Chandra Tripathi and the move to hold a parallel function was reportedly backed by Kamalapati's student followers.

Srivastava and Janata Party youth leader O.P. Singh, who is also general secretary of the union, vehemently deny any political motivation. Argued Srivastava: "We had decided to boycott the official function and hold our own as a protest. The district and university administrations are trying to give a political colour to create misunderstandings among the student leaders as we have varying political leanings."

But the tinder had been well and truly lit, notwithstanding a purge of the campus carried out in December last by the university authorities: illegal occupants and criminal elements residing in the four BHU hostels had been evicted. Within hours, the 1.25 lakh student population of the three universities in Varanasi—BHU, Kashi Vidyapeeth and Sanskrit University—were on the rampage, with the virus quickly spreading to other districts. Aiding and abetting the mayhem were other Tripathi backers: Prabhakar Bhatt, general secretary of the Allahabad students union and Saroj Tiwari of the Lucknow union. The students predictably claim innocence, pointing an accusing finger at the police, but it did little to hide the fact that student activists from Varanasi were succeeding in keeping matters on the boil.

Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh

Police beating students and (inset) Rastogi: political nexus

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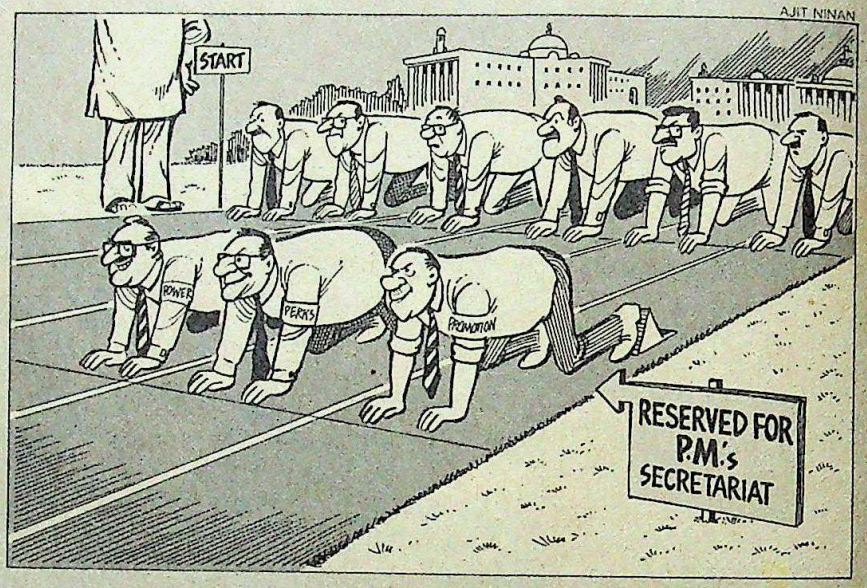
summoned a meeting on February 10, attended by among others, Dr Rastogi and Union Minister of State for Education Krishna Sahi. A reluctant Rastogi was forced to announce student elections in May but in a drastically different manner. Following amendments to the constitution of the BHU union, Rastogi first wants elections to the various faculties, and the representatives chosen will in turn elect office-bearers to the students union. The students have rejected this formula outright and, following a convention of leaders from across Uttar Pradesh, have now threatened a state-level agitation.

Though peace has returned, politics was uppermost on everyone's mind. Varanasi Police Superintendent Himmat Singh was transferred in an effort to placate the students who, sensing weakness, have demanded Rastogi's removal and a magisterial inquiry into BHU's affairs. None of the student leaders has been arrested, however, and many of them continue to hold meetings in the union office. Some teachers and university employees have now thrown their weight behind the students. A senior official reflected the feelings of a demoralised administration and police when he sarcastically asked: "What are we expected to do in a law and order situation? Prevent it or think about political considerations?" But his question went abegging.

—DILIP AWASTHI

PM'S SECRETARIAT

Power Pack



IT has always been known that there are several advantages to being posted in the Prime Minister's Secretariat. But to the traditional list of pluses—power, perquisites and patronage—must now be added a fourth 'p': promotions.

When the Government announced three promotions of senior officials to the rank of secretary last fortnight, two of them turned out to be in the Prime Minister's Secretariat. And, coincidentally, both of them got the plum assignments (G.K. Arora staying on in South Block as special secretary to the prime minister and Otima Bordia getting the prize post of industry secretary). The third promotee—B.B. Mahajan—was shunted off to the inconsequential Department of Official Languages.

The last official in the Government to be promoted to the post of secretary before this was the short, dapper P. Murari, who too is now connected with the prime minister as he is the secretary of the committee set up to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Independence as well as Jawaharlal Nehru's birth centenary.

These promotions might have passed without comment in bureaucratic circles were it not for the fact that all four officials have superseded officials senior to them in the 'civil list'. All of them belong to the 1957 batch of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), and they leave behind as additional secretaries people of the 1956 batch or of their own 1957 batch who were senior to them, men like Suresh Mathur (director-general of All India Radio), B.J. Hirjee of the Department of Justice, Naresh Chandra (till recently adviser to Jammu & Kashmir Governor Jagmohan) and P.N. Abi of the Department of Coal.

Another official in the promotional stakes, R.K. Tikkoo, was shunted out of the Department of Personnel and reverted to his state cadre, Madhya Pradesh. But Arora, who too was due to be posted back to Uttar Pradesh following the completion of his tenure at the Centre, overstayed briefly before he got his promotion. If the South Block grape-vine is to be believed, Arora is the most indispensable official in the Prime Minister's Secretariat and is tipped to succeed Serla Grewal, whose term as secretary to the prime minister is due to expire in a few months.

With the latest round of promotions, the Prime Minister's Secretariat now has three secretaries for the first time. In addition, there is now the post of cultural adviser (Pupul Jayakar), carrying the rank of minister of state.

In fact, the prime minister's office has been growing so rapidly and getting so top-heavy that it has, in the last two years of Rajiv Gandhi's rule, occupied an extra 12,000 sq ft of office space occupied earlier by the neighbouring Ministry of External Affairs, which has been forced to move out partially to a former hotel.

Some of the officials superseded in the latest round may, however, be accommodated in the near future. The problem at the moment is said to be a shortage of secretary-level posts. But even in the next round, some officials due for promotion are likely to be passed over because their ministers do not look on them very kindly. Law Minister A.K. Sen for instance refused to recommend Hirjee's name, though why the two of them don't see eye to eye remains a mystery. In Abi's case, what may have gone against him is the perception that he is close to the President Giani Zail Singh, under whom he had worked in the Home Ministry. As for Mathur, his minister Ajit Panja was unable to press his case firmly enough.

Bureaucracy-bashing, it would seem, will continue in the Government in different ways.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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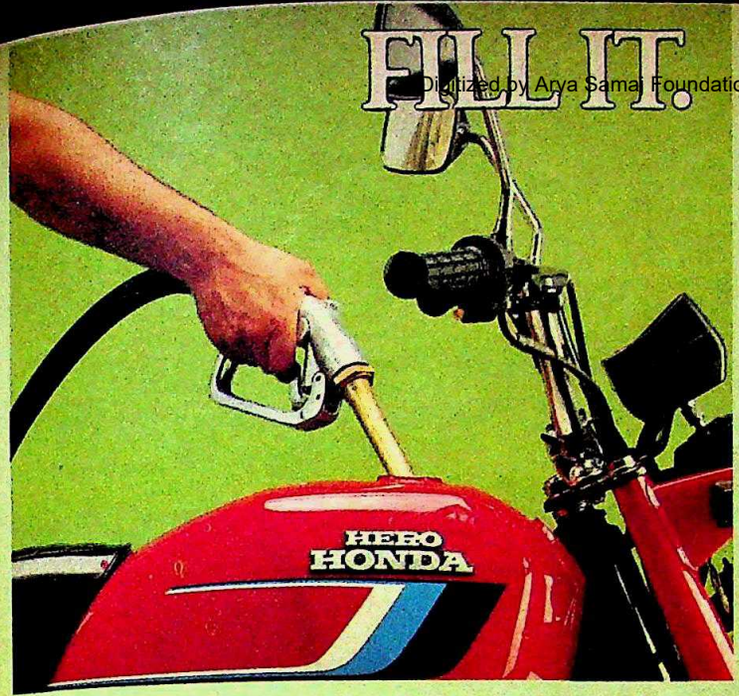

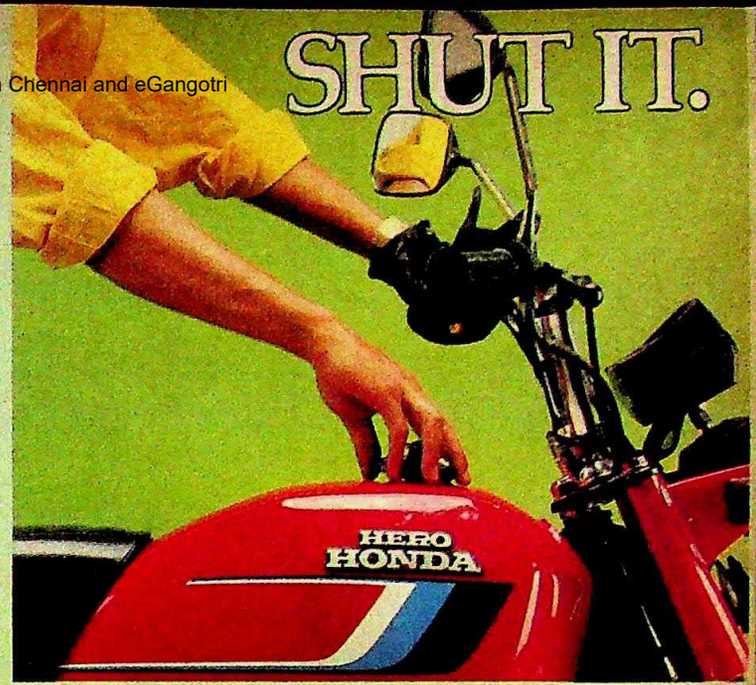

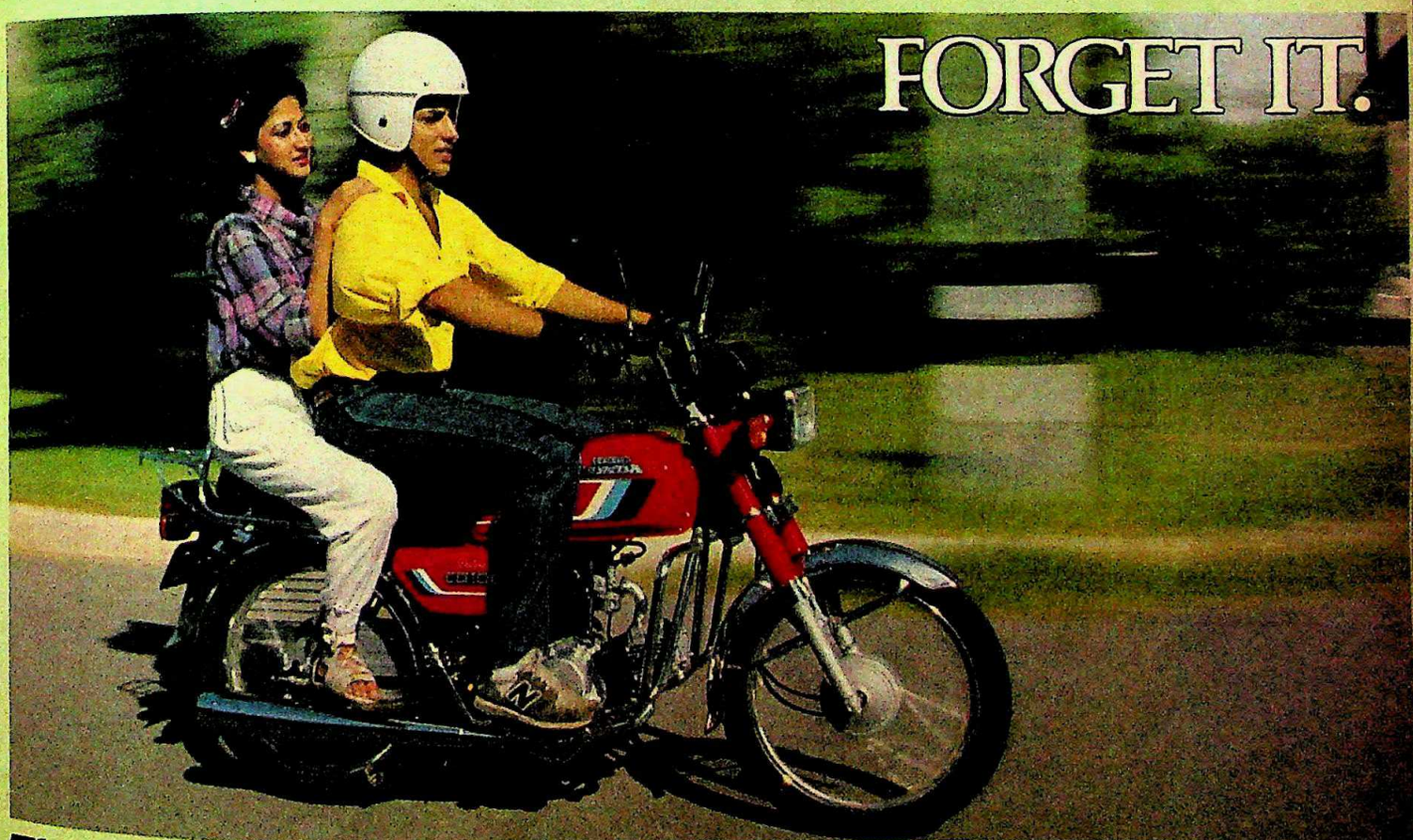

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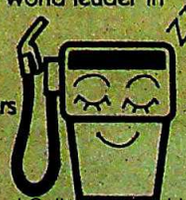
This phenomenal economy is due to the latest 4-stroke engine from Honda—the world leader in motorcycle technology.

And apart from being the most fuel efficient motorcycle in the country, Hero Honda CD 100 offers you much more—total comfort, total power and total reliability. In short—a total performance motorcycle.

Also, there is a nationwide network of 150 dealers and service points, for prompt, efficient service.

So fill it, shut it, forget it—for the next 720 km*.

*At 40 kmph with a load of 130 kg.



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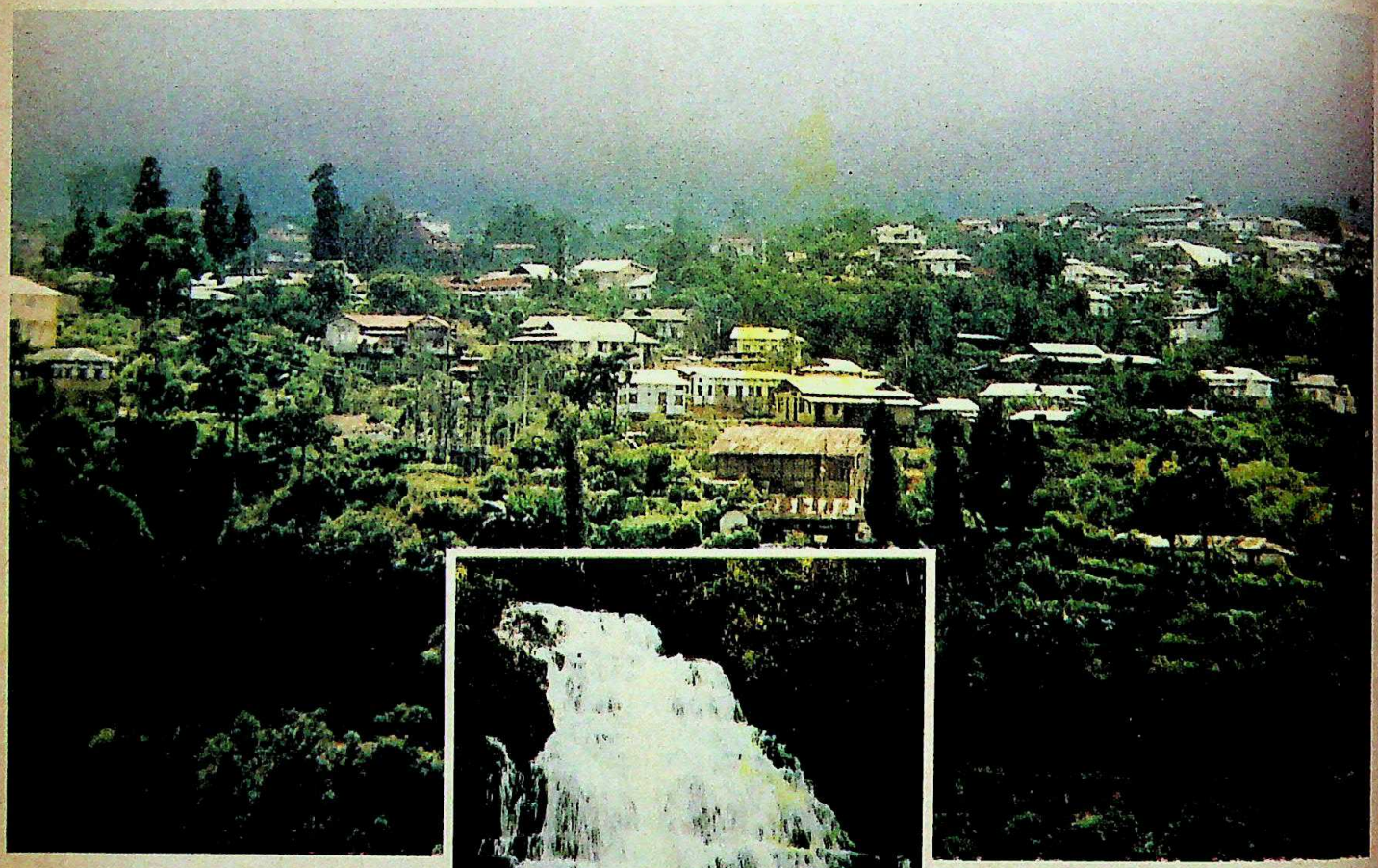
The distant song of water soothed their hearts, while misted hills awoke poignant memories of home.



Year after year, nostalgic civil servants of the British Raj left the heat and dust of the plains for the green hills of Shillong. Gentle, rolling hills dotted with sunwashed cottages that brought back vivid memories of home. A land of mists and scented pinewoods, which transported them to another time and place altogether. No wonder, Shillong was once called "Scotland of the East". Come, see for yourself whether it was aptly named.

ACCESSIBILITY

Daily Vayudoot flights connect Shillong with Calcutta. The nearest airport for Indian Airlines flights is Guwahati (127 km). This is also the nearest railhead (104 km). Taxis and buses are available here.

ACCOMMODATION

MTDC runs the Shillong Tourist Hotel, Tel: 24933 and ITDC runs Pinewood Ashok, Tel: 23116. For reservations, you can also contact the Meghalaya Tourist Information Offices at 9, Aurangzeb Road, New Delhi-110 011, Tel: 3014417, or at Police Bazar, Shillong, Tel: 6054.

TOURS

Package tours from Calcutta in season conducted by Vayudoot, along with MTDC. MTDC also conducts sightseeing tours in and around Shillong.

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UTTAR PRADESH

House Grouse

HOMESICKNESS is developing into a particularly serious disease in Uttar Pradesh—and the reasons are neither psychological nor medical. The source of trouble is the state housing board which has failed to provide homes to 1.89 lakh applicants, many of whom have been in the queue for years. That the Uttar Pradesh Housing and Development Board (UPHDB) hasn't learnt its lessons is evident from the fact that it will go in for fresh registrations this month in 124 cities and towns although it has not honoured its commitment to aspiring householders who date back to 1972.

It is not as if the authorities are unaware of the backlog. Admits Housing Commissioner Chandrapal: "There has been no perspective planning or monitoring for the implementation of schemes." But the lessons of the past appear to be lost in the board's bureaucratic maze.

So complete is the mess that the board has even lost track of the identities and addresses of people who have registered with it. It has, therefore, been forced to abandon the procedure of informing people by registered post about their allotments and has resorted instead to advertising in local newspapers. Over the last 15 years since it opened registration in 115 towns, till end-1986, the board has been able to provide houses and plots to only 1.10 lakh people.

In the past, it has taken the board three to five years—because of legal complications—to acquire land. The uncertainty of allotment that results has been disastrous for people like Lal Bahadur, a Kanpur clerk: he is still trying to find out about a home he booked 15 years ago. Says the frustrated clerk: "One of the TV ads is so apt for the board: 'Fill it (the form), submit it, and forget it'." Yet, the UPHDB is going ahead merrily with its current registrations although it still has to acquire land in 52 towns. Not that the pace of construction after land becomes available is encouraging: it takes the board six years to build a house and construction is currently taking place on less than 50 per cent of the 10,450 acres already acquired.

Major towns and cities offer conclusive evidence of the disorganised manner in which the board has functioned. Sixteen schemes were announced for the state capital, Lucknow, and 61,675 people registered but it has been able to implement only four schemes. Over half the people are still waiting, and these include large numbers from the weaker sections and the lower income groups.

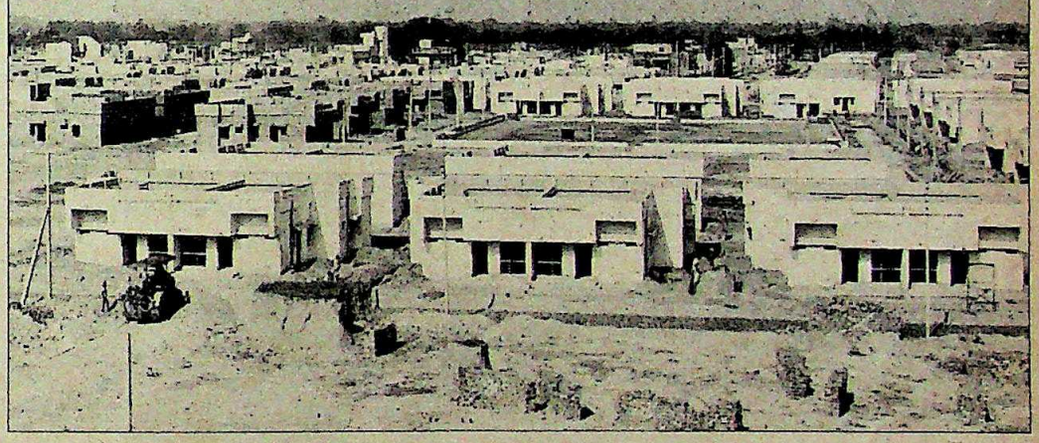
But the situation in Lucknow looks positively cheerful compared to elsewhere. In Agra, only 27 per cent of 24,626 applicants have been successful while in Allahabad the percentage is 26.41 for the 17,500 hopefuls. Kanpur and Ghaziabad can only be regarded as a bad joke. Just 987 applicants out of 27,467 in Kanpur—or 3.59 per cent—have secured possession and in Ghaziabad the percentage is a negligible 1.39—merely 400 out of 28,668 have tasted success.

"Taking up registrations without having the land for the scheme has been a major defect," concedes Chandrapal but adds that there is "no other way to gauge demand". This argument sounds unconvincing, especially when the price the applicant has to pay is considered—in terms of not only higher price tags but also smaller houses.

Data provided by the board indicates that cost escalations have been phenomenal. Indeed, the poorest have been the worst hit: a one-room home which cost Rs 15,000 in 1975, now goes for Rs 35,000. Not surprisingly, several of the needy have either been compelled to withdraw applications or take on huge loans. Laments a frustrated applicant Adarsh Kumar of Lucknow: "This trick of registering houses before having any land was the practice of private developers. But now the housing board is adopting it."

S. PREMI

The Uttar Pradesh Housing Development Board is asking for fresh registrations despite the fact that it has not honoured its earlier commitment to aspiring householders since 1972.



A housing board colony in Lucknow: homesickness

The UPHDB has gone a step further: it has been arbitrarily reducing plot and house sizes. Middle income group houses built in 1975 had a plinth area of 100 sq metres in a total plot size of 250 sq metres. The board is now constructing flats for the higher income groups on plots measuring 181 sq metres with a plinth area of just 71 sq metres.

The process of taking possession too is exhausting. Recalls Ram Sagar, a resident of Indira Nagar in Lucknow: "I was given the allotment letter for an LIG flat last August, was able to get the house only in January and the board's engineering staff still has to do the finishing job." The UPHDB seems determined to establish that house-making is anything but a pleasant exercise.

—DILIP AWASTHI

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MADHYA PRADESH

Scandal Sheet

ALL the signs of a scandal are there: documents missing from safe deposit vaults, important papers destroyed just before they were required and rules in small print conveniently forgotten. The intended beneficiary: a VIP's daughter who became remarkably bright after her father became the education minister.

As the details of the episode—reminiscent of the Nilangekar affair in Maharashtra—started unfolding last fortnight, Madhya Pradesh's Minister for Higher Education Chitrakant Jayaswal, 63, appeared to be sinking deep into trouble. The minister stood accused of misusing his post and influence to manipulate the results of his daughter, Jaya, who not only topped in M.A. (Economics) in Bhopal University but also secured a record 84 per cent in one of the papers—International Economics.

Ironically enough, the charge was first raised by the Bhopal University's unit of National Students' Union of India (NSUI), the Congress(I)'s students wing, which wanted Chief Minister Motilal Vora to remove Jayaswal. "He has no moral right to continue," says state NSUI Vice-President Abdul Shafeeq Khan. The governor later instituted a probe.

But the petite Jaya, 20, remains unfazed. "Is it a crime for a minister's daughter to top in an examination?" she asks. Jayaswal himself believed that his daughter had become victim of a conspiracy hatched by those who had suffered because of his efforts to clean up the mess in higher education.

Nonetheless several points in Jaya's case remain intriguing. She was a good student—securing around 60 per cent marks—but in 1985, when her father became the education minister, she was awarded an impressive 90 per cent in the internal assessment for M.A. (Previous) Economics carried out by the Government Girls Post-graduate College, Bilaspur. However, the external assessment done by Bilaspur University for the same examination yielded only 59 per cent marks—a yawning gap of 31 per cent. As the final percentage is tabulated on the basis of both internal and external assessments, with internal assessment given only 10 per cent weightage, her overall percentage fell to 62.

Dissatisfied, Jaya applied for revaluation of her statistics paper. Her percentage rose to 64 and she finished second on the merit list. For her M.A. Final, she shifted to Bhopal University, where she displayed a flash of brilliance aggregating 77 per cent marks to top the merit list. In one paper, International Economics, she got 84 per cent, breaking all previous records. It was then that inconvenient questions started being asked and revealing facts were unearthed, much to the embarrassment of the minister.

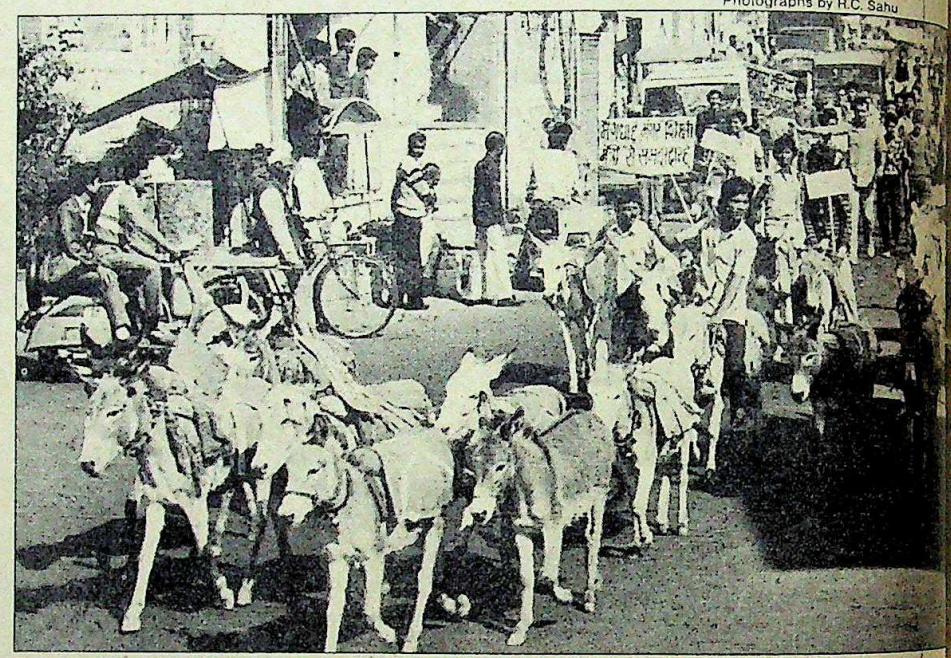
Bhopal's Nutan College, where Jaya was admitted, did not have written permission from university authorities—as required under the rules—permitting her to shift. It was found that she never appeared in one of the compulsory papers: Indian Economic Problems. Her M.A. (Previous) mark-sheet was also found missing from Bhopal University records. And finally, even the controversial answer book which was revaluated, couldn't be found. It was sold as waste paper recently, claimed Bilaspur University Vice-chancellor S.C. Behar.

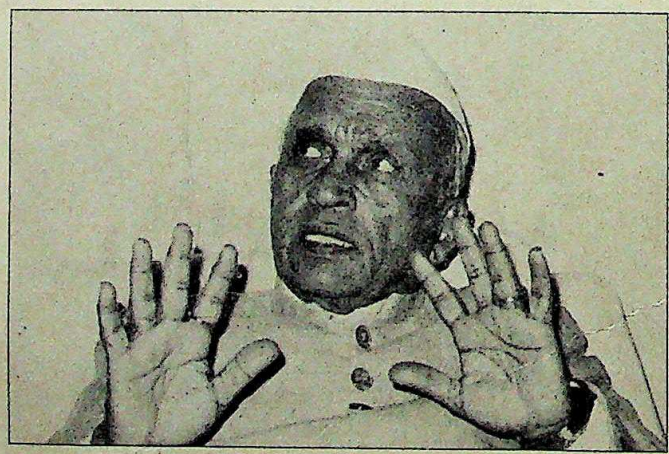
Denying charges of manipulation, Behar said: "There is quite a rigorous procedure for revaluation and it seems all the rules were followed in her case." Vora also skirted the issue. Asked if he had taken any steps to inquire into the affair, he said: "It's the minister's daughter who is involved and I believe that the university authorities are already looking into the charges."

The inquiry ordered by the governor cannot be expected to reveal much though Jaya's M.A. (Final) answer books have been seized by Bhopal University authorities. Teachers claim that revaluation is a regular racket where answer sheets of favoured students are sent to sympathetic examiners. Clearly, the charge is impossible to prove. What is certain is that, despite official disclaimers, most people feel this is another instance of charity beginning at home.

—N.K. SINGH

Photographs by R.C. Sahu





(Above) Students of Bhopal University take out a rally demanding removal of Jayaswal (left): marked man

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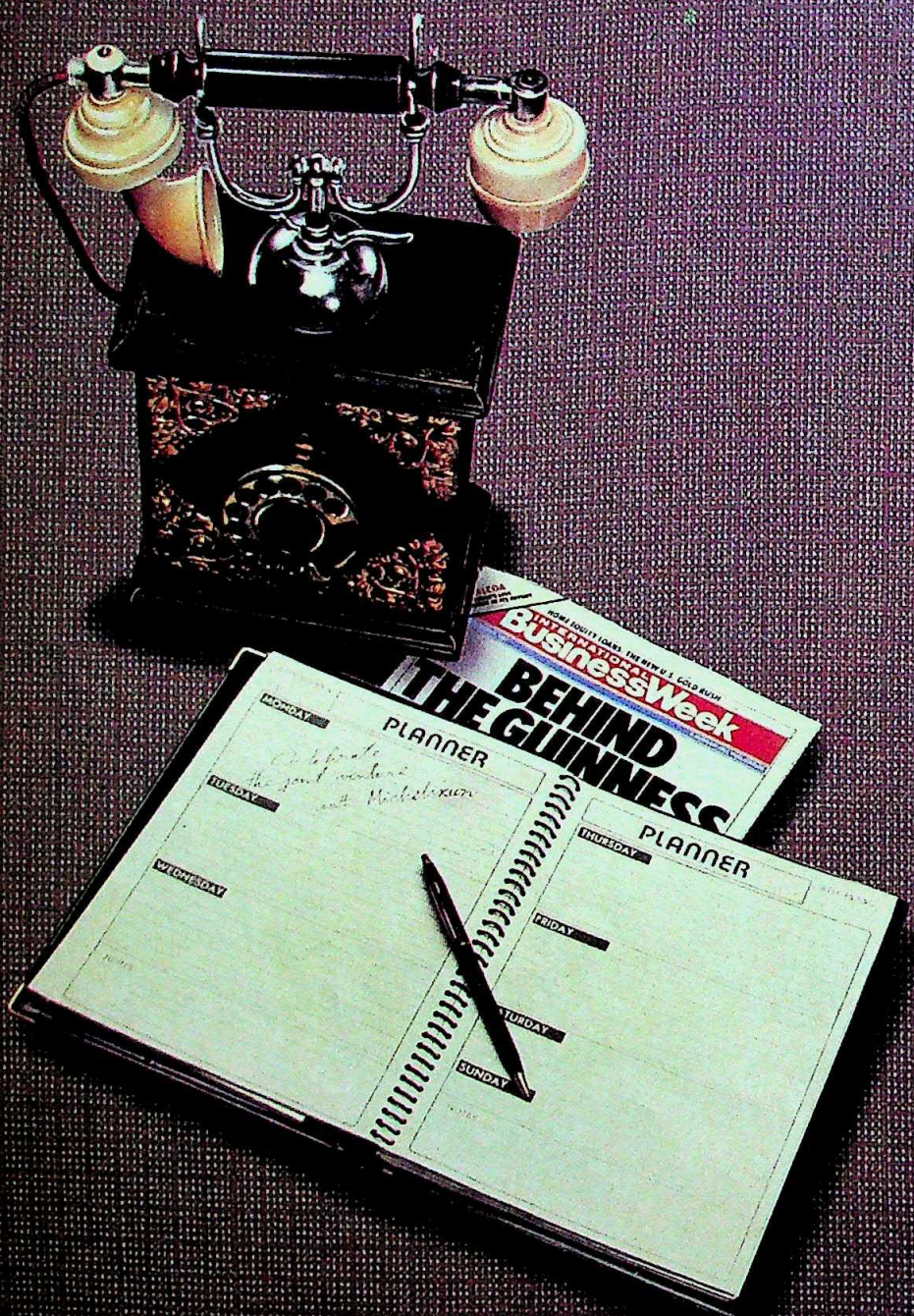

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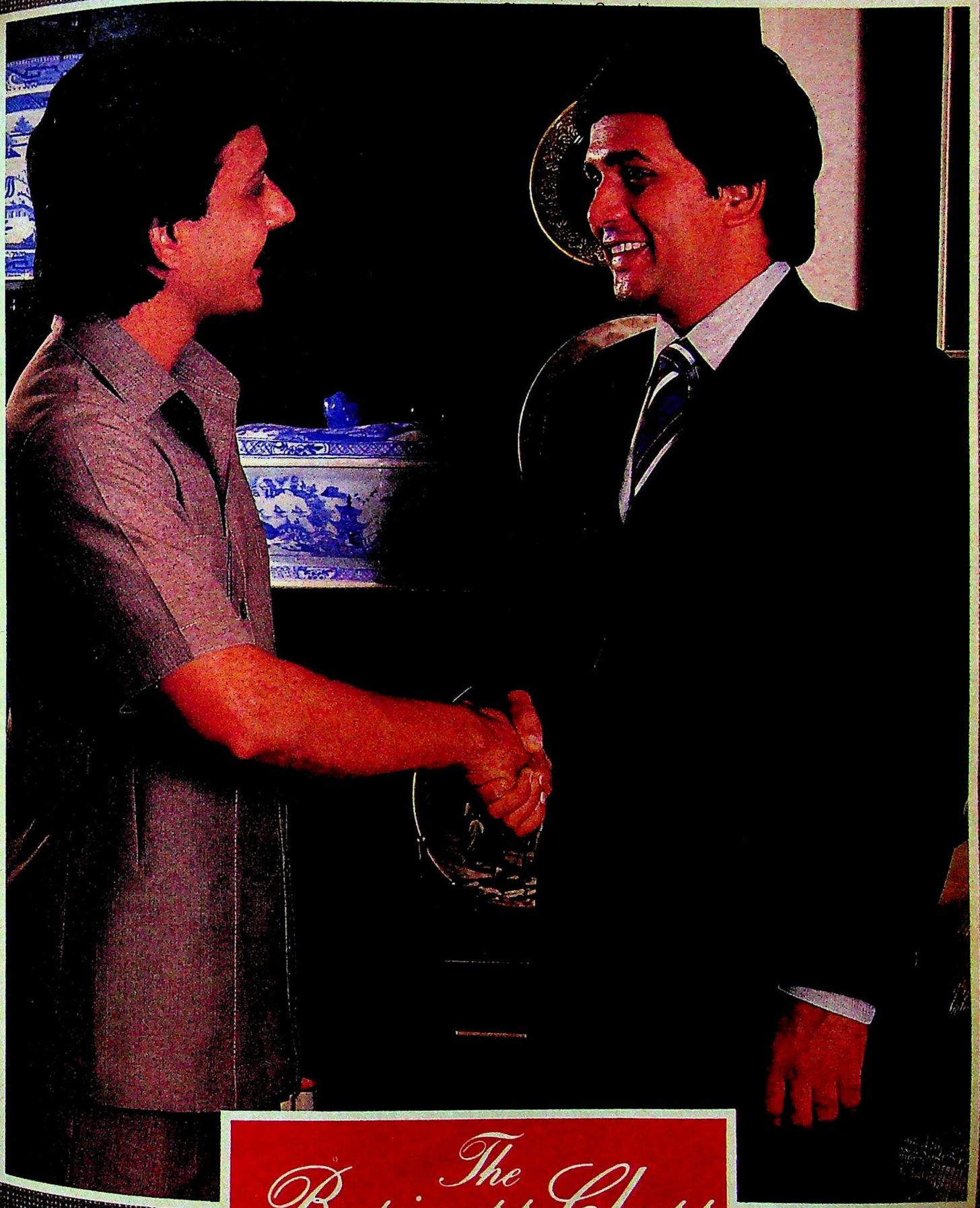

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CALCUTTA

Stealing from the Mother

IT was literally like stealing candy from a baby. But in this case, the crooks had picked the wrong baby, or rather, babies—the homeless waifs under the care of Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity. Last fortnight, the Calcutta police were poised to nab the kingpin behind a gang of international cheats who have been steadily siphoning off thousands of dollars, sent as donations to Mother Teresa.

Operating from Calcutta, Dhaka, Singapore and Hong Kong, the gang had been intercepting cheques bound for the care of the dying, the destitutes and orphans. "It is a terrible thing," remarked Mother Teresa. "Many of the senders are small children, they save and send their love to feed hungry children." But the postal thieves were obviously immune to all such moral restrictions and would have continued to drain the dollars had it not been for the Calcutta police detective department, which after three years of arduous investigations, is finally succeeding in its crackdown on the culprits.

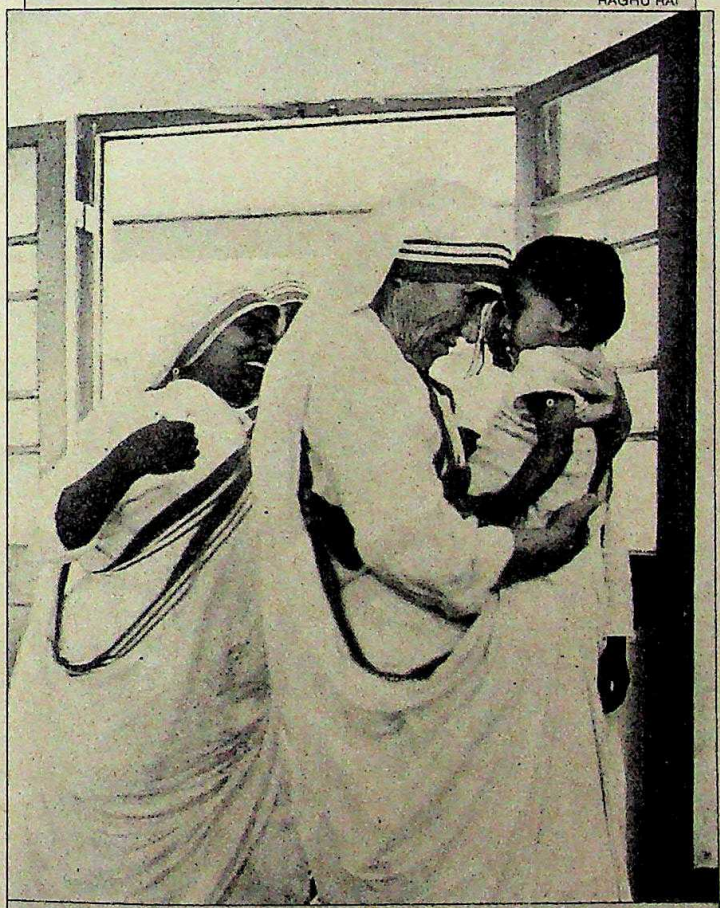
So far, the police have managed to recover cheques worth US $ 1,50,000 (Rs 19.5 lakh). Several suspects have been arrested and their houses raided. Hopefully, once they are successfully prosecuted, the money from the recovered cheques will be sent on to Mother Teresa. "Investigations are still on, but we will get the evidence to round up the gang soon," says the detective department's chief H.A. Sawfi.

But it was pure chance that provided the first clue. An American donor took the trouble of writing to Mother Teresa asking for an acknowledgement of his cheque. When Mother Teresa failed to find any record of the cheque, she lodged a complaint with the Calcutta police in late 1983. "We did not for a moment suspect that some people might steal our cheques," says a nun of the Missionaries, in charge of postal deliveries.

Inspector P.K. Lahiri, head of the detective department's fraud squad, who was handed the case, made the first breakthrough when enquiries with banks revealed that the cheque had indeed been cashed, but not by Mother Teresa's organisation. Bank records showed that the cheque had been cashed by a Singapore-based firm, Amar Brothers Private Limited. Intrigued by this "Singapore connection", Lahiri made his way to Calcutta airport's mail section.

Police are poised to nab the kingpin behind a gang of international cheats who have been steadily siphoning off thousands of dollars, sent as donations to Mother Teresa.

RAGHU RAI



Mother Teresa with a baby: robbed

"It is a terrible thing. Many of the senders are small children, they save and send their love to feed hungry children."

MOTHER TERESA

Each day, sackloads of mail—letters, money orders and parcels—arrive at the airport for Mother Teresa, and it was the obvious place to start. After keeping the section under watch for a few months, the police early last year gathered enough evidence to arrest the air mail head sorter, who had been opening all mail addressed to Mother Teresa and pilfering the envelopes containing cheques, cash or bank drafts. He would pass these on to two Calcutta-based businessmen, who would in turn send them to Singapore through Bangladeshi couriers. With the modus operandi established after interrogating the two businessmen and the sorter, the Calcutta detectives were ready for their next coup.

Travelling to Singapore in late January, Inspector Lahiri and another detective, Gautam Chakraborty, teamed up with the local police. Aided by a *suo moto* arrest warrant issued by the Singapore police, the detectives sprang a trap for the Bangladeshi couriers who were finally arrested on February 3 this year. The couriers revealed that they were acting under orders from the man running Amar Brothers. A raid on the firm drew a blank, but the police is convinced that the company boss is their man. So far, they have refused to divulge his name as he has not been charge-sheeted.

But it's known that he

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hails from Kanpur, had emigrated to Dhaka in 1958, and after Bangladesh's independence in 1971, had moved to Singapore where he set up his company. The Singapore police found the firm's operations vague and centred around small-time trading. Yet the company's proprietor does very well for himself, living in style in a palatial house.

The police claim to have strong circumstantial evidence against this emigre businessman. While the Singapore police is keeping close tabs on him, the Calcutta police is digging up crucial bank documents that it says will tie up the case. Already, the Calcutta detectives have xerox copies of cheques that have been cashed by Amar Brothers. The cheques, involving sums ranging from US $ 5 to $ 5,000, show Mother Teresa's signature, obviously false, instructing the concerned banks to transfer the funds to the company's Singapore bank account.

Meanwhile, even as the Singapore end of the affair is being wrapped up, interrogation of the arrested couriers suggests the existence of a parallel operation in Hong Kong which also diverts Mother Teresa's cheques. Though investigations by Calcutta detectives who travelled to Hong Kong show that a Sindhi businessman heads the racket there, progress has been stalled because of banking regulations in the British colony. Hong Kong bankers promise clients absolute privacy and have turned down the sleuths' request to study the suspect's accounts. But Lahiri is hopeful that pressure from Hong Kong's police bosses will ultimately make the bankers more cooperative.

"We should have the case wrapped up in the next few months," assures Sawfi. Meanwhile, postal authorities have by special order, appointed two officers, in Bombay and New Delhi, to sort mail bound for Mother Teresa and send it to the organisation's Calcutta headquarters by special courier. "We have received no further complaint from our donors and we believe that the postal thieves will not dare steal our cheques any more," says a nun. But already, money that could have saved so many more hundreds of destitutes and dying, has been drained away—perhaps irretrievably. While the police have unearthed some cheques, in all probability, this is only a fraction of the actual money that has been diverted. A handful of people have obviously struck it rich—at the cost of the poorest of the poor.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

LAST WORD/RAJINDER PURI

Cool Cabinet

THE Congress under Rajiv Gandhi is changing so rapidly that there is no saying how things will be in the 21st century. But we can guess how things will be next year, say around the same time. As I see it, this is how a typical cabinet meeting would go in 1988.

All the ministers are present, waiting for the prime minister. Rajesh Khanna leans over and whispers to Sunil Dutt: "Is the prime minister always late?"

"Don't ask me," Sunil whispers back. "I joined the Cabinet recently myself, in the 29th reshuffle. Ask Amitabh, he was inducted in the 17th reshuffle, he ought to know...."

Just then the prime minister walks in and takes his chair. "Well, let's get down to business," Rajiv says briskly. "What's the first item on the agenda?"

Narasimha Rao shuffles some papers and says: "The first item is the acute financial crisis, sir—we have a terrible problem of resource mobilisation!"

"Well, what does the finance minister have to say?" Rajiv turns his head and asks.

Amitabh clears his throat. "As finance minister, I have only one thing to say," he mutters, and then breaks out into a song:

Swiss bank ka paisa, jab kaho laa den,
Hum voh hain, jo do aur do paanch banaa den...."

Rajiv listens to him very attentively, then says: "Hmm! I see what you mean. More NRI investment along with a good dose of deficit financing, eh? Jolly good strategy, what? Okay, let's move on to the next item!"

"But...but sir," V.P. Singh stutters.

"No buts, man—let's have the next item," Rajiv snaps sternly.

"The next item relates to our fluctuating relations with Pakistan, sir," Narasimha Rao says hastily. "Our foreign office is quite confused about Pakistan's intentions, which is demoralising our armed forces. We have to formulate clear directions for the army, sir."

"What does the defence minister have to say?" Rajiv asks. All eyes turn towards Sunil Dutt. Sunil looks up at the ceiling, and melodiously starts to sing:

"Akhiyaan milaa ke,
Zia sharma ke,
Chale nahi jaana
Ho-ho-ooh,
Chale nahi jaana...."

Rajiv gives a satisfied smile. "There, gentlemen," he says. "We have our answer. Even if President Zia shies away from confrontation today, our boys at the front are ready

for anything tomorrow! Anything else?"

Narasimha Rao clears his throat. "One last item, prime minister," he says. "Eleven months in the year you are travelling abroad. Your long absences from home while problems mount are causing great concern. There are so many problems about which you are silent—do you have nothing to say?"

"Of course I have something to say," the prime minister replies. "I have something very important to say to you all."

"What?" ask the ministers, suddenly sitting up.

Rajiv solemnly looks around the room, then softly starts singing:

"Awara hoon, hoo-hoo-hoo,
Awara hoon...."

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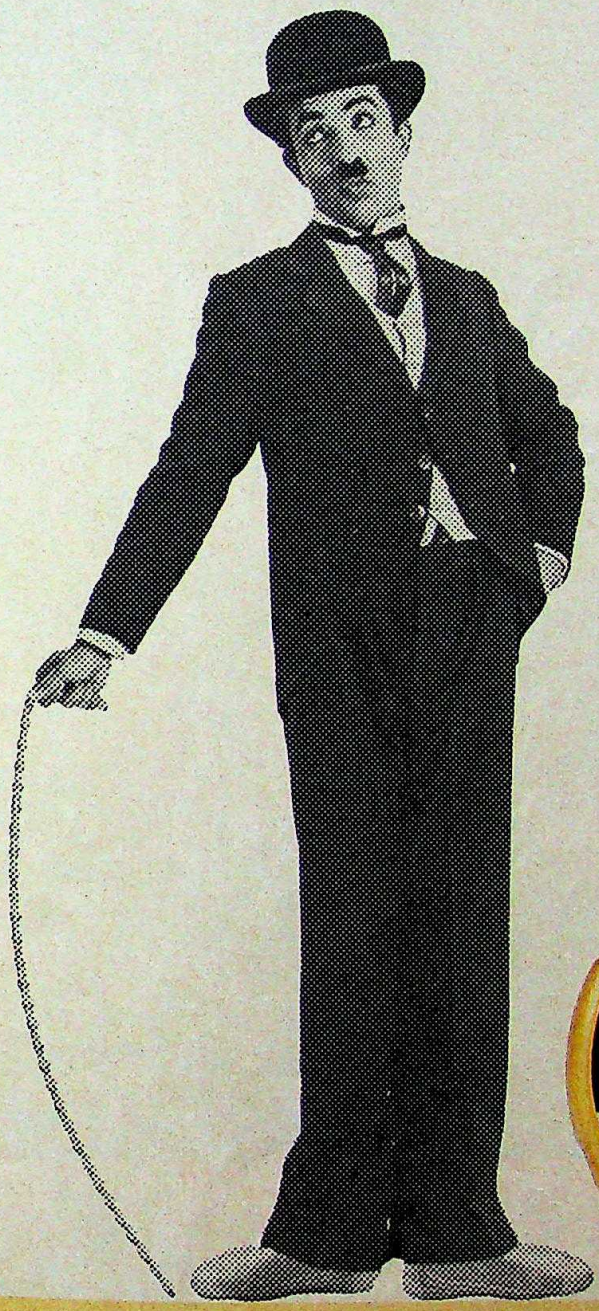
"In these Modern Times I'd love to be in your shoes!"



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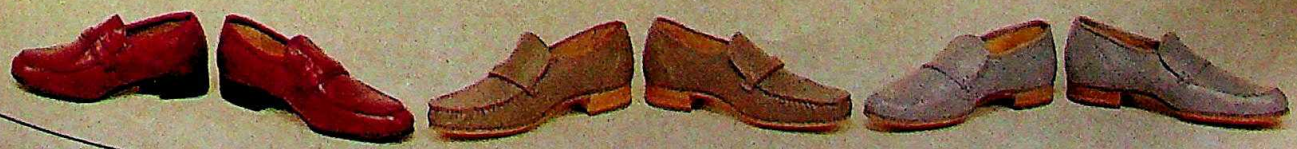

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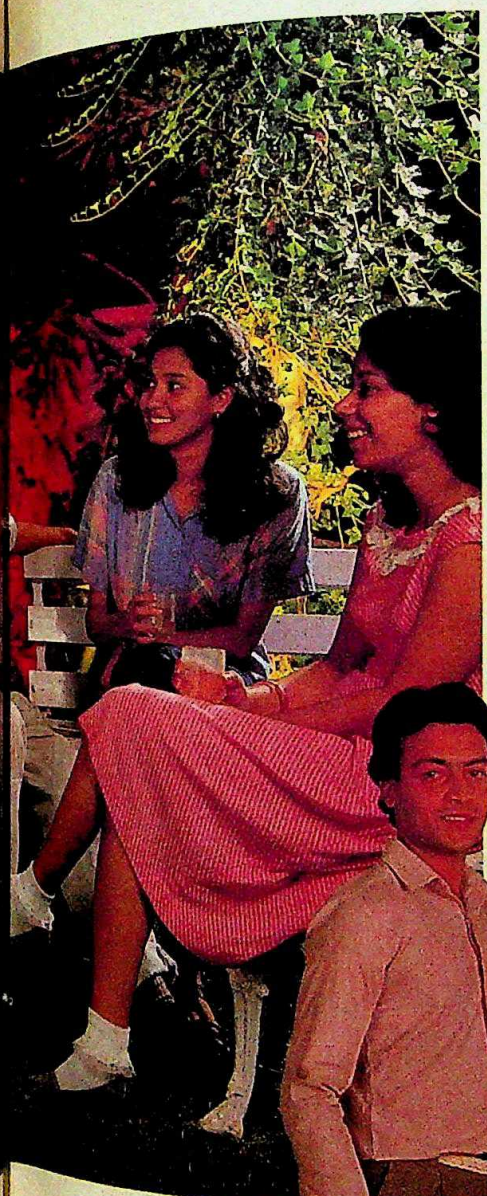

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And as the glowing coal slow grills the chicken tangri and the corn-a-cob gets browner, the tantalizing aroma of food makes everyone hungrier, livelier, then the stampede for food begins!

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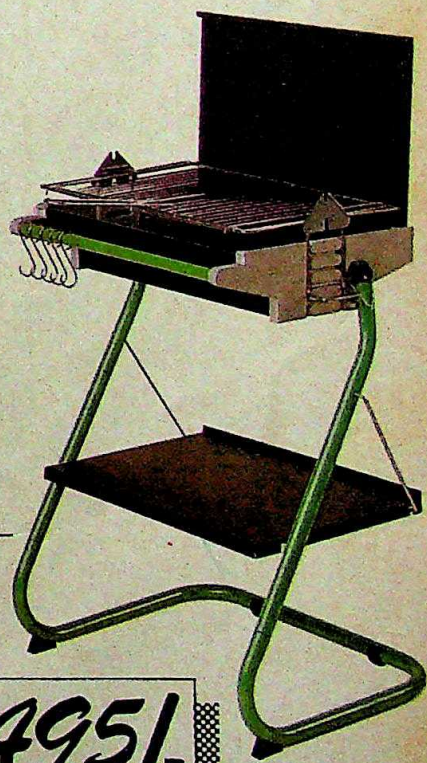

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Give the devil his due.

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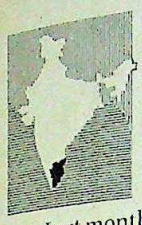
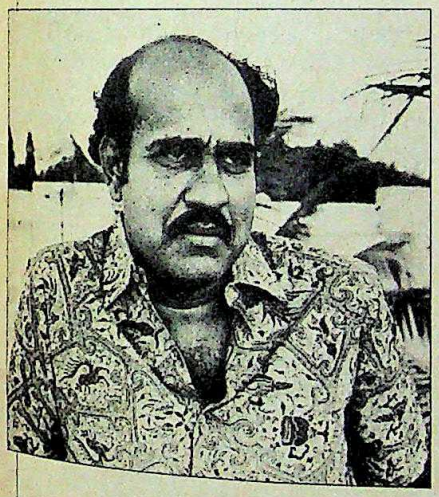
TAMIL NADU

The Militant Menace



KANDASAMY Durairaja, 49, a Jaffna Tamil and formerly a prosperous merchant from Trincomalee, took refuge with his family in Madras about two years ago. Last month, Durairaja was returning to his flat in Mylapore in the heart of Madras, when he was abducted by armed youths. The kidnappers demanded Rs 6 lakh as ransom for his release. Durairaja was forced to write letters to his wife imploring her to somehow raise the money and give it to the boys, otherwise he would be killed.

Three weeks earlier, a gang of revolver and sub-machine-gun wielding militants had stormed their way into the posh Anna Nagar residence of Thamodharam Manivasagam, a rich businessman hailing from coastal Valvettithurai town in the Jaffna peninsula, now a director in a Singapore shipping company, and spirited him away. The boys demanded a ransom of Rs 25 lakh from his family. His wife paid up Rs 3.5 lakh.



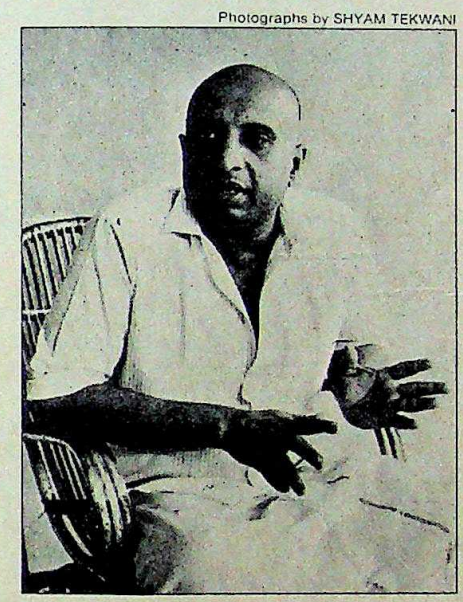
Kadirvelu Mohandas

Yet another bunch of armed Tamil youths whisked away another rich Jaffna businessman, Sinniah Kadirvelu Mohandas, from the same Anna Nagar locality, and demanded Rs 5 lakh for his release. Mohandas was tortured by his kidnappers, and left to spend his nights in a mosquito-infested toilet. In yet another similar incident around the same time, Suryakumar, a Sri Lankan Tamil travel agent operating now from Madras, was also kidnapped from his Arumbakkam residence on the outskirts of the city.

The families of these kidnapped Jaffna businessmen preferred not to lodge formal police complaints. The reason adduced was that they had been warned of militant reprisals in case they chose to do so. But top police officials had been privately informed and the cops had spread their dragnet.

Thamodharam Manivasagam

Photographs by SHYAM TEKWANI



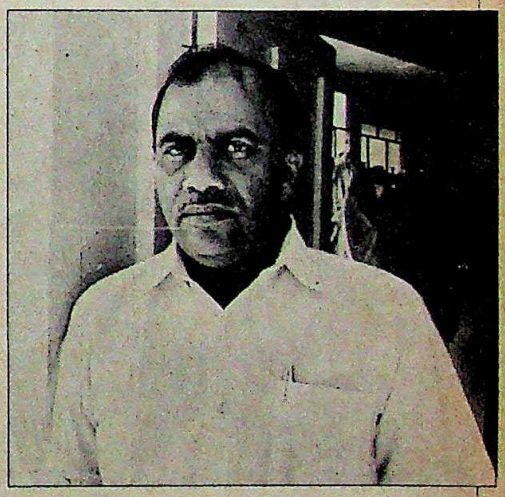
Tamil militants are now kidnapping rich Jaffna businessmen—who have taken refuge in Madras—to acquire much needed funds.

On the morning of February 16, events came to a head. Durairaja's captors had told his wife that they were prepared to show her husband to their 11-year-old son, Mayuran, if the boy was brought to a prominent hotel in central Madras. There was an unofficial police trap laid for the militants at the hotel. As Mayuran was picked up and taken in a car by the kidnappers, a plainclothes policeman got into an autorickshaw with Durairaja's wife and gave chase. Luckily, the speeding car hit a scooter in west Madras, and as the public closed in on the car Mayuran shouted that he was being kidnapped.

Two of the four kidnappers managed to escape while the public caught the others. Police subsequently identified them as Selvam, 24, and Subramaniam, 25, belonging to the Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), headed by Uma Maheshwaran.

Based on the information extorted from the two PLOTE militants, police parties fanned out into different areas of west Madras and rounded up 40 PLOTE members of the Uma Maheshwaran group. The same night Manivasagam was released by his gaolers. Subsequently, the shipping company director's relative who had handed over Rs 3.5 lakh to his kidnappers was able to identify the recipient, another PLOTE member. And, thanks to the large-scale round-ups, Durairaja was also set at liberty the following morning.

But Mohandas had yet to be traced. The police crackdown on the PLOTE did not bring about his release, so it was obviously another group that was holding him captive. Luckily, a couple of days later, an anonymous telephone caller ordered Mohandas' wife Bhagavathi to produce Rs 5 lakh in half-an-hour, and hand the money over to her husband's kidnappers near the Ayyappa Temple at Anna Nagar. Policemen, who had tapped her telephone, asked her to plead for a little more time, which was granted.



Kandasamy Durairaja

Well before the appointed hour, over 25 policemen in disguise had surrounded the rendezvous, some as Ayyappa devotees and others as vegetable vendors. At the scheduled time four

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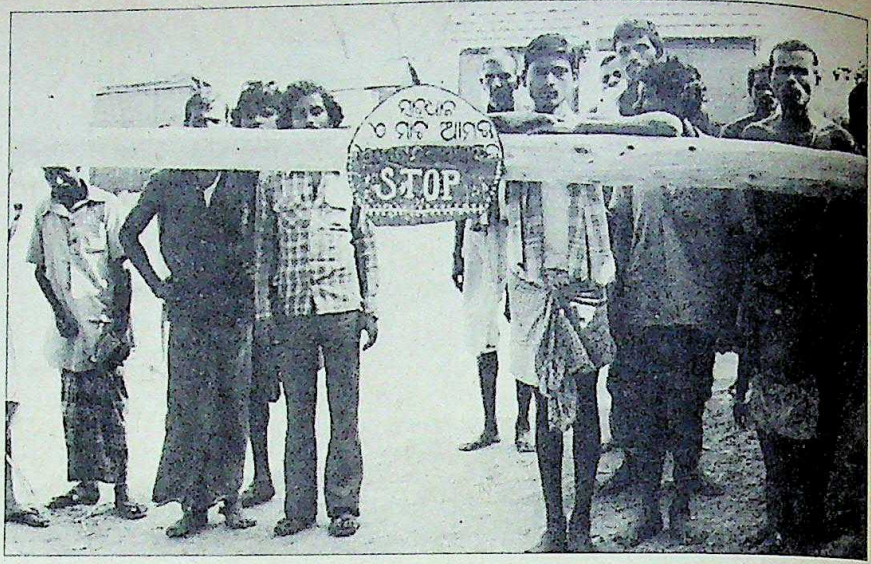
men appeared on the scene. As the money changed hands, policemen pounced on the four, all of whom turned out to be important members of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO). Following the arrests, the police were able to free Mohandas that night from a hut in Koyambedu on the fringes of Madras city. Forty-five TELO members were also taken into custody.

The police have concluded, after all their investigations, that groups like PLOTE and TELO, which have started disintegrating as a result of serious internal factional quarrels, are facing an acute shortage of funds and are getting increasingly tempted to resort to kidnappings for ransom. In November last year, Point Pedro (in Jaffna) businessman K.T. Rajasinghamand and travel agent K. Jeyarathinam were kidnapped by Tamil militants and released only after realisation of the demanded ransoms. After the Liberation Tigers proved their domination of the militant struggle, donations from expatriate and other Sri Lankan Tamils to the other militant groups started thinning down and they are now struggling to even sustain themselves. Corroborated Durairaja: "I found that my kidnappers were having only bread for breakfast, lunch and dinner on most days."

The latest series of kidnappings and the fact that desperate Tamil militants belonging to the smaller groups have begun to openly come out in the streets of Madras toting guns has come as the proverbial last straw for the people of Tamil Nadu. Said Madras Police Commissioner Walter Dewaram: "Sri Lankan Tamil refugees here should realise that they are our guests and have to behave themselves to continue to enjoy our hospitality." PLOTE spokesman A.S. Skanda says blandly: "We did not kidnap Durairaja. We arrested him because we had given him money for safe-keeping and he has not returned it." While Srikant, the TELO spokesman, says that certain irresponsible members of the group were responsible for the Mohandas kidnapping and they have been expelled. But the militants are now under considerable public pressure.

However, the militarily-most powerful militant group, the LTTE, and the Eelam revolutionary organisers who have recently been working in close cooperation with the Tigers still enjoy public support. Otherwise Tamil Nadu's sympathy for the cause of the Tamils of Sri Lanka would have by now been drowned in disenchantment with militant misbehaviour.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI



ORISSA

Siege of Balasore

THE battleground is familiar: the shores of the Bay of Bengal in the lush Baliapal and Bhograi blocks of Balasore district—abode of Lord Shiva—where the Defence Ministry had been trying for the past four years to set up a National Test Range (NTR)—estimated cost: Rs 3,000 crore—to test newly-developed missiles, rockets and pilotless target aircraft.

But the battle strategy has changed. Everyday, at dawn and dusk, women and children gather in their lush green fields blowing conch-shells and beating brass utensils each time they spot a stranger in the area, while the men block village roads to reiterate their resolve to fight the creation of the NTR which they believe will bring economic disaster. Village youth instead of working in the fields, vie with each other to enroll themselves as members of the *Marna Sena* (suicide squad) and guard entry points preventing government officials and their vehicles from entering the area. "We will not surrender even an inch of our land come what may," declared *Sena* volunteer Saroj Kumar Kar.

The battle has now escalated with villagers imposing a ban on the movement of government personnel and vehicles. The Orissa Government on the other hand has clamped an undeclared "economic sanction" on the area, denying the villagers essential commodities and agriculture credits for the past three months in a bid to force them to leave their homes and surrender their rich fertile lands.

But that has only made the villagers more determined. Village dwellings and shop walls are littered with slogans in Oriya, *Yudhanahi Shanti Chauhun, Ghati Nahi Mati Chauhun* (We don't want war, we want our soil). The slogans at the peoples' checkgates are more direct: "Warning: stop! the land is ours, the sea is ours." With the battle lines drawn, observers fear that a bloody confrontation

Map by B.K. SHARMA

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Photographs by EASTERN PRESS AGENCY

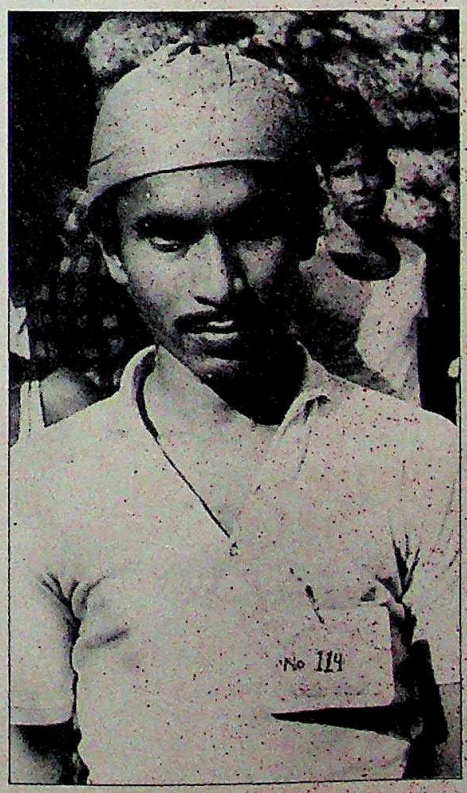
Villagers enforcing blockade (left); and slogan against test range: defiant mood

between the administration and members of the suicide squad is inevitable. Last fortnight, Janata Party leader Samarendra Kundu, the former minister of state for external affairs, sent a memorandum to Defence Minister V.P. Singh saying: "The people are determined not to leave the area. If the Government uses force, it will spill innocent blood." Opposition leaders have asked the Defence Ministry to locate the NTR in a place like the Andaman Islands, where it would affect less people, but Minister of State for Defence Arun Singh has insisted that the Andamans would cost much more. The Government also maintained that apart from the cost factor, the Andamans had far more rainy days, and testing required at least 200 clear days, a theory the opposition leaders refuted, saying that Baliapal had more rainy days than the Andamans. Still, with government officials claiming that there is no alternative site to build the NTR, the situation seems to be a stand-off.

The administration has now taken the extreme step of imposing an unofficial economic blockade by stopping the supply of essential commodities and refusing to ply buses to lift local farming products. Said Bansidhar Dey, a retail shop owner: "The Government has stopped supplying sugar, kerosene and other foodgrains since December as a result of which people are buying kerosene in black at the rate of Rs 9 a litre and sugar at the rate of Rs 7 a kg." Added another retailer Gauranga Bebarta: "Before the economic blockade was imposed, each centre was allotted 4.5 quintals of sugar and 416 litres of kerosene besides other commodities, but now our shops are empty." Collector of Balasore Priyabarta Patnaik denied that the administration had imposed any economic blockade but added that since government vehicles and personnel were not permitted to enter the villages, they were unable to monitor the supply.

For farmers, the area, spread over 400 sq km along the seashore and comprising 132 villages, is a virtual goldmine with cash crops like betel-vines, coconuts and cashew besides profitable fishing in the shallow waters. Farmers earn an estimated Rs 20 crore a year from betel-vines alone. Local farmers say that the NTR project would not only destroy vast paddy land but also over 30,000 betel-vines, thousands of coconut trees and cashew plants worth over Rs 750 crore.

Saroj Kar: ready to die



Said Sanatan Shee of village Tahalia and a member of the Pratirodh Committee: "Even the landless and poor here are richer than their counterparts in any industrial area. Even a child earns not less than Rs 20 a day." Said Collector Patnaik: "It was natural for the villagers to oppose such a project when they found that valuable land and houses would be taken away and the administration instead of provoking a confrontation was trying to ensure normalcy through negotiations. But the fear and panic had created a big gap between the administration and the people." That was amply illustrated recently when the Government, unable to meet village leaders, airdropped pamphlets explaining the Government's rehabilitation plans.

The Centre has announced a Rs 127-crore rehabilitation package which envisages paying the villagers Rs 50,000 per acre of land, a chain of industries to absorb all persons to be rendered jobless and even compensation for government land under occupation of the villagers. Chief Minister Patnaik has stated that the Government will not acquire land until all affected persons are completely rehabilitated. Village leaders, however, disbelieve the rehabilitation package and feel that once they move they will be denied compensation. The Government, under pressure, has now agreed to reduce the area for the project, thus affecting only 68 villages. The Government has also proposed the setting up of a model village by the end of the year so that at least 3,000 villagers can be accommodated in the first batch.

But the villagers are adamant and have received support from many opposition parties. Members from the affected villages are running a parallel state and peoples' courts, setting up a network to bring in essential commodities and sending local products outside. Last month, they turned down a Rs 15-lakh offer of the NTR development fund for their local college. "We know how to manage our own affairs," said a Pratirodh spokesman.

The area is being compared to Jaffna, with the Government resorting to blockades and the locals defiantly resisting. But by last fortnight, it was clear that tension here is rising to dangerous levels and the Balasore test range could well echo with the sound of gun-fire even before it is built.

—FARZAND AHMED in Baliapal

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PRASHANT PANJIAR

Sethia with wife Laxmi after being granted bail: long wait

RAJINDER SETHIA

To Jail and Back

IN the elegant ambience of his five-star hotel suite, he could easily pass for an expatriate millionaire on a visit to the old country. The faded jeans and windcheater could be a deliberately cultivated air of casualty, offset by the expensively elegant sari and jewellery adorning the wife by his side. But for the last two years, his home has been a 10 × 12 feet cell in Delhi's notorious, top-security Tihar Jail.

Last fortnight Rajinder Singh Sethia, 39, the man who made international headlines as the world's biggest bankrupt, was savouring the half-forgotten fruit of his old life-style as the Indian courts finally granted him bail. In those two years, his world has been turned on its head. The flamboyant, jet-set millionaire who owned a fleet of ships and limousines, a private Boeing airliner, casinos and dozens of trading companies had been reduced to the ranks of a common criminal, unable to even rustle up the Rs 10 lakh in cash for his bail.

In a span of just 30 months, the Rs 750-crore Sethia empire had collapsed like a house of cards, his flagship, Esal Commodities, liquidated and its creditors, including three Indian banks, were baying for his blood to recover the approximate US$ 150 million (Rs 200 crore) they had loaned him three years ago.

But the exaggerated hype that surrounds the Sethia story has somehow contrived to obscure the bizarre nature of the case and the actual charges against him. Perhaps the most bizarre aspect is that he has spent two years in jail even though the banks he has allegedly defrauded have still not filed any charges against him. Even the false passport case carries a maximum sentence of six months. Punjab National Bank (PNB), the only bank that has given some details of the money owed to them, has admitted that it holds securities that are in excess of their loans to Sethia.

In fact, the complex nature of Sethia's business activities and his dealings with the banks, seem to have entangled the case in a complex and confusing ball of financial wool that will take some unravelling. The initial impression created was that Sethia, at the time of his bankruptcy, had swindled the banks of over $1,000 million. The banks also claimed that his securities were either fake or doubtful. But what they conveniently forgot to mention was that between 1984 and 1985, Sethia had borrowed over $1,000 million from them and repayments had been made in full and within the stipulated time. But despite that, during the arguments on his numerous bail applications, none of the banks clearly stated that their loans were not fully secured. The total oustanding

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debt is around Rs 145 crore of which about Rs 70 crore is tied up in the Sudanese and Nigerian bills of lading while the rest is fully secured.

Further, the banks have not made any serious attempts to sell off the securities they were holding against the loans. Neither has any attempt been made to recover the payments due from the Nigerian and Sudanese governments. After numerous trips made to London by Indian investigators, the final chargesheet mentions the figure of only $7 million allegedly involved in the fraud case. As Sethia asserts: "I never intended to play mischief with the banks. I am not a criminal. I was guilty of some bad business judgements."

Sethia's spell in Tihar has obviously mellowed the man. He now chooses his words carefully and judiciously. "Where is the money right now to repay every one of the banks? My immediate goal is to clear all my debts outstanding in India. I have to somehow get back my reputation of a successful businessman," he says soberly.

That will be no easy task. His future is tenuously linked with the final outcome of the three criminal cases pending against him in the Delhi and Calcutta courts and one in London *(see box)*. The fact that it took his battery of lawyers, including the celebrated Ram Jethmalani, a dozen attempts before his bail request was finally granted indicates that the cases could drag on for years.

In fact, Sethia's 715-day journey from custody to temporary freedom has been a bitterly-fought legal battle, every step of the way. In early March 1985, he was arrested from his New Delhi hotel and two cases relating to bank fraud and possessing a forged passport were registered against him by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). He was sent to Tihar Jail on March 13. While still battling to defend himself against the charges, he was implicated in yet another major criminal case. In April 1986, he was one of the 14 people accused of collaborating in the sensational Charles Sobhraj jailbreak.

TRAIL TO TIHAR

Founds Esal Commodities in London in 1977. Company's turnover in 1978: Rs 1 crore. Establishes commercial relations with Indian banks in London in 1979. Raises loans from the banks for trading with Sudan and Nigeria.

Esal turnover rises to Rs 100 crore in 1981 and bank advances to Rs 100 crore. Sethia goes on a property and assets buying spree worth Rs 50 crore in 1982. By 1983, outstanding bank advances to Esal rise to over Rs 100 crore.

Esal's turnover rises to Rs 600 crore in 1983. The same year, a coup in Nigeria poses a major setback for Esal. Bank advances against Esal start rising without repayment. Esal's creditors start demanding money.

In January 1984, the Allied Arab Bank files a criminal case for recovery of outstanding loans. A London court freezes Esal's bank account. In February, arrest warrants against Sethia issued. He leaves UK and moves to Spain.

Esal's creditors meet in Copenhagen in February 1984. By August, they approve a Rs 50 crore rescue plan which is sent to Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Rescue Plan approved by the RBI and all the creditors on September 6, 1984.

Rescue Plan presented to London court for approval on November 6, 1984. On November 7, the British Government opposes the plan in public interest. Court liquidates the company and appoints Cork Gully as receivers.

Sethia returns to India in November 1984 for negotiations with the main offices of the three banks. Subsequently, he travels to the US and other western countries to arrange additional money. He returns to India in December, 1984.

Sethia arrives in Delhi on February 28, 1985. On March 1, he is arrested by the CBI on charges of fraud and possession of false passport. Released on bail by Delhi High Court on February 13, 1987, after 715 days in Tihar jail under judicial custody.

Overnight, his plans of getting out on bail receded into the darkness of solitary confinement where he found himself stripped of visitors' rights and unable to even meet his immediate family. His attractive wife Laxmi returned to London without meeting him and his nephew Daljeet Bhalla, who was handling his legal affairs, was also arrested in the jailbreak case. Says Laxmi: "It was hell. We thought we were finished."

What obviously landed him in the soup is his track record and his high-flying manner of doing business. The Sethia family consists of three brothers, all living in London who branched out from their father's jute business in Calcutta to set up a world-wide commodity trading network. But it was Rajinder who was always the high-flyer. He had the knack of locating the right contacts, specially in Africa where he had established a personal rapport with leaders of many African states. It was through his connections that Esal got orders for supplying everything, from sugar to potatoes, to customers all over the world. In the span of just five years, the 37-year-old magnate had taken Esal's turnover from Rs 1 crore to a staggering Rs 600 crore.

But it was self-evident that the high-risk element in Sethia's business dealings would someday land him in hot water. In January 1984, a coup took place in Nigeria, a country with which Esal conducted over 40 per cent of its annual business. Sethia, in his high-flying fashion, had been borrowing millions from banks and other financial sources on the basis of documents and pledges. And as the payments from Nigeria suddenly dried up, the pressure from his creditors started building up. The Allied Arab Bank demanded payment of £10 million (Rs 15 crore) that was owed to them by Esal and

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SOBHRAJ

Charlie's Angle

ONE of the most intriguing elements in the Rajinder Sethia case is his relationship with the most celebrated inmate in Tihar Jail, Charles Sobhraj. The Delhi police had tried to implicate Sethia in the Sobhraj jailbreak last year. But so far they have been unable to produce solid evidence.

Just how well did Sethia and Sobhraj know each other? According to Sethia, not very well. The fact that the two were kept in separate wards of Tihar made frequent meetings impossible. But even so, Sethia confirms that 'Charlie', as Sobhraj is known in Tihar, was monarch of all he surveyed and lived like one; a man before whom even jail officials would bow and scrape, who had limitless resources and contacts.

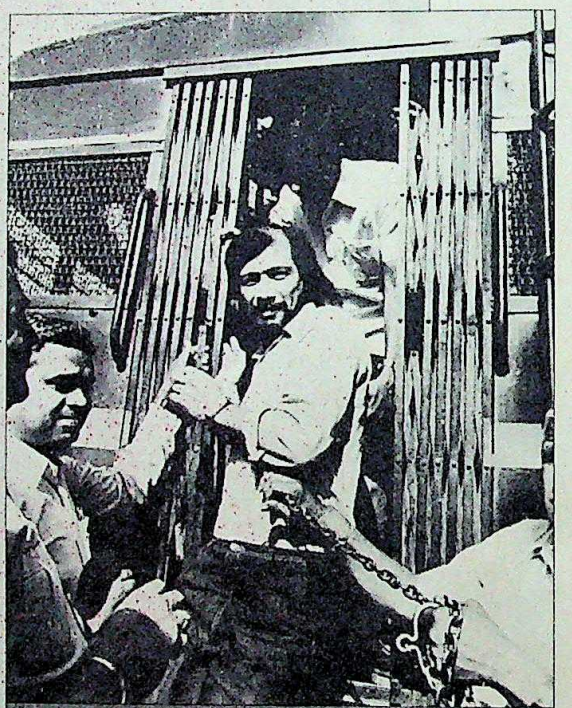
Says Sethia: "Charlie and I were never great friends. I only came in close contact with him during our routine meetings with our respective visitors in the jail's lobby." Sethia confirms that despite his notoriety, Sobhraj was easily the most popular inmate amongst the prisoners. "Charlie is both respected and feared by all. He is respected for his command over the rules of the prison and has succeeded in securing many benefits for the prisoners which were, in fact, denied by the jail staff," says Sethia.

But Sobhraj is also greatly feared. "The overall impression in Tihar is that he is one of the most hardened criminals and can go to the extent of killing people if he so decides. In Tihar everybody, including the top officials, are overawed by Charlie. He is a bit of a blackmailer and a bully."

But Sobhraj is also a man of taste. His life-style inside the jail speaks for the money power at his command. He spends lavishly and jail officials share his luxurious life. Says Sethia: "I have been told that he has at least half-a-dozen bank accounts abroad and he receives regular money through his contacts. In Tihar, if someone knows Charlie, jail will become like home for him. Charlie has both the means and the methods to import into the jail whatever anybody wants." Moreover, prisoners look up to him for legal advice. He counsels them on bail matters and on hiring the right kind of advocates and has become a sort of resident advocate.

Sobhraj, according to Sethia, keeps himself fit and reads a lot inside the jail. Sethia also feels that Sobhraj is a man of considerable courage: "When he was brought back to Delhi after his arrest in Goa he was beaten black and blue to extract information. But he did not give in. Instead he challenged them to take off his handcuffs and he would kill them with his bare hands. He's a tough man."

Charlie is best known in Tihar for being a schemer. Says Sethia: "He is always thinking in terms of his future strategy. After his acquittal in a murder case in Karnataka, he feared that the Indian Government would send him to Thailand where he was to be hanged. I feel his entire energy was being spent to postpone that day and it will not be a surprise if this escape was part of his plans. He knew that he would be convicted at least for two years in the jailbreak case and seven years for drugging the jail staff. Till he completes that term he cannot be sent to Thailand." Even inside Tihar, it is obvious that the Sobhraj saga grows larger with every passing day.



Sobhraj: monarch of Tihar

finally filed a criminal case alleging that Sethia had taken loans on forged documents.

That was the signal for other banks to panic. The London branches of PNB, Central Bank of India and the Union Bank of India, which had together advanced Sethia over $200 million (Rs 250 crore) against bills of lading, demanded payments. As the pressure mounted, Sethia quietly left London in January and headed for Spain from where he tried to recover from what appeared to be a temporary setback. Two of the three banks were, in fact, quite willing to bail him out by loaning him additional money.

Accordingly, the Indian banks cobbled together a rescue package of $45 million which was duly approved by the Reserve Bank of India. But the British Government refused to accept the bail-out deal and Esal was finally brought under liquidation on November 7, 1985.

Now with Sethia out on bail, the question being debated is whether he has enough assets to repay the loans. For over two years, none of the banks have made public the amount Sethia owes them. Even in court, the PNB took almost 18 months to provide the actual amount debited in Sethia's account. Till then, figures ranging between Rs 100 crore and Rs 200 crore were being bandied about. Surprisingly, the issue is now restricted to the charge that Sethia had defrauded the PNB to the tune of only Rs 10 crore. None of the other banks have even lodged a formal complaint against Sethia or launched civil or criminal proceedings.

Moreover, Cork Gully, the official receivers, stated in June 1985 that the total advances of the Indian banks were: PNB $92,500,000 (Rs 110 crore), the Central Bank about $21 million (Rs 25 crore) and the Union Bank about $14 million (Rs 16 crore) raising the total to Rs 151 crore. Against this, the receivers confirmed that the value of the securities held by the PNB were in excess of the loans. In the case of the other two banks, investigations were still pending.

But the PNB gave a revised amount in its letter to the CBI dated July 8, 1986, which stated that the total outstanding in Esal's account was $81,869 million (Rs 90

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crore) and included the accumulated interest of over Rs 20 crore on the loans. This means that the bank has recovered a considerable amount of money after Esal's liquidation. PNB admits that it is holding securities against all advances but feels that all of them may not be enforceable due to legal complications. Of the $81 million, over $48 million is due on account of Sudanese and Nigerian bills, most of which are secured by Lloyds of London. It is only in the case of certain Hong Kong bills that Sethia has no security to offer.

According to PNB, even the prestigious security of Jokai Tea Estate is disputed and cannot be sold off to recover the loans. Sethia's brother, according to the bank, has claimed a share in the company which is currently worth over Rs 35 crore. The PNB is even doubtful about the recovery of Nigerian and Sudanese bills because a criminal case against one of Sethia's companies has been registered and the Nigerian Government is not fulfilling its commitment. But Sethia asserts that he will be able to recover the money from Nigeria and Sudan. Says he: "It can be done only if all of us get together and fight diplomatically and legally. My securities are not in doubt. Why aren't they selling them off? If they are facing any problem let them tell me. I am available for corrective action."

While the PNB seems likely to recover its money, the Central Bank and Union Bank will find it difficult as the value of the securities with them is far less than the advances given. According to bank sources, the value is short by over 50 per cent in both the cases.

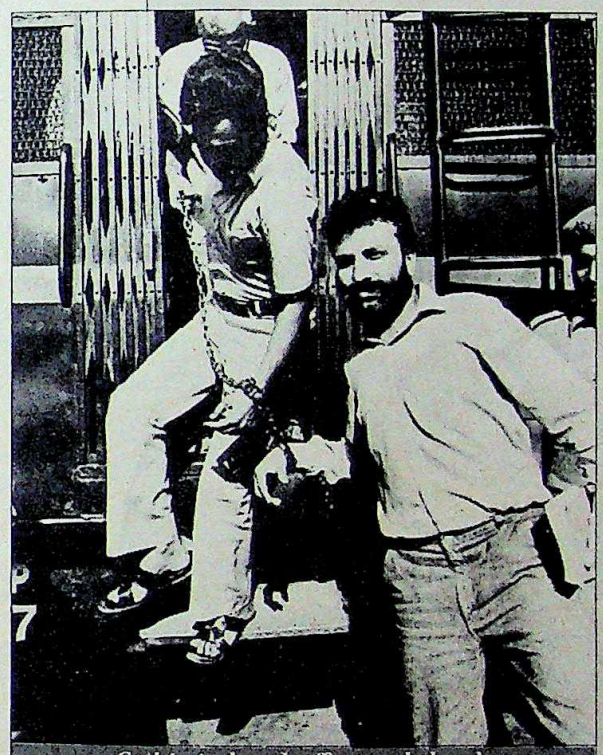
But despite the odds, Sethia seems determined to stage a comeback. "I have a long life to go. I can't live like a bankrupt. If I get the right environment and support I will not only clear all my debts but bring back to India much more." Sethia, however, is hamstrung by the fact that his passport has been impounded and his movements are further restricted as he has to report weekly to the offices of the CBI. He may have managed to get out of Tihar but that might eventually be a holiday compared to the financial bind he has yet to extricate himself from.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

CHARGES

Loan Mela

RAJINDER Sethia is involved by the police in three criminal cases. He was originally arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on March 1, 1985 for defrauding Indian banks in London "of millions of rupees". At the same time he was also charged with possessing a forged passport. While these two cases were still in the preliminary stage he was rearrested for allegedly being part of a conspiracy to help Charles Sobhraj in escaping from Tihar in April 1986.



Sethia in handcuffs: tangled web

He was released on bail last fortnight in all the three cases. In addition, Sethia is facing a criminal case in London for cheating a bank. Two of his directors were earlier arrested by the London police but both have since been acquitted by the courts. Since Sethia was not present to defend himself no judgement has been passed on his personal involvement. Says his London solicitor M.R. Laddie: "There are no specific charges against Raj Sethia though there is a warrant outstanding against him. This warrant is similar to the three directors of the company who were acquitted. All I can say at this stage is that the police here would probably want to interview him should he return."

However, it is the bank fraud case which remains the most serious one. The CBI filed a first information report against Sethia on March 1, 1985 stating that Sethia "entered into a criminal conspiracy with his own employees as well as certain officials of the Punjab National Bank (PNB), Central Bank of India, Union Bank of India and other institutions based at UK, the object of which was to defraud those institutions and banks to the tune of millions of pounds sterling."

But as the investigations progressed the CBI finally came down to a figure of $10.40 million (Rs 13 crore) as compared to the earlier $33 million (Rs 42 crore). Though the CBI charged Sethia with fraud and conspiracy the trial court did not accept this and dropped the charges against him. He was, however, charged with cheating the banks.

The prosecution case is that Sethia submitted false bills of lading worth over Rs 13 crore to PNB in December 1983. After presenting these bills, which stated that sugar worth that amount had actually been despatched to Nigeria, Sethia requested the PNB to reduce the outstanding amount against his account by over Rs 13 crore, which the bank did. The CBI, during its investigations, discovered that sugar was never sent to Nigeria as claimed by Sethia. The CBI also accused Sethia of replacing the original documents with new ones to cover up the fraud.

Sethia's company claimed that the 25,000 tonnes of sugar was shipped and submitted documents in support of its claim. But the CBI established that the tonnage capacity of the ship named by Sethia as the carrier could carry only 12,500 tonnes and not 25,000 tonnes as claimed by him. In fact, the CBI has been able to lay its hands on what looks like irrefutable evidence to prove that the sugar was never shipped. However, Sethia sticks to his position and says that he never took any money against this shipment though the PNB did reduce his outstanding loans by the amount of the shipped sugar's value. But this entry has also been reversed and the bank loans remain at the original amount.

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Final Bow

ITS long list of contributors, over a span of 63 years, reads like a who's who of Telugu writers, poets, historians, epigraphists, other scholars and social reformers in Andhra Pradesh during this century. Yet, even they could not save the prestigious monthly *Bharathi* from making its final bow with the January 1987 issue. Lamented owner-editor S. Radhakrishna: "It is sad but the accountant's decision mattered most. We were spending Rs 50,000 on a journal which brought in only Rs 40,000." The closure of *Bharathi* marks the end of an era of periodical journalism which pioneered the renaissance in Telugu culture this century.

NAGENDER RAO

Bharathi: last issue

The founders of the oldest Telugu daily, *Andhra Patrika*, brought out the journal at eight annas a copy, 63 years ago, to promote literary criticism, and studies on the history, social and cultural movements of the Telugu-speaking people. Its circulation never rose beyond 4,000 but contributors prized their names appearing on the authors' list of *Bharathi*. Radhakrishna is now planning to push it as a special section with the daily *Andhra Patrika* once a fortnight. Telugu afficionados will be happy enough with that.

Counter Moves

IT is now clear that Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Motilal Vora is trying to build up Minister of State for Railways Madhavrao Scindia at Arjun Singh's cost. Last month, when Scindia was in Bhopal for some railway work, Vora raised quite a few eyebrows by convening a high-level meeting to discuss the "development of Gwalior division". State cabinet ministers present in the city were asked to attend the meeting, senior officials were summoned from the four districts of Gwalior division and top bureaucrats in the state secretariat had to do proper homework for the meeting. Earlier, the chief minister's special assistant, Iqbal Ahmed, had shot off a terse memo to a number of officials asking them to send notes about their departments.

DIP

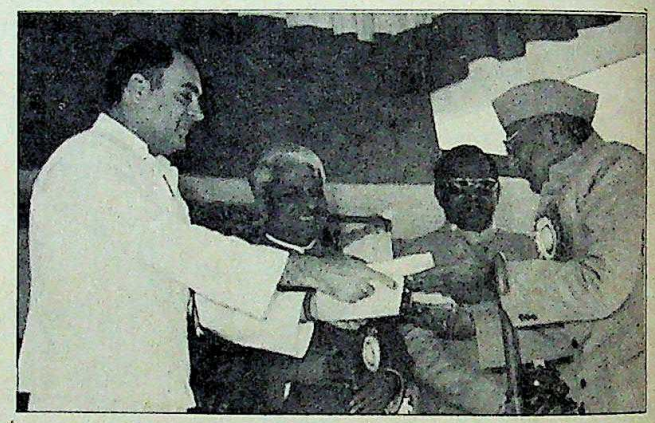
Scindia with Vora (left) at the meeting: breach of protocol

The meeting, held to humour a minister of state, created history of sorts and triggered off murmurs of dissent. Many ministers felt that it was a flagrant and quite surprising breach of protocol. But, an unfazed Vora maintains that the meeting, jointly addressed by him and Scindia, was nothing new: "Such meetings have been held in the past." Records, however, don't confirm the claim.

Capital Connection

PARLIAMENTARIAN 'Raja' Dinesh Singh, 62, minister in the External Affairs Ministry for half a dozen years in the '60s, is rising from what seemed his political grave. Speculation on this count has been fuelled by a prime ministerial visit to Singh's Kala Kanker estate in Uttar Pradesh's Pratapgarh district.

It was an odd function that took Rajiv there: he spent two and a half hours, first for tea at Singh's palace, and later participating in the centenary celebrations of a newspaper that folded up 79 years ago. In any case, the event should have been noted about a year and a half ago, because Singh's great grandfather, Raja Rampal Singh, had launched the *Hindusthan*—of which Madan Mohan Malviya was editor—on November 1, 1885. It closed shop in 1908 after Rampal Singh's death, when it was incurring an annual loss of Rs 50,000.



Rajiv with Singh (right) at *Hindusthan* centenary: speculation

The incident received particular attention in Congress(I) circles also because Rajiv has visited the state on few occasions since he came to power. Such is the nature of ruling party politics that, soon after Rajiv's visit, the rumour mills went immediately into top gear and Singh is being talked of as an alternative Thakur leader to the present crop of Defence Minister V.P. Singh, Union Communications Minister Arjun Singh and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh. That Rajiv, as an MP, visited Kala Kanker at least thrice with his wife Sonia, is also being counted as an important factor that favours Singh's comeback.

There seems little else to Singh except for his personal familiarity with the country's most powerful family—he was not only a Union minister but once a confidant of Indira Gandhi. But he deserted the Congress for the Janata Party just before the 1980 elections and lost the seat. He was taken back into the fold by Mrs Gandhi and Rajiv, who gave him the Pratapgarh ticket in the 1984 elections. How much he can capitalise on his family connections will continue to be a point of speculation in coming months.

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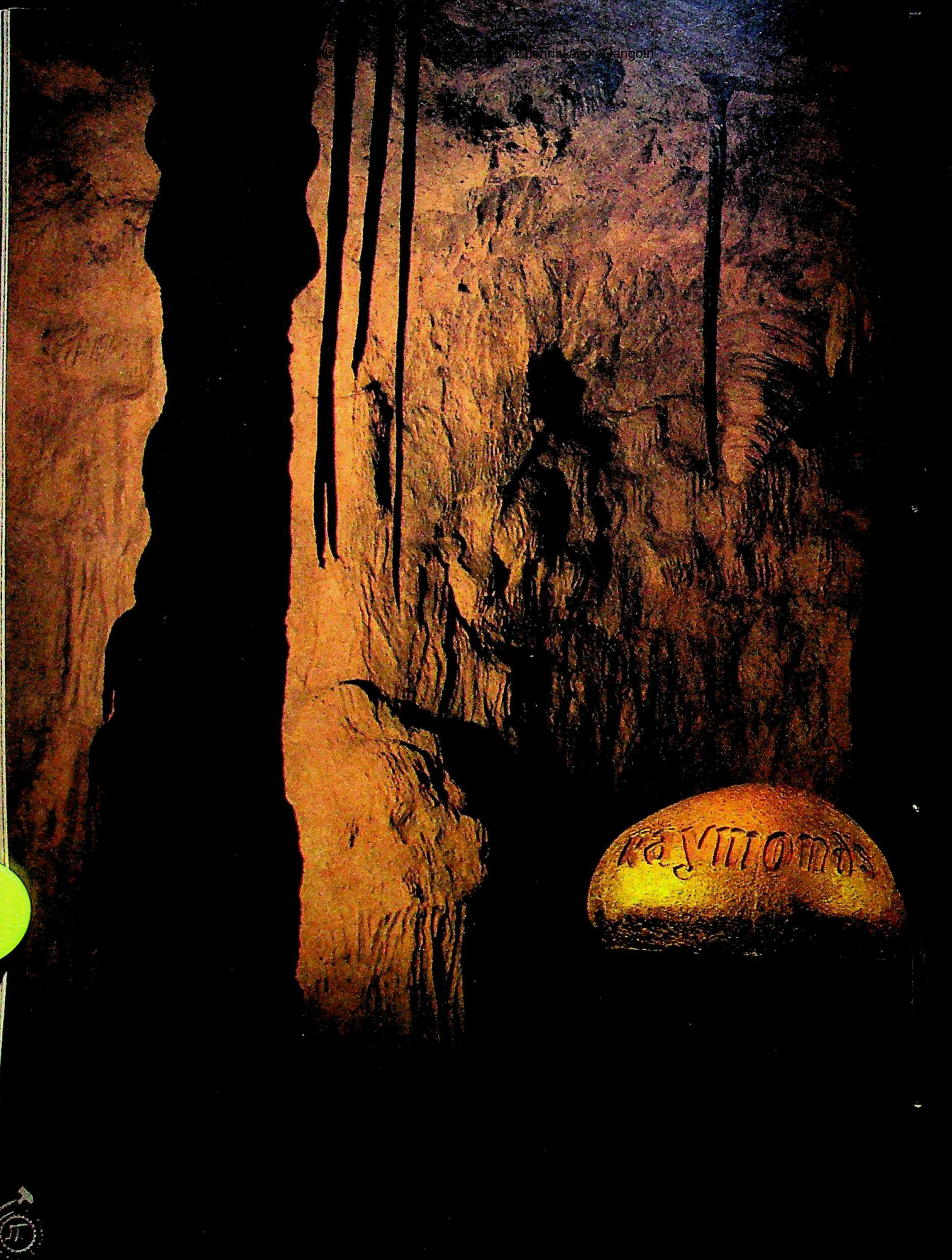

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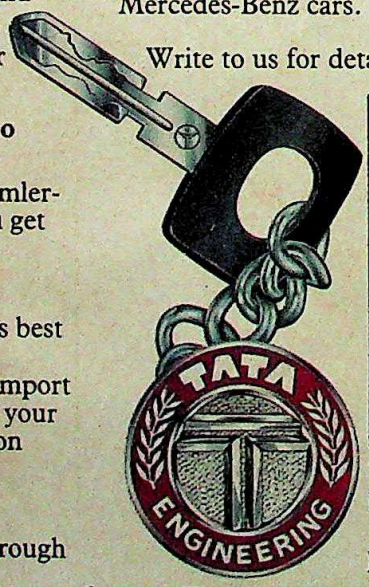

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Joy Ride

THERE is no love lost between Balakrishnan Pillai, the controversial Kerala electricity minister, and the journalist fraternity. But Pillai and Trivandrum Press Club President V.P. Madhavan Nair, 65, both from Kottarakara, get along famously. So it came as no surprise when Nair recently arranged a junket tour sponsored by the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) to visit hydel projects all over India. In 1982, when the CPI(M) led-E.K. Nayanar ministry was about to fall, Pillai, who was in charge of the same portfolio then, had organised a similar tour. Some journalists had had to abandon the trip midway in order to cover the fall of the ministry. Now, as the state prepares for the polls, the selected Trivandrum press may be earnestly "studying" hydel projects again.

C. RATHEESH KUMAR

Pillai: press treat

Nair's tour has created enough bad blood with the state press. Several reporters have withdrawn to cover the polls. But, says Nair: "Tell me one journalist who has not curried favour with ministers. Pillai is not bribing us with this tour, he only wants to see the hydel projects in other states." The tour in a special first class railway compartment will cost the KSEB a whopping Rs 3 lakh. As one journalist humourously said: "It's a Pillai treat for the pressmen following his legal victories in the high court which have almost exonerated him from his famous seditious speech in Cochin."

Customs' Coup

BOMBAY customs unearthed what amounted to a virtual gold-mine at the city port last month. Successive raids within a week on four country craft and a ship that was coming from the Gulf brought in 225 kg of gold, worth more than Rs 8 crore—half the value of the gold seized during all of 1986 in the city. In the process, Bombay customs also broke open another ingenious *modus operandi* that was employed by gold smugglers.

Most of the gold was seized from country craft which were returning from Dubai with cargoes of onions, dates and waste paper. What was unusual, however, was the fact that the gold biscuits were not hidden in the cargo or in secret compartments but were slipped into special cavities in the boats' wooden planks after being neatly wrapped in cellophane and cloth. After unloading the cargo at the port, the boats were to be taken to a repair yard, where the glittering biscuits would have been taken out by the carriers and handed over to the smuggler's agents in the city.

The raids, which were organised by the new Additional Collector L.D. Aurora, had an immediate impact on the price of gold in the market, which suddenly shot up to more than Rs 2,600 per 10 gram. And immediately afterwards, the customs, along with the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence and the Economic Intelligence Bureau, raided 20 establishments of gold dealers and seized piles of documents relating to illegal gold transactions. After a long time, it seemed that the pressure was being increased on both the transporters and dealers of smuggled gold.

Problem Prisoner

SUDDENLY, all attention is once again focused on the historic Bhagalpur central jail and on inmate Simranjeet Singh Mann, the former IPS officer who was recently named president of the United Shiromani Akali Dal. Mann has been always considered a high-security risk, and though kept under what officials claim is "foolproof" security—"even a fly cannot enter his cell undetected"—the Union Home Ministry and the state administration turned panicky after the mysterious visit of one Darshan Singh from Calcutta. Intelligence Bureau sleuths investigating the case felt that Darshan Singh collected Mann's "resignation" letter from the party presidentship through Mann's father or his lawyers but the visit caused a flutter.

Mann: high-security risk

Part of the reason for this was the fact that Singh's visit came after a study by a three-member Union Home Ministry team suggested that there could be a possibility of an escape bid when Mann is taken to court every fortnight. Mann is lodged in the vast two-acre Juvenile Ward, enclosed by seven-foot high walls on all sides. The ward has three large halls with a verandah. Mann is housed in the middle hall. The state Government is spending Rs 30,000 a day on his security. Now the Union Home Ministry has suggested that the trial should take place in the jail itself.

Shocking Tale

DESPITE the inconvenience, Calcuttans have been bearing the nearly six-week-long suspension of telephone services in the city with a touch of gleeful malice. For, claim lady telephone operators at the city's Telephone Bhavan, that they have been getting a jolt—literally 50-volt electric shocks—while answering incoming calls. Significantly, these shocks have been received only by persons manning incoming calls from electronic exchanges and all those "shocked" belong to the employees' union that has been resisting the entry of computers and electronic exchanges into the telephone scene.

JYANTA SHAW

Operators: selective shocks

While Calcutta Telephone's General Manager Jyotirmoy Bose suspects sabotage, the shocking episode brought not only two officers from the Telecom Research Centre in Delhi but also Dr B. Hockings from Australia to study this new "occupational hazard". A satisfactory explanation is awaited. Quipped a telephone subscriber, convinced of "God's hand" in the shocks: "Perhaps it was God's reminder to the operators that they ought to perform their duties towards the public."

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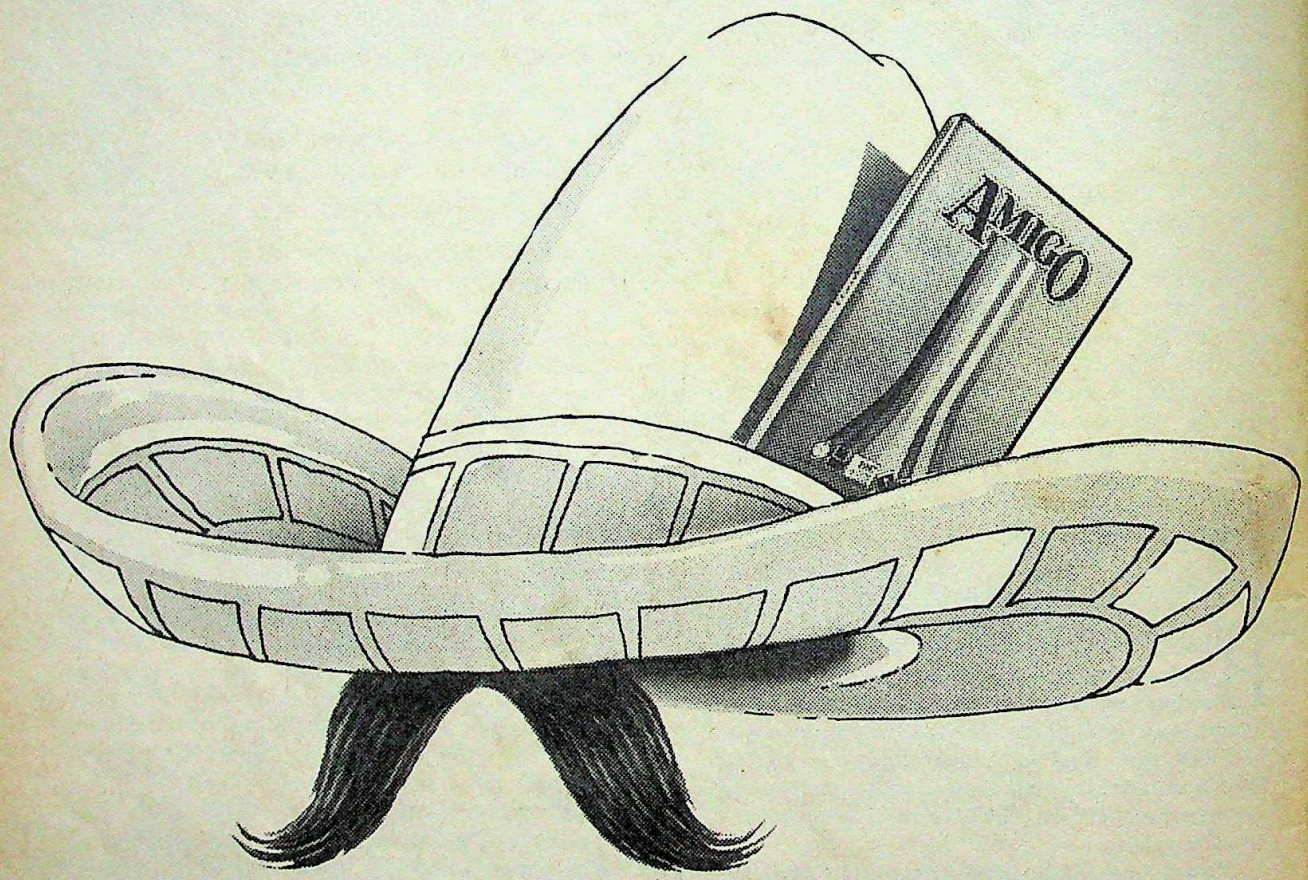

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CHAKMAS

Shattered Lives

FOR the past nine months, Chakma refugees have been fleeing Bangladesh terrorised by the Bangladesh Army. Last fortnight, the Buddhist tribals came in waves into Tripura swelling to over 45,000, haunted by memories of their women raped, houses burnt and people mercilessly shot or hacked to death. Senior Correspondent RAMESH MENON with Photographer PRASHANT PANJIAR visited the makeshift camps in Tripura set up by the state Government, where anger and tragedy punctuated the atmosphere. His report on the atrocities and the problems the new refugees pose.

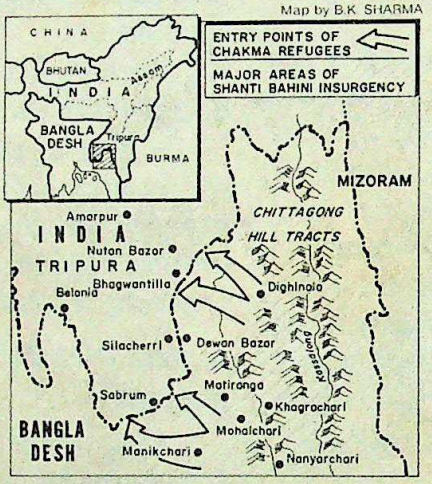
EXACTLY 16 years ago, the jungles were swarming with thousands of terrified refugees fleeing from the barbaric atrocities of the Pakistan Army. That influx led to one of the bloodiest births in modern history—the creation of Bangladesh. And now, the wheel of tragedy has come full circle. Last fortnight, the same jungles along the borders of Tripura were once again alive with a steadily growing flood of refugees fleeing in terror from the atrocities of the Bangladesh armed forces.

They are history's least-known refugees and the tragic dimensions of their situation have largely gone unnoticed, and unreported. But the tales of horror brought by the Chakmas, the Buddhist tribes living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, are vocal witness to the nightmare they are escaping from, and to the only sanctuary they can find—India.

Each day, as dusk drops its shroud of darkness over the dense forests, entire families of Chakmas, many barefooted and carrying their meagre belongings, slip across the border to India. The influx started nine months ago and by last fortnight there were around 45,000 Chakmas in the overcrowded, makeshift refugee camps set up by the Tripura Government.

From the Indian point of view, the steady influx of a growing number of refugees is a serious problem with alarming ramifications. But on humanitarian grounds, there is no way the state Government can put a stop to it. The stories of brutalities brought by each family point to a human tragedy of massive proportions—another genocide. Anil Chakma from Pablakhali village in the hill tracts, entered India with his wife and four children on February 9. They had walked barefoot through the jungles surviving on bamboo shoots and wild roots. They had decided to flee after the Bangladesh Army unleashed an orgy of violence—attacked

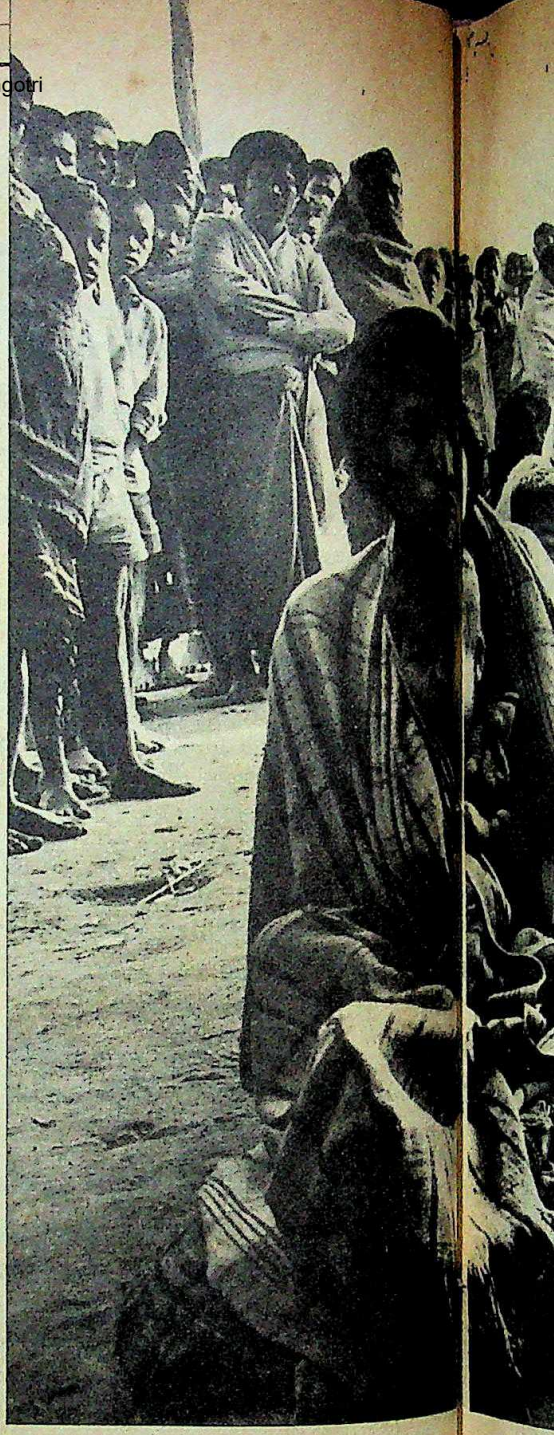
Map by B.K. SHARMA



their village, beat up Chakma men, raped their women and burnt and looted their houses.

The litany of horror is repeated with each arrival. Annai Marma, 32, from Khagracherri district sobs as she recounts how six armymen beat up her husband and then gang-raped her in front of him. Nundibala Chakma, 39, saw her husband being shot dead before being dragged to an army camp and gang-raped for two days. Tanyajuri Chakma, who came into Tripura last fortnight, still nurses festering wounds on her breasts where her nipples were bitten off by Bangladesh army personnel. Says she tonelessly: "The army jawans usually encircle a Chakma village, segregrate men and then rape the women. The younger and beautiful ones are taken to army camps and kept for many days." Lambracha Murmal, a pretty 16-year-old girl, is still in a state of shock. In mid-December, she was raped by three jawans who took her into a forest and kept her there for a few days. She managed to escape from their clutches and join other Chakmas seeking sanctuary in India.

It is hardly surprising that none of the Chakma refugees are prepared to return to Bangladesh. Specially now that the



Chakma refugees in a Tripura camp: borderline existence

Bangladesh military offensive against the Chakma tribals has been stepped up to crush the insurgent operations of the Shanti Bahini guerrillas, led by young Chakmas who are demanding autonomy.

The insurgency has been going on for at least a decade and has claimed thousands of lives on both sides. Bangladesh President H.M. Ershad told newly-elected parliament members in mid-July of 1986 that in the last 10 years about 1,000 people had been killed. Shanti Bahini sources put the figure at least ten times

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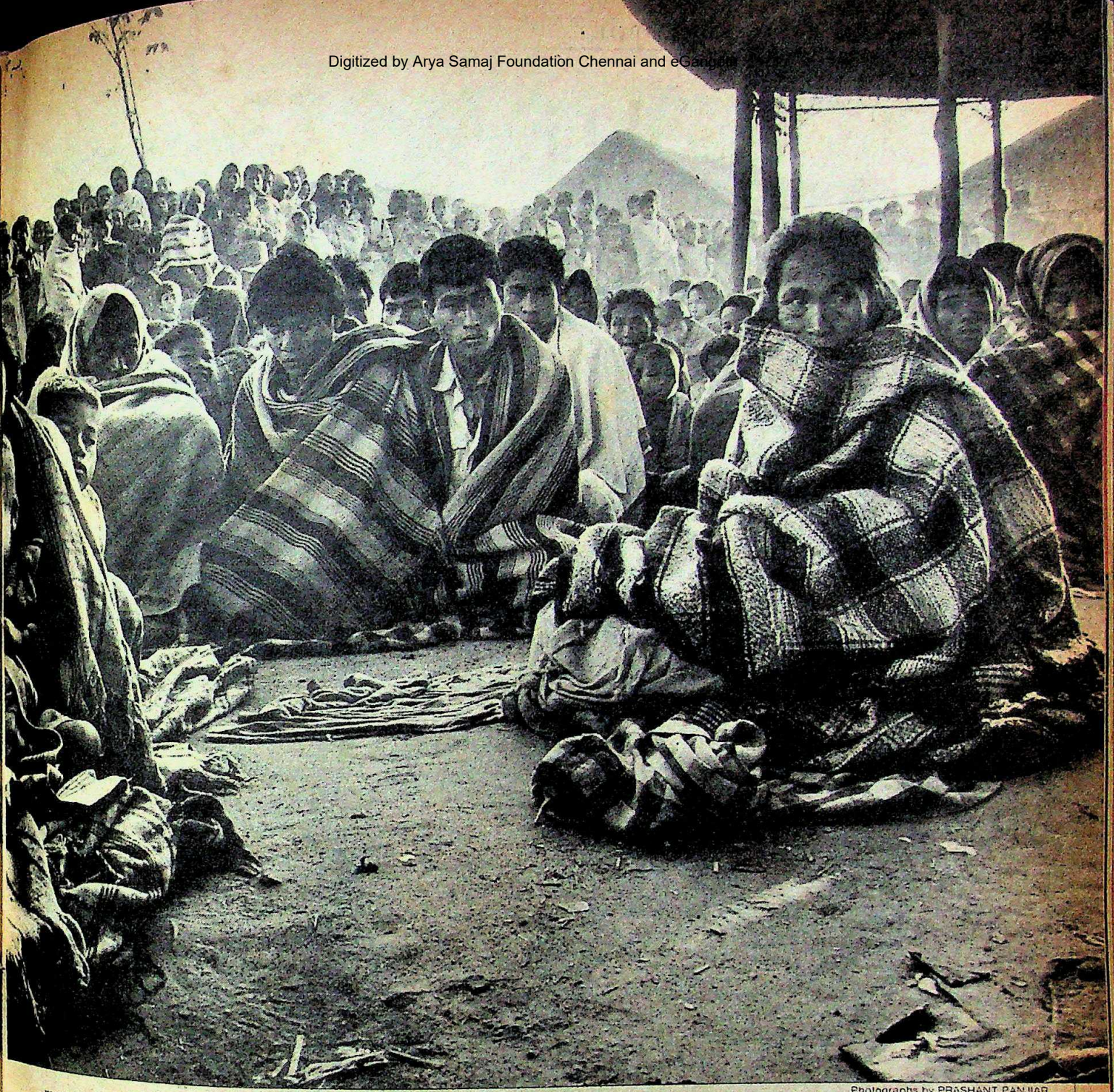

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR

The plight of thousands of Chakmas, who prefer to huddle in the discomfort of makeshift refugee camps rather than return to their homes across the border, underscores the enormous human dimensions of the tragedy.

more. Whatever the truth, the Chakmas pouring into India believe that returning to Bangladesh means certain death. According to figures released by the respected human rights organisation Amnesty International, over 800 Chakmas have been killed in the last eight months in the hill tracts following army operations.

The Bangladesh Government had agreed to take back 24,000 refugees beginning from January 15, but the Chakmas refused to leave. When Indian security forces tried to collect them together to send them back to Bangladesh, many of them fled into the nearby forests while others flatly refused to budge from the relief camps. Their argument was simple and spoke volumes for what they had undergone—that if they crossed over to the hill tracts, they would be killed. And if they were going to die, they would rather die in India than in Bangladesh. Says Bhagat Singh, CRPF commandant: "We were helpless. The Chakmas just sat tight saying that we could shoot them but they would not go back."

The fact that more refugees are pouring in every day with fresh stories of the genocide in the hill tracts, has only strengthened their resolve to stay in India.

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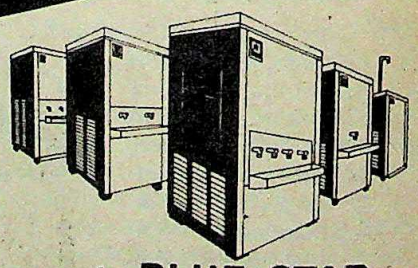

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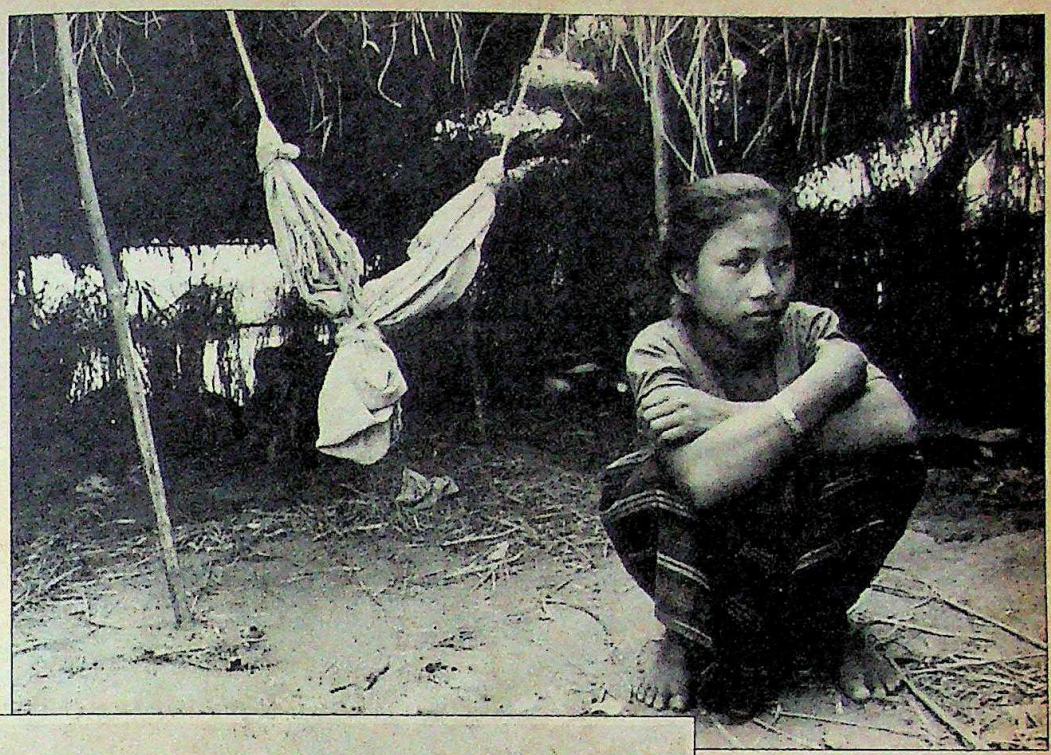
Said Sujata Chakma, 13: "We will go back only after we get independence." The memory of the atrocities which she witnessed, including her friends being gang-raped by Bangladesh army jawans, is graphically engraved in her young mind.

With the refugee flow increasing each day, the Tripura Government is faced with an unenviable task. Strapped for resources, it has already spent over Rs 2.25 crore on the Chakmas in the last nine months. But money is not the only problem. The major concern centres around the fact that a few hundred Chakmas have left the refugee camps and infiltrated into the interior, taken up local jobs and show every sign of settling down permanently. Intelligence sources fear that Tribal National Volunteer (TNV) extremists might also infiltrate into India from Bangladesh in the guise of refugees.

Tripura Chief Minister Nripen Chakraborthy has tried to draw the attention of the Centre to the need to stop what he termed as "the sea of humanity flowing into Tripura", but with little success so far. Chief Secretary N.P. Navani feels that though the state is being saddled with a problem of complex dimensions, they cannot ignore it either because of the humanitarian issues involved.



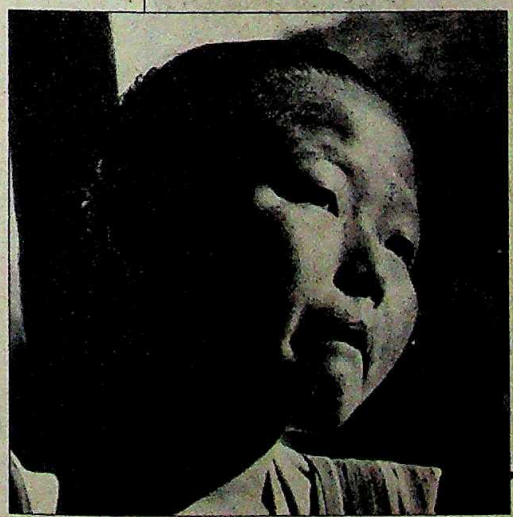
Lambracha Murma, 16, was kidnapped by army jawans, taken to a jungle and gang-raped. She escaped to join refugees fleeing to India. Many young Chakma girls are reportedly being sexually abused in army camps.

THE camps at Silacheri, Kathalcheri, Korbook and Takumbari—all close to the Bangladesh border—are as Chakraborthy says, a sea of humanity, with hundreds of displaced families attempting to stitch together the bits of their shattered lives. On some days, the state Government finds it difficult to accommodate the refugees as they come in hundreds and are forced to sit out in the open, huddling together for warmth during the chilly nights.

The Chakma crisis is essentially one of identity. During partition, the Chakmas were angered when the British granted the 5,138 square miles of the Chittagong Hill Tracts to erstwhile east Pakistan. Chakma leader Snehkumar Chakma rushed to New Delhi to beg that the area be allowed to remain part of India. But nothing came of it. Gopal Chakma, one of the tribal leaders who has been living in India for the last decade, feels that India was not concerned since the Chakmas who occupied the hill tracts were politically unorganised.

Soon after the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, another Chakma leader Manobendra Narayan Larma, led a delegation to Dhaka to ask the late prime minister Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, if the Chakmas living in the hill tracts could be given autonomy and a ban imposed on the entry of non-tribals into the area. Mujibur would have none of it, as he said: "Bangladesh will never recognise any dual identity."

Realising that there was no political solution, the Shanti Bahini was formed with the idea of gaining autonomy through an armed struggle. But an added problem arose in 1974 when an economic crisis forced Dhaka to encourage poor Muslim Bengalis to settle in the hill tracts. This was partially to meet the demands of



Tanyajuri Chakma was not only raped by jawans, but her nipples were bitten off. The festering wounds on her breasts tell an ugly tale. For many Chakmas, tears have dried out. Years of genocide have desensitised them.

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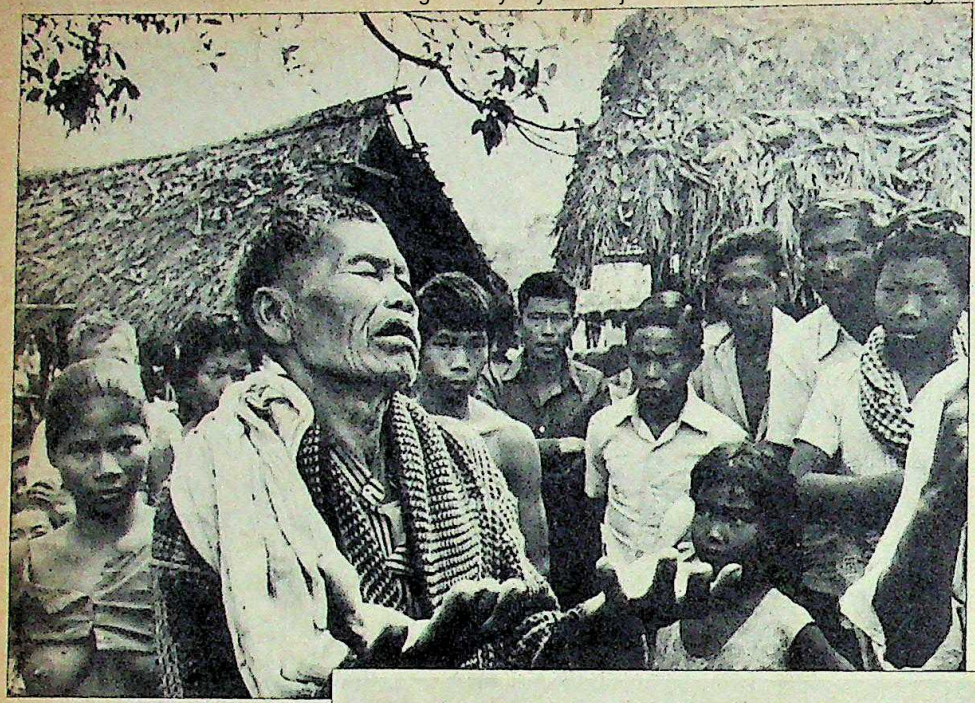

Thibijya Chakma, 80, was made to witness the gruesome gunning down of his aged wife by army jawans and was beaten up brutally permanently damaging his jaw. Memories of torture haunt most of the refugees.

land-hungry peasants in the heavily-populated plains. But more important, the resettlement was a device to ensure alteration of the demographic position of the hill tracts which were dominated by the Chakmas. Almost overnight, the Chakma population in the hill tracts was reduced from 98 per cent to around 70 per cent.

MOREOVER, most of the resettled Muslim peasants were ex-servicemen. This was a deliberate ploy to dampen the Chakma insurgency and also ensure that the Chakma villagers, who are basically simple people, would be prevented from giving shelter to Shanti Bahini guerrillas. Inevitably, the target of the insurgents became the Muslim resettlers. Last fortnight, over 200 casualties were recorded in the hill tracts as the Shanti Bahini raided army camps and Muslim settlements. The Bahini fields over 7,000 guerrillas, 2,000 of whom are armed, and the recent renewal of atrocities has ensured that their number will increase. Says Jorna Chakma whose husband, Chandrakanta, was killed last year: "More youngsters will join the Shanti Bahini now. We just cannot be wiped out."

The continuing ethnic and communal strife in the hill tracts have left the Chakmas bitter and revengeful. Says Shantibikas Chakma, a high school teacher: "Our only hope now is armed combat. After all these years of oppression, there can be no short cuts." Triptimoy Chakma, 21, whose father was killed before his eyes when he was just six years old, says defiantly: "If our future generations are to live like human beings, we have to take the guns on our shoulders." Most Chakma youngsters feel the same way.

But there are dangerous implications in this for the Indian Government. As with the Tamil militants from Sri Lanka, India could be caught in a diplomatic fix if the Chakmas decide to carry on their armed struggle from Tripura. Despite this, New Delhi seems to be surprisingly complacent about the issue and no effort has been made to put pressure on Dhaka to stop the brutalities across the border. Chakma leaders say that they will only go back if a tripartite meeting between representatives of Bangladesh, India and the Chakmas themselves produces an assurance that the persecutions will definitely stop.

But there is little likelihood of that happening. The general feeling among government officials is that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has chosen to play down the Chakma issue during his leadership of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

Admittedly, there are no easy solutions. But New Delhi's current complacency may cost the country heavily. Tripura is already affected by TNV extremism. The influx of thousands of tribals from Bangladesh, who obviously intend to settle down in the state, will only increase ethnic pressures—and give TNV extremists added leverage and scope. The Chakmas may have been Dhaka's problem but they are increasingly becoming India's as well now.

Triptimoy Chakma at the age of six saw his father gunned down by passing jawans. Many Buddhists have met a similar fate. Most youngsters feel that armed combat is the only way out if future generations of Chakmas are to live like humans.

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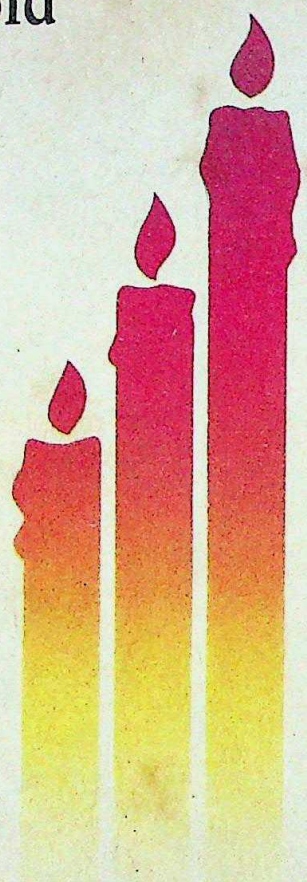

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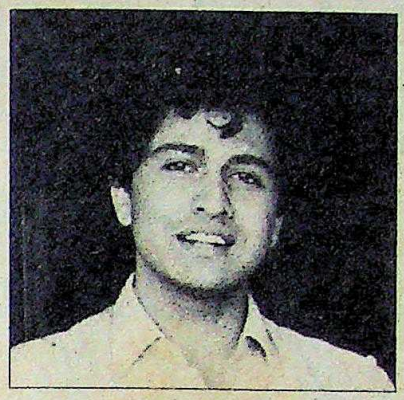
Musical Award

PARAM Vir, the 34-year-old music composer well known in Delhi for his pioneering work in children's music theatre, has been awarded the coveted Benjamin Britten Composers' prize for 1987, for his string orchestral work, *Before Krishna*. Besides the £500 (Rs 10,010) prize-money, Param Vir is now scheduled to present his award-winning work, to be performed by the Britten-Pears orchestra this summer, at the prestigious Aldeburgh Festival on the Suffolk coast in eastern England. A former music teacher at St Xavier's School, Delhi, Param Vir has initiated several experimental projects, choirs and musicals for children. The best-known amongst his works include *Kidstuff*, the fantasy musical *The Demons of Bara Tooti* and the anti-nuclear musical *Fall-out*.



Param Vir: pioneering work

Winning awards has become something of a habit with the gifted composer. After being awarded an Inlaks Foundation scholarship in 1984 to study composing under his boyhood hero, Oliver Knussen, Param Vir won three major composition prizes in five months—the Boston-based Kucyna International Composition prize, with his concert for chamber orchestra entitled *Pragati*, the Tippet Foundation award, which will be performed at the Dartington International Summer School, where he hopes to put up a cantata on *Krishna*, and now, the Benjamin Britten award. People instantly tend to assume his works are an east-west mix. "Not so," says the composer. "Indo-western music, I feel, is a trap. The results are never entirely satisfying. In writing concert music, I am not interested in a career as such. I am interested in the musical ideas for their own sake." Param Vir, who now hopes to divide his time between Delhi and London, has several rather ambitious projects ahead of him. They include a sprawling children's opera entitled *Childhood of Krishna*, and also a full-scale opera on what he describes as the "most popular of Indian gods"—Krishna again.

Asian Treat

A treat is in store for Asian viewers in Britain and Europe. By the end of the year, viewers in Oslo, Paris and Manchester can watch Hindi films, Indian 'soaps', chat shows, current affairs programmes, and even cricket Tests in their living-rooms, by courtesy of the "Asian satellite channel". It is the brainchild of two experienced cable TV experts, John Seddon and John Wilde.

Seddon

The Asian Television Service will be broadcast four hours a night, and delivered to cable TV networks and individual satellite aerial owners. Says Seddon: "This will be a unique TV channel which will be presented by Asians, for Asians. It will be transmitted in scrambled form, and will require the viewer to subscribe." Besides possibly buying programmes from India or Pakistan, most of the programmes are expected to be new and specially devised for the satellite channel.

Arts Gallery

AFTER years of painstaking effort, the Indian Arts Council in the UK now has a home at last. The Horizon Gallery, which opened last fortnight in central London, will henceforth aim to show the best of contemporary art and artists from the Indian subcontinent. The gallery, which is the first serious and sustained endeavour to provide a permanent place to artists from this region to show their work, will attempt to host 10 exhibitions each year, apart from seminars, workshops and other cultural events.

In his resounding inaugural speech, Balraj Khanna, the writer-painter, while requesting generous support for the gallery, said: "We call upon you all, we need you to become our sugar daddies, for we believe the Horizon Gallery has something to offer the world." The first artists to be featured by the gallery were the Switzerland-based painter, Prafull Dave and the sculptor Avatarjeet S. Dhanjal.

Prized Photo

A young Southall-based Gujarati girl is among the winners, announced last fortnight, of the highly-publicised Kodak black and white photograph awards for 1986. Twenty-two-year-old Godavri Gandhi won £1,000 (Rs 20,020), for the best printing award in the commercial-industrial category, for a picture taken by photographer Graham Slough.

Gandhi, who works for a photographic lab in west London, was the only Asian girl in the running for an award, and also the only woman photographic printer whose work was commended for its technical excellence. Other categories of awards included news, royalty, sports and advertising as well as fine art. The award-winners featured dailies like *The Mail on Sunday*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun*, and the panel of judges included, apart from well-known photographers, picture editors of some prominent newspapers. Gandhi, who is also quite a keen photographer, says she plans to invest her prize money in a better camera.

Gandhi (inset) and award-winning picture

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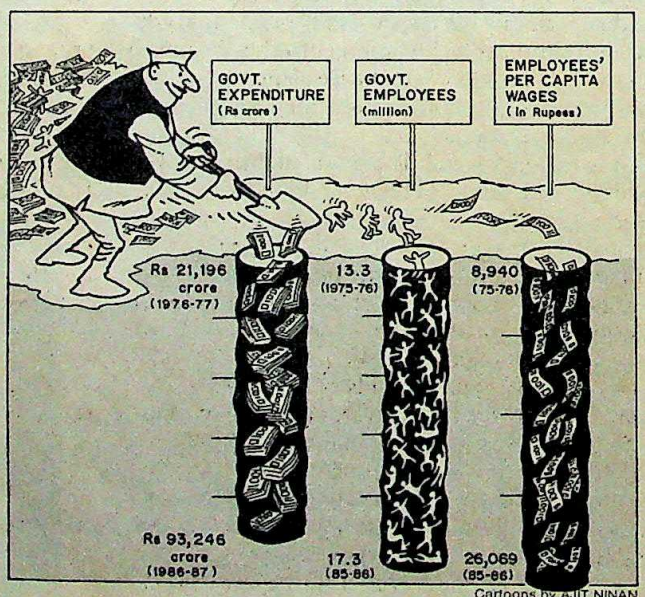
THE DIRTY DOZEN

The Laws of Government Waste

The sums are staggering. Every third rupee spent in the country is spent by some government department or the other. That's Rs 100,000 crore a year. And every fifth rupee out of that goes waste: Rs 20,000 crore a year, Rs 4 lakh down the drain every minute.

This is not a journalistic exaggeration but a figure suggested by the seniormost civil servants and the heads of some of the largest public sector corporations in the country. Indeed, some secretaries to the Government put the figure still higher. And though there is no way of arriving at a 'verifiable' figure, there is little doubt that the loss and waste are colossal. When governments in other countries take up 35 per cent or 40 per cent of the GNP, they provide efficient public services and admirable social security systems. In India, the Government has tried to take the lead in developmental tasks, but the commanding heights of the economy have become the demanding heights. And what is inescapable to even the untrained eye is the profligacy, the unnecessary proliferation of government offices, the bloated ranks of government servants (17 million—including public sector staff), and the corruption.



Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

All this constitutes waste: Rs 4,000 crore paid out as subsidies because of inefficiencies in the food, fertiliser and export sectors, the flab in manpower (Rs 4,000 crore would be saved if the Government and public sector could do with 10 per cent fewer employees), the cost over-runs on projects (Rs 25,000 crore so far on 264 major projects, which must mean an annual loss of Rs 2,500 crore), the Rs 2,500 crore losses incurred by Central and state public sector companies, plus the 'opportunity cost' of getting virtually no return on the Rs 50,000 crore invested in them (another Rs 5,000 crore), the fact that half to two-thirds of some categories of bank loans are never repaid, the hidden waste that must be there in the Rs 10,000 crore defence bill, the cream built into hardware contracts—the list can go on.

So when government expenditure seems out of control, it is time to take a hard look at the flab. Each item of waste cannot be listed, but there are some seemingly immutable 'laws' which offer an insight into the numerous ways in which public money is wasted.

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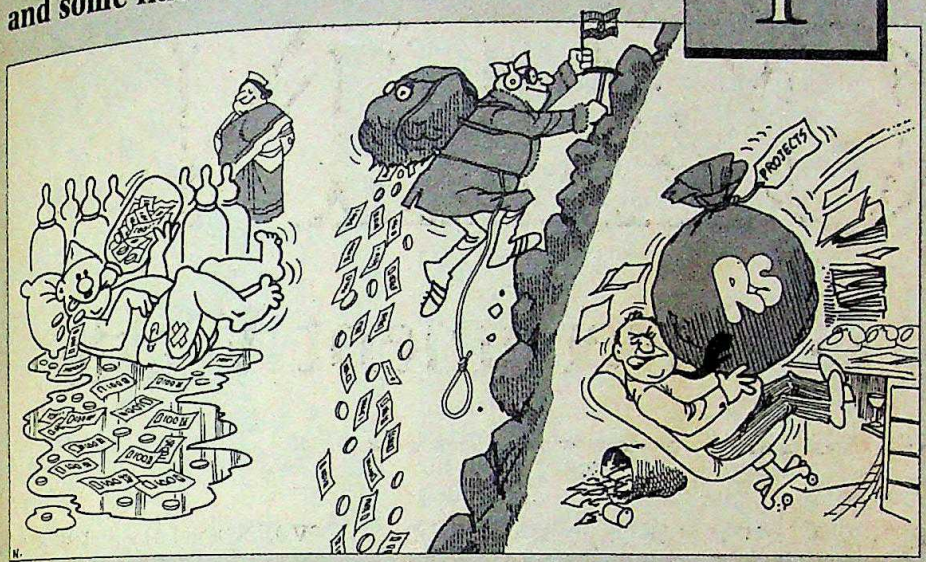
Some departments are born wasteful, some achieve wastefulness, and some have waste thrust upon them.

LAW 1



1 COMMUNITY singing is a worthwhile objective, but should the Government promote it? Someone in the Government decided three years ago that it should. So tape recorders and recorded tapes were supplied to schools across the country. The objective: make community singing a mass movement, starting with schoolchildren. The Plan budget: Rs 25 lakh.

That's not a very large sum, especially when the governments in the country—at the Centre and in the states—spend as much virtually every minute. But every little bit adds up to make for the large deficits and large waste: like Rs 30 lakh spent on promoting scientific interest in youth, or Rs 90 lakh for promoting national integration, or Rs 6 crore spent on administrative tribunals that are non-functional, or Rs 50 crore supposedly spent on providing mini-kits to farmers to raise their productivity.

The Finance Ministry has spotted 150 such schemes in the budget that it feels need to be axed—including one for teaching farmers how to drive and use tractors. This may have had some relevance when tractors were first being introduced, but today?

The saving on these 150 schemes will be Rs 1,000 crore. But even that large sum is less than 2 per cent of the Central Government's annual expenditure. And even the Finance Ministry may not have cared to ask the kind of basic questions that—surprisingly enough—civil servants are prepared to consider. "Why should there be a large Agriculture Ministry at the Centre when agriculture is a state subject under the Constitution?", a senior secretary to the Government asked last fortnight. "Or somebody in Delhi monitoring a cotton crop programme that is being handled by the states?" Said another senior official: "Education is primarily the responsibility of the state governments, but the Centre has begun to take increasing charge of this, its bureaucracy goes as a result, but the bureaucracies in the states will continue unquestioned." The moral of the story: you can keep adding and multiplying departments one on top of the other at various levels, and each will do little more than create work for the other.

Or, for that matter, why should there be even a Department of Defence Supplies, which was created in 1965 to speed up the process of indigenising defence supplies? Last April, this is what Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) had to say about the department's labours: "The committee has reached the firm conclusion that the department....has not been able to achieve what was expected of it. Despite the fact that the department has been functioning for the past 20 years, it does not appear yet to have succeeded in establishing many reliable producers of defence stores and equipment....The failure is all the more disappointing in as much as the Government appears to have followed a liberal policy with regard to development expenses."

Logically, then, the PAC should have recommended that the department be wound up. Instead, it did something entirely predictable: it recommended that a 'high-level' committee be set up "to go into the entire question of indigenisation and production of defence stores".

Without any doubt, the committee—if it is ever set up—will be born wasteful in the same manner that the Department of Defence Supplies has acquired wastefulness, and in the same manner as the steel industry has the Government's waste thrust upon it. After all, flourishing steel industries in other countries make do without an Iron and Steel Controller's Office, a Joint Plant Committee (JPC), a Mineral Development Board, and in many cases even without a Department of Steel. But India must have them all, and more.

The Mineral Development Board is supposed to keep an eye on the country's mineral resources, but serves primarily as a burial ground for unwanted officials (two steel secretaries were shunted there, for instance).

The JPC is supposed to be a mechanism for fixing prices, and should have been an independent agent after steel prices were decontrolled five years ago. But it still proposes for the Government to dispose—which can as well be done by the producing companies without the JPC's involvement. But the JPC exists and collects Rs 5 per tonne of steel as a cess. Most of this money is not required, of course: the annual revenue of Rs 3 crore is more than twice the expenditure. So the JPC has invested over Rs 5 crore this year in the purchase of office buildings, flats and guest-houses—whose primary customers are government officials.

As for the Iron and Steel Controller's Office, it is based in Calcutta with six regional offices across the country, each headed by a senior officer belonging to the Indian Administrative Service and a total staff strength that runs into a few hundreds. There was a time when this office served a purpose: steel was in short supply and had to be rationed. But the situation in the market has changed, and it should be possible for producers and consumers of steel to deal with each other directly. Nevertheless the controller's office survives, and no new consumer can begin to claim steel from a producer without first getting its steel requirements vetted by the

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controller's office. But, of course, sanction from the controller's office for a certain amount of steel does not make the steel available if there is a shortage!

As for the Steel Ministry itself, it spends most of its time monitoring Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL), which spends most of its time monitoring the producing plants. The ministry—once a small, lean team—now has a secretary, an additional secretary, four joint secretaries, five directors, as many deputy secretaries and over a dozen under secretaries, plus a large collection of desk officers, section officers and supporting staff. Although the Steel Secretary, R.P. Khosla, reacted in mild surprise when asked why his department should not be wound up (saying it was a question of economic philosophy and calling the proposal 'Reaganite'), the general view in both SAIL and Tata Iron and Steel Company is that the industry will do better without the ministry.

The Government too can do without wasteful departments, equally unnecessary 'associated offices' and hair-brained schemes to promote community singing.

But the truth of the matter also is that the Government doesn't make the job easy. An exporter of fruit products listed last fortnight the various clearances he has to obtain from the Government, and the various forms he has to submit, before he can export a tin of mango pulp. And the list made impressive reading.

There was, to start with, the fruit products order certificate, followed by the invoice and the packing list. Then came something called the GR1 form, and a drawback statement (for claiming a refund of duty that may have been paid). After this came the B1 excise exemption bond, a Form N (for octroi exemption) and a Form H (for sales tax exemption). Then there was a declaration that had to be submitted on quality, value and specifications, followed by another declaration called DEEC: duty exemption entitlement certificate (which presumably means what it says). Finally, coming down the home straight, there was a declaration which had to be made stating that no separate duty rebate had been claimed. Altogether, there are 10 forms and filling them would test the stamina of any middle-distance runner.

The test for the marathon runner is the procedure for opening a hotel, because here there are 43 clearances to be obtained from 25 different authorities: urban land ceiling clearance, covered area and height clearance (from two separate authorities), drawing approval, water and electricity clearances plus a separate tubewell clearance, clearance from the inspector of lifts, clearance for boiler operation, clearance on weights and measures, liquor excise licence, permission for food production and so on.

Even the obtaining of a birth certificate can often mean endless running around, from the corporation authorities to the city magistrate and back. And often it seems that the Government is determined to use the taxpayer's money to harass the taxpayer in a series of very imaginative ways, so that the taxpayer then has to spend more time and money tackling the harassment.

It need hardly be said that at each point some money may have to change hands. Indeed, this may well be the objective in asking for so many clearances to be obtained.

At the end of it all, of course, the Government takes no responsibility for any of the clearances it has given. The exporter of fruit, for instance, has his quality attested by an inspector in Madras even though the fruit is being shipped from Bangalore via Bombay port. And if something goes wrong, the entire blame is on the exporter, not the inspector (who is merely doing his job, after all).

A programme expands to make complete use of the money available.

Forget the goal, it's the paperwork that counts.

LAW 2

2 WHEN Pranab Mukherjee was commerce minister and Abid Hussain commerce secretary, the minister suggested to his secretary that the country should be given the slogan 'Export or perish'. Hussain replied: "If you give Indians the choice, they would rather perish."

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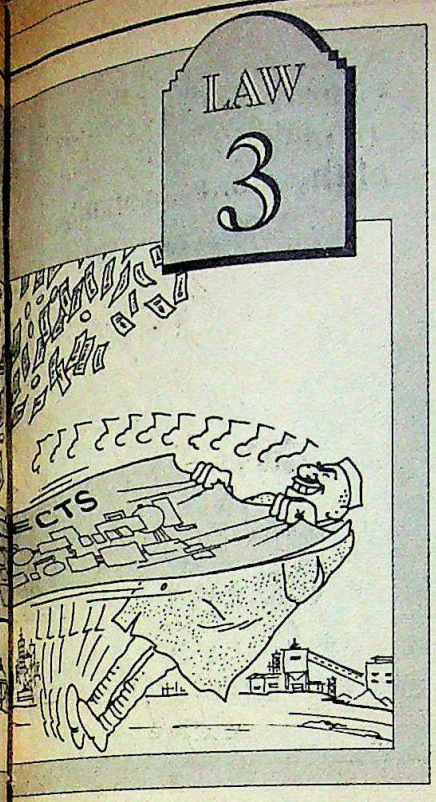


C. Northcote Parkinson discovered long ago that work expands to fill the time available. The Government has its own variation of Parkinson's law: its programmes expand to make full use of the money available.

Over a year ago, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was suddenly struck by his conscience, and decided to increase sharply the outlay on rural development programmes. Promptly, the Department of Rural Development opted for coloured, art-paper booklets—each costing close to Rs 500 though you would never have guessed it—chalking out the progress of various programmes; when the agriculture minister made an important speech on rural development, thousands of copies were promptly printed and distributed to all and sundry (the budget, after all, could accommodate all this). And hopefully, at the end of it all, the rural poor got some extra benefit.

Spending money is clearly not a problem for people in the Government, and during the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85), the joke in the Planning Commission was that if you wanted money for any project, the safest thing to do was to keep it out of the plan framework—because if it was in the plan there were serious financial constraints.

Thus, money was effortlessly provided for Maruti Udyog's investment of over Rs 200 crore, and for the Asian Games, which resulted in hundreds of crores being spent. Neither, of course, was a plan project.

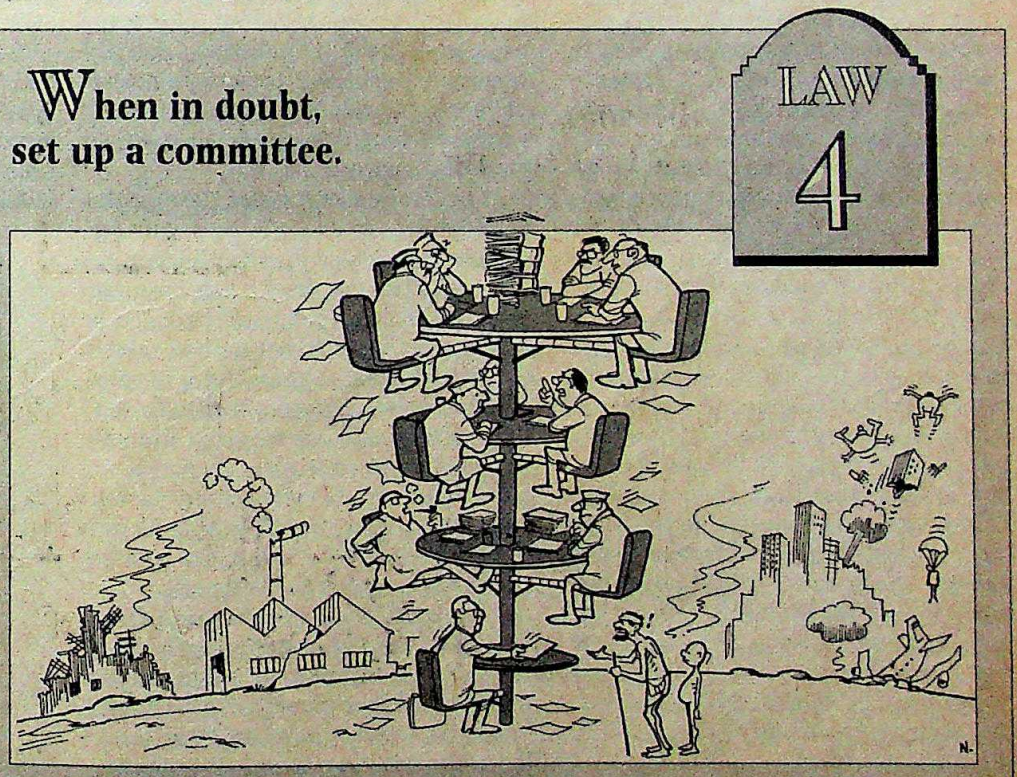
As things turned out, however, the Asian Games was a major exercise in wasteful spending, freed as it was from the usual system of checks and balances that are supposed to regulate financial outlays. The audit report on the games project is replete with tales of financial misdemeanour and is strongly recommended for bedside reading. Even four years after the games, several of the flats in the Asiad Village complex are still lying vacant—with no tenants and no buyers—while a Rs 4.2 crore players' hostel that was to be converted into a five-star hotel was never finished in time and still lies unfinished. Already Rs 5.3 crore have been spent on it, another Rs 8.5 crore need to be spent, and no hotel chain wants to take charge of the complex as it is considered unviable. Now the proposal is to make the might-have-been hotel into a hospital to be run by a private company.

If these are examples of programmes rapidly expanding to make full use of funds that may or may not be there, there are also examples of funds disappearing into hidden pockets when the spenders are not able to spend enough. Thus, the financial year-end is traditionally a period of reckless spending in virtually every government department—because if the money is not spent by March 31 it lapses, and next year the department will be given less to spend.

This results in departments furiously ordering jeeps (because they are easily available) or, as in the case of a Rajasthan Government department once, some 45 motor-cycles. In Madhya Pradesh, departmental officials simply issue and encash cheques on March 31. In 1983, such transactions totalled Rs 45 crore on the last day of the financial year. The next year, when payments after March 15 were banned in order to prevent a recurrence, officials got around the problem by issuing bank drafts in advance and keeping them in their desk drawers—for pulling out and paying later, when the money was actually needed.

So whether the money is surplus, or the outlay has been suddenly increased, or even if the programme is outside the plan—spending the money is obviously not difficult. Spending someone else's money seldom is.

When in doubt, set up a committee.



Committees of 20 deliberate plenty
Committees of 10 act now and then
But most jobs are done by committees of one
(old rhyme).

Anyone who began counting the committees set up by the Government would have lost count ages ago. There are committees of 20, committees of 10 and

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committees of one (and some in between)—and most seem to do pretty little.

There is, for instance, the Committee for Implementing Legal Aid Schemes under the Law Ministry, a Committee for Scientific and Technical Terminology, a Committee for Implementation of Hindi under the Railway Ministry besides a Committee on Official languages in the Home Ministry, a National Commission on Urbanisation separate from the Charles Correa-led committee to advise on urban development, a Major Ports Reforms Committee, and a joint communications and electronics committee. In energy there's the Energy Advisory Board, plus K.L. Puri (ex-chairman, Bharat Heavy Electricals) as a special officer to go into energy conservation, and also a conservation wing in the Energy Ministry.

The list can go on: Rajiv has an Economic Advisory Council apart from a Scientific Advisory Committee, a committee to celebrate Nehru's birth centenary and the 40th anniversary of Independence, and many others. Till recently he also had as an adviser L.K. Jha—who sometimes seems like a permanent one-man committee. The Programme Implementation Ministry has set up a committee of businessmen to advise on programme implementation, and the Planning Commission has a steering committee for transport planning.

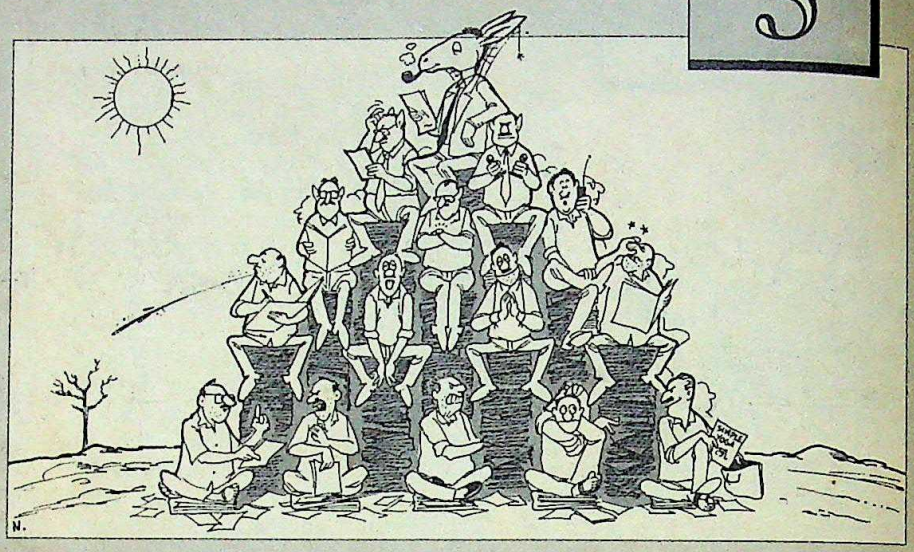
Several committees and commissions, of course, get nowhere. For example, the Kudal Commission spent Rs 7 crore and five years to come up with inconsequential titbits on the Gandhi Peace Foundation. The committee to go into the affairs of the Bharat Sevak Samaj still continues, but the Sarkar Commission formed to look into the affairs of the Birla group was finally wound up after nine fruitless years. As for the various commissions of inquiry appointed with monotonous regularity to inquire into communal riots, no one has ever been convicted on the basis of the commissions' reports.

Sometimes committees are asked to look into commission reports (as is now the case with the Misra Commission).

No one knows how much these various commissions and committees have cost the Government, and whether the cost-benefit ratio works out at all reasonable. But it might be a good idea to set up a committee to find out.

Every bureaucrat rises beyond his level of incompetence.

LAW 5



5 LAURENCE J. Peter wrote some years ago: "In a hierarchy every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence"—the Peter principle. But the Government is a special case: since seniority is the over-riding consideration, most employees tend to rise well beyond their level of incompetence.

The Government is a special case due to other factors as well. To start with, there is no stick or carrot. Whether the man works or not, he will get his increment at the year end. And he can't be fired; about the worst that can be done is to transfer someone, but even this is rare.

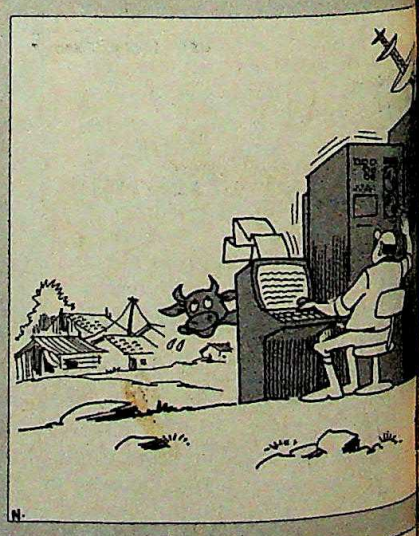
The confidential reports on individual performance that are prepared annually are, as a matter of fairness, shown to the official concerned if there are any adverse comments against him—so that he can defend himself. The result: few officers care to make adverse comments.

Finally, routine transfers are so frequent that an officer is rarely in place long enough to be identified as the culprit due to whom things went wrong. At the Vishakhapatnam steel plant, for instance, there have already been four managing directors.

It is a system tailor-made for mediocrity. With no proper checks and balances, everyone heads slowly for the top, and questions about levels of competence and incompetence fade into the background. The decisive factor, more often than not, is which service you belong to: some ensure a faster climb to the top, others stop short.

But whichever service it is, there is usually little mid-career training. The result: bankers talk of officials in the Finance Ministry sitting in judgement on projects without understanding concepts like discounted cash flow. And history students try to sit in judgement on the suitability of medical equipment being offered. And, most important, no one is penalised for sitting on his hands.

If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing wastefully.



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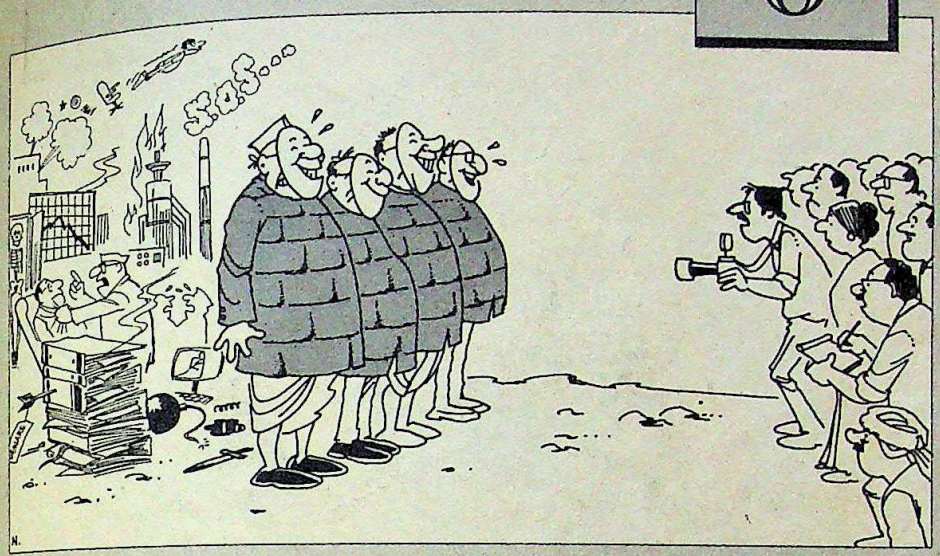
LAW 6

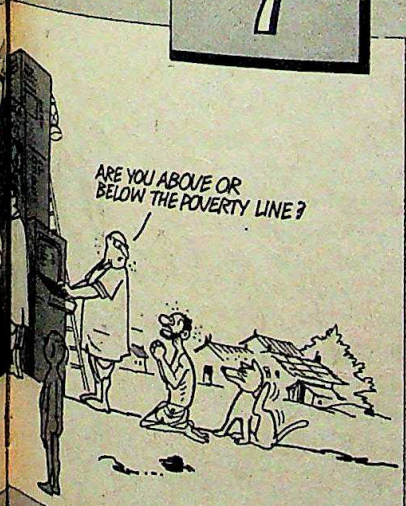
When things go wrong, stonewall.



6 OCCASIONALLY, the Government gets caught, or is found out. A Kuo oil deal surfaces, or an Antulay's bluff about a private trust being a government trust is called. These and other cases of the Government losing money or being mulcted in different ways invariably end up with bureaucrats deciding to hang together in the face of external enquiry. Parliament is given obfuscating replies to questions, or fobbed off with the statement that information is being collected; and the Official Secrets Act is very conveniently thrown at the press.

Irregular bank loans are now said to total Rs 5,000 crore, but any information sought on the subject comes up against the standard response that a bank's relationship with its customers is confidential and that details cannot be disclosed. In another classic example, no final figure is available even today on how much was spent on the 1982 Asian Games and related activity; indeed, unsold tickets to the various sporting arenas were destroyed before a tally could be taken of how many tickets were in fact unsold.

LAW 7



7 GOVERNMENT money—public money—can be (and is) wasted in a hundred ingenious ways. A corporate headquarters is built at Rs 700 per sq.feet by the State Trading Corporation (more than double the normal cost), 12 irrigation projects in Uttar Pradesh's Sharda Sahayak canal system are modernised but achieve only 5 per cent of the irrigation potential, and 5,000 employees of the Hindustan Steelworks Construction Corporation have been idle for five years but nothing is being done about them.

There are some quaint examples too. Arunachal Pradesh, for instance, was carved out as a separate Union Territory in the early '70s. But although a new capital was built (Itanagar), part of the Arunachal Pradesh secretariat is still housed in a building in faraway Shillong, Meghalaya. And every morning, a mini-bus shuttles between Shillong and Itanagar, a distance of some 500 km, ferrying files and people.

Such examples can be multiplied. The director of education in Allahabad bought 22 bus chassis between 1980-81 and 1983-84 to ship girls to their schools and back. But no money was provided for fabricating bus bodies on the chassis, which therefore lay out in the open, in a state of disuse. Some money was eventually provided, starting from 1982-83, and 14 of the 22 chassis acquired bodies till 1985-86. One chassis bought in 1980-81 did not have a body fabricated till 1985-86, five years later.

Further afield, at Naraini in Banda district, a small women's hospital was sanctioned in 1979, a building hired and supporting staff posted in 1980. Till the end of 1981, however, no doctor was posted there, and the hospital was finally 'closed'. But the building and staff were retained.

On somewhat similar lines, a national fitness corps was once set up, with an annual recurring expenditure of Rs 6.43 crore. The corps was mercifully wound up, but the people in it were absorbed by the various state governments—and till today the Centre is paying for their costs.

Back in New Delhi, at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), the careful auditor will find dozens of expensive research equipment lying in their packing cases for years together. There is the case of Rs 2 crore worth of equipment that was paid for with Norwegian aid, bought five years ago and still unused—with a committee now investigating the matter. A commercial photon corelator (worth Rs 8 lakh), acquired with British aid, has been non-operational for five years.

If the situation in the IITs is bad, that in hospitals is worse. Estimates vary of the amount of medical equipment lying unused in government hospitals across the country: one says this alone is enough to fully equip 10 large, brand new hospitals, another says that 60 per cent of all the medical equipment in the country is not being serviced or is unserviceable, and a third estimates the value of unused equipment at Rs 100 crore.

The Karnataka health minister admitted once in the Assembly that several X-ray machines in the state were not being

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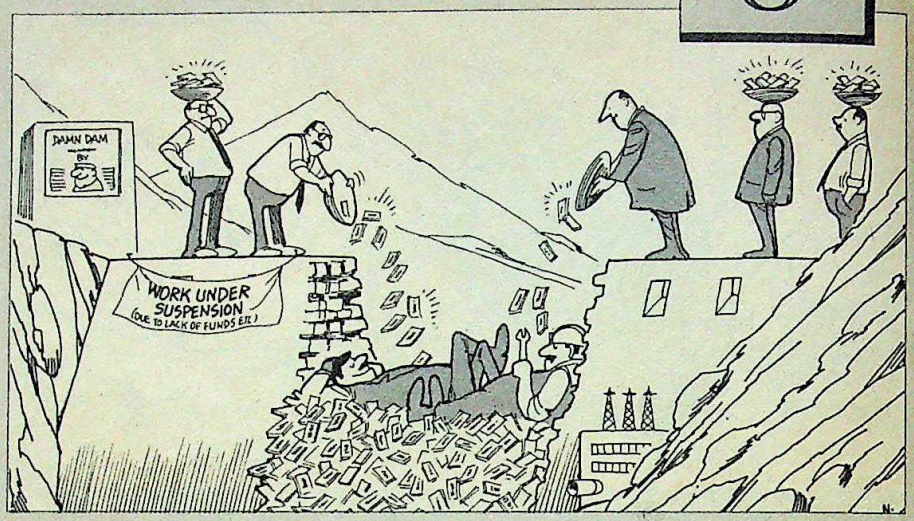
used as there were no trained technicians, while the 318 mobile dispensaries imported from Britain in 1980 for use in the National Rural Health Service are mostly not being used for the intended purpose. Their cost: Rs 19.3 crore.

But the best example of its kind comes from Lucknow, where the economic intelligence and statistics division of the State Planning Institute decided it needed a computer to minimise the time needed for collecting data. The hiring of a computer was ordered in March 1973, but the supply firm failed to deliver for two years. The Department of Electronics in New Delhi then declared that this particular computer was obsolete, and in 1977 the import of a fresh computer was approved.

Time is money; more time is more money.

LAW 8



A tender was floated, none of the 15 applicants was found suitable and another tender was floated in 1979. In 1980 a Burroughs system was approved for Rs 49 lakh, but the boss of the statistics division could not agree with Burroughs on the terms of the contract. So in 1981 a Univac system was chosen instead, the agreements were signed in 1982 and delivery was to be in six months—with the installation site to be ready in advance. The computer arrived in 1983, and lay in Lucknow for 18 months, waiting for site modifications to be carried out.

The site building had, in fact, been cleared in 1975, and the building (with 3,000 square feet of space) and air-conditioning plant were handed over in 1978. Both lay unused till 1984, during which period Rs 30 lakh were spent on maintenance. And at installation time it was found that the building needed modification, which was done for Rs 14 lakh. But then the temperature and humidity control were not good enough, and the building—which by now had cost Rs 80 lakh—was found unsuitable.

Finally, the computer was installed. It was supposed to run for 22 hours a day, in three shifts. But till August 1985 (when the audit people took a look at the rigmarole), it was running just one shift, the cost of doing this was almost 20 times the revenue, and the data of only one government department was being fed into the computer.

TWO years ago, at his first press conference after becoming the prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi said that he would like his government to be known as the 'Government that works faster'. A Ministry for Programme Implementation was set up to monitor government projects—and timeliness seemed to count at last.

But now, the newly-created ministry reports that in the last 17 months alone 40 major public sector projects have "incurred additional delays up to 24 months". That seems an impossible feat, but the public sector is obviously on its own time machine.

The result: all 13 large projects in the steel sector are now delayed, two out of every three power projects are behind schedule, and more than half the petroleum and coal projects are also late. One coal project is late by 17 years (the prestigious Moonidih underground project), two steel projects are late by 11 years each (Bokaro and Bhilai expansion), the Haldia fertiliser project by 10 years, and a railway project by 12 years.

Time over-runs mean cost over-runs. A single day's delay in a super-thermal power project can mean a total loss of Rs 40 crore, and a day's delay in something like the Rs 6,000 crore Vishakhapatnam steel project can mean a loss of Rs 10 crore. So when large projects are delayed by many years, at a stretch, the cost is often incalculable.

Fertiliser and railway projects have ended up costing five times their projected cost, coal projects have seen a 750 per cent cost over-run, and power projects have multiplied tenfold in cost.

Such delays also lock up huge amounts of capital for long periods—without any return in terms of production. The total money locked up in 264 government projects is now a staggering Rs 65,000 crore, more than the total Seventh Plan allocation for the entire organised sector of industry. Of this, Rs 25,000 crore could have been saved if it were not for cost over-runs: enough to fully refund all the income-tax paid to the Government for the last 15 years.

Often, when the project is finally ready, the capital cost has gone so high that the company can never make money. In the case of the Vishakhapatnam steel project, the investment per tonne of production capacity will be more than Rs 20,000. Assuming that capacity utilisation will be around 65 per cent, the cost of interest charges, depreciation and other basic overheads alone will be Rs 7,000 per tonne—close to the price of steel. So whatever production costs the company incurs is a loss.

In short, the Government already knows that the Rs 6,000 crore invested in this 16-year-old project will be a financial write-off, that the plant cannot hope to make a profit, and that more public money will have to be spent every year to pay for the inevitable losses.

And Vishakhapatnam is not alone.

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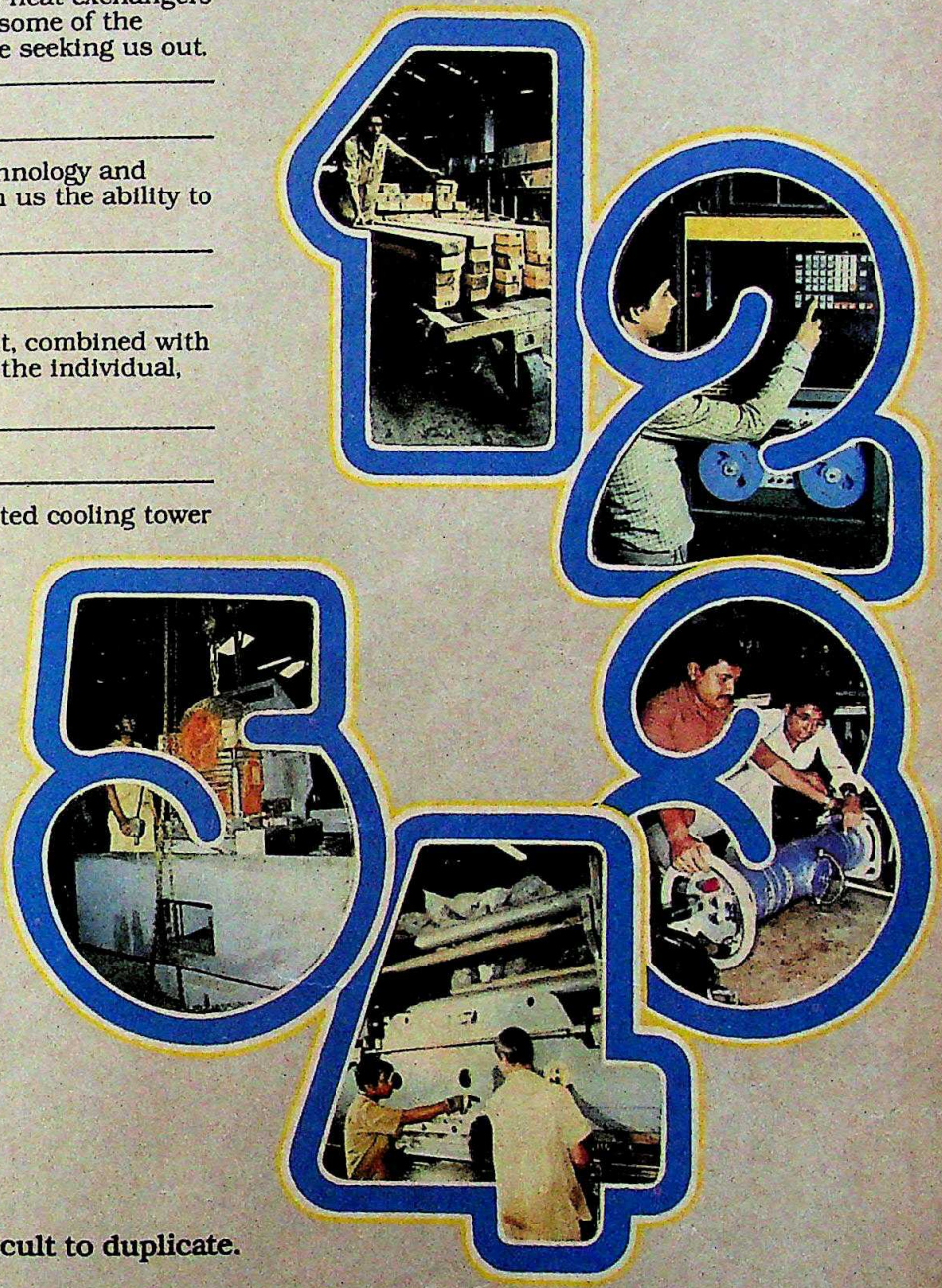

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MR. KUNAL GHOSHAL OF ITC LTD. IS OVERJOYED WITH HIS COMPANY'S NEW UPTRON ELECTRONIC PABX.

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He looks quite delirious with joy, doesn't he? But before you jump to the wrong conclusions, we'd better explain how it happened.

One fine morning...

Uptron's Talkman II Electronic PABX made its debut at ITC Ltd., Virginia House, Calcutta (which is where Mr. Ghoshal works).

And nothing was the same again.

Calls came through like lightning. The operator was seen smiling and patting the console affectionately. People devised new ways of cradling the lightweight handset between their ear and shoulder while they used their hands to bend paper clips.

Before long, word spread like wildfire. Everyone, but everyone, wanted to know about this amazing new electronic PABX at ITC. And whenever anyone asked, they were told . . . .

"Ask Mr. Ghoshal. He chose Uptron."

The poor chap. He was inundated by calls—which were put through instantly by Talkman II. And each caller demanded everything they ever wanted to know about Talkman II—and were not afraid to ask. (Mr. Ghoshal wishes they were!).

Soon, Mr. Ghoshal was reduced to a sorry state. He'd shudder from head to toe at every gentle beep of the Talkman II. But the callers were most persistent. In desperation, Mr. Ghoshal contacted us. Although he swears undying allegiance to Talkman II, he wanted us to put this appeal in this ad. . .

If you want to know about the Talkman II, don't call Mr. Ghoshal. Ask Uptron.

Unlike the callers who harrassed Mr. Ghoshal, we will be brief. Here then, are the major features of the Talkman II Electronic PABX Systems:

- Line capacity of 24 to 240
- Direct outward dialling
- Call transfer
- Abbreviated dialling
- Conference facility
- Automatic call back
- Call forwarding
- Consultation hold
- Flexible station numbering
- Cost saving through the call monitoring system
- Conforms to P&T technical specifications

Uptron has entered into a technical collaboration with Jeumont Schneider—a leading international name in the field of telecommunications—for the manufacture of EPABX systems of a higher capacity, up to 5000 lines.

As of now, Uptron has already installed over 5,000 lines of the Talkman II in offices, hotels, hospitals and other institutions all over India. Backed up by Uptron's nationwide network of Service Centres and its years of expertise in the field of telecommunications. And those are only a few reasons why you should choose Talkman II. To know the whole story, get in touch with Uptron. And leave Mr. Ghoshal in peace !

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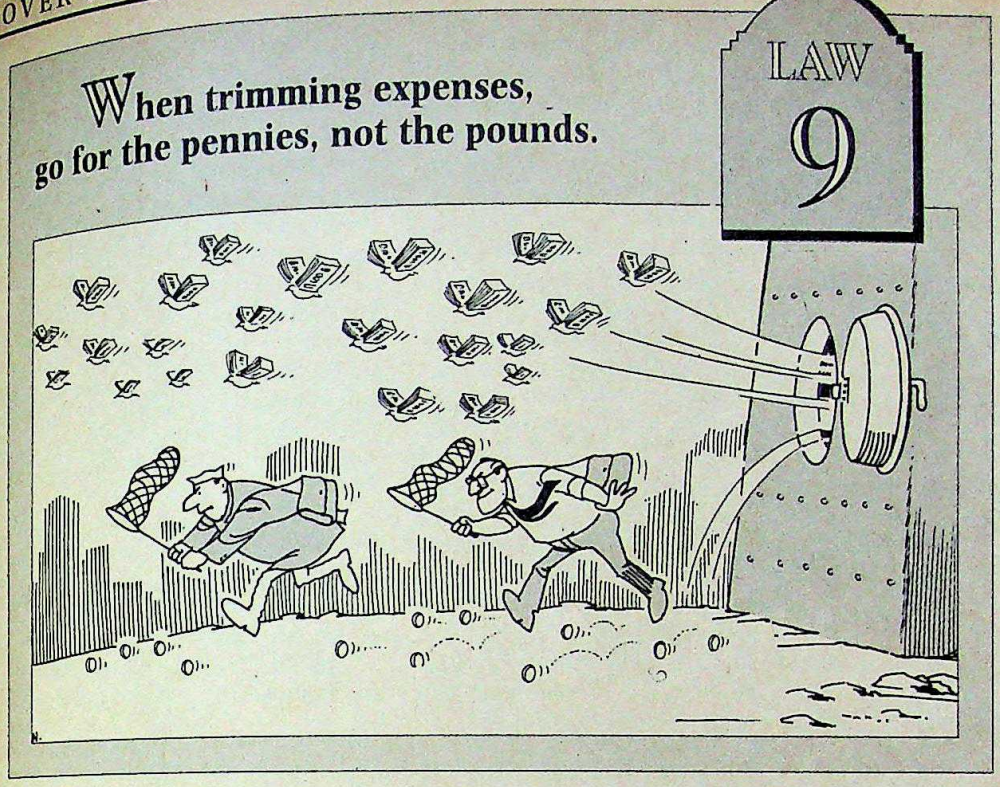
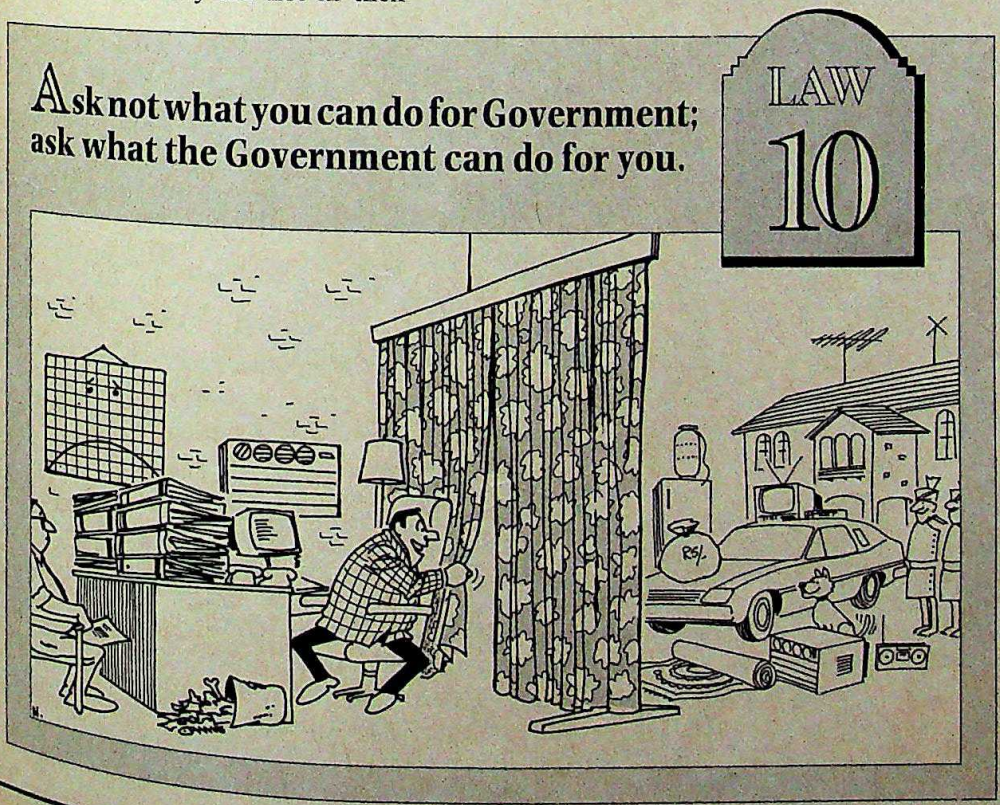


THE trick is to make the grand announcement: a 5 or 10 per cent cut in all non-plan expenditure. It's been done in three of the last four years. Each time, the expenditure has gone up although endless questions are asked about travel bills, the fresh employment of peons is banned and circulars go around requesting people to switch the lights off when they are not in their rooms. Conscientious officials start using the flip side of used paper, and limits are placed on petrol consumption.

None of this, of course, will achieve very much—because it's like a housewife trying to save on cooking oil while the husband is at the race course. Besides, while peons may not be appointed on a permanent basis, they are often brought in as daily wagers. And attempts at curbing travel bills often impede efficiency—telephones, cars and travel are after all necessary to do one's work.

Rajiv has tried to improve on this. He set up the Kaul committee to locate surplus staff, and some 12,000 have thus been weeded out (which must rank as a considerable achievement). And now there is to be zero-based budgeting, which means every department must justify every programme each year.

But even now no economy drive has ever touched the spots where large savings are possible—which is not on the non-plan side but very much a part of five-year plan spending. All the effort that goes into a 5 per cent saving in non-plan administrative expenditure can be avoided and the same amount of money saved if one large industrial, power or irrigation project is handled well and completed on time, or if fertiliser is imported when prices are in a trough and not at their peak. And, of course, no questions are ever asked about defence, which swallows Rs 10,000 crore: every sixth rupee spent by the Central Government.



10 MILOVAN Djilas called them the 'New Class'—ministers and bureaucrats thrown up by a system of state capitalism, people who became more equal than others. They don't serve the system, the system serves them. Their salaries must go up faster than prices, indeed in some states (as in Kerala) their salary bill eats up virtually the state's entire tax revenue.

Yet the work they do is of another order altogether, as in the case of the tribal project officer at Manikpur in Uttar Pradesh's Banda district, who was charged with helping to rehabilitate freed bonded labourers. In the first two years (1979-80 and 1980-81), although close to Rs 2 lakh was spent on the project office, not a single bonded labourer was rehabil-

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itated. And after three years of intermittent activity, once again no one was rehabilitated in 1984-85. Altogether, some 300 bonded labourers were rehabilitated during these six years (roughly one every week). And the administrative cost of doing this was Rs 6 lakh. The initial limit fixed for the assistance that could be given to each bonded labourer was Rs 2,000, and the administrative cost of the exercise also worked out to nearly Rs 2,000 per head. The programme, it might seem, existed for the project officer at Manikpur, not the project officer for the programme.

Such examples abound across the country: the Calcutta State Road Transport Corporation employs 25 people for every bus that it has on the road, the Calcutta Corporation spends 60 per cent of the revenue it collects paying the salaries of 36,000 employees, who are all part of the self-welfare state.

The state of the electricity boards is no better, provoking N. Tata Rao, chairman of the Andhra Pradesh State Electricity Board, to remark on one occasion to a particularly obtuse power minister that "power stations are not meant to provide employment, they are meant to provide power."

A former principal secretary in the Andhra Pradesh Government once calculated the cost to his government of getting one sheet of paper typed by a government typist. The figure worked out to around Rs 4.00—not counting the cost of the typewriter, office space and paper. Officials in New Delhi do similar sums and point out that a typist who gets paid Rs 1,500 a month and types six pages in a day (apparently the average in some offices) costs the Government Rs 10 per sheet of paper typed.

Higher up the bureaucratic ladder in Delhi, of course, the name of the game is not employment or typing sinecures but perquisites and forbidden fruit. In Udyog Bhavan—the massive government monolith that houses various ministries in New Delhi—almost every civil servant worth his salt has got some hapless public sector company to pay for his creature comforts: an air-conditioner in the office, or fancy carpeting, or a car for the memsahib. Some ministers get two private taxis on a daily basis, on a monthly cost of Rs 10,000, or Rs 1.2 lakh a year.

At the top of the hierarchy in the New Class, even officials' houses are furnished and fitted out by public sector companies. In one case a couple of years ago, the secretary in-charge of a ministry had his house furnished by a public sector company for Rs 80,000. When the official was transferred to another ministry, an administrative officer from the company had the temerity to ask the official for the return of the furniture. Promptly the official called the chairman of the undertaking and upbraided him, adding the warning that his minions should not misbehave with secretaries to the Government of India. The furniture was allowed to remain where it was.

Chief ministers are on their own trip, of course, as in the case of Madhya Pradesh's Motilal Vora, for whose benefit the state Government maintains a fleet of aircraft and helicopters. The expenditure on this has climbed 40 per cent in the last four years (from Rs 35 lakh to Rs 50 lakh), so that the daily cost to the exchequer of keeping Vora in the air is Rs 13,700.

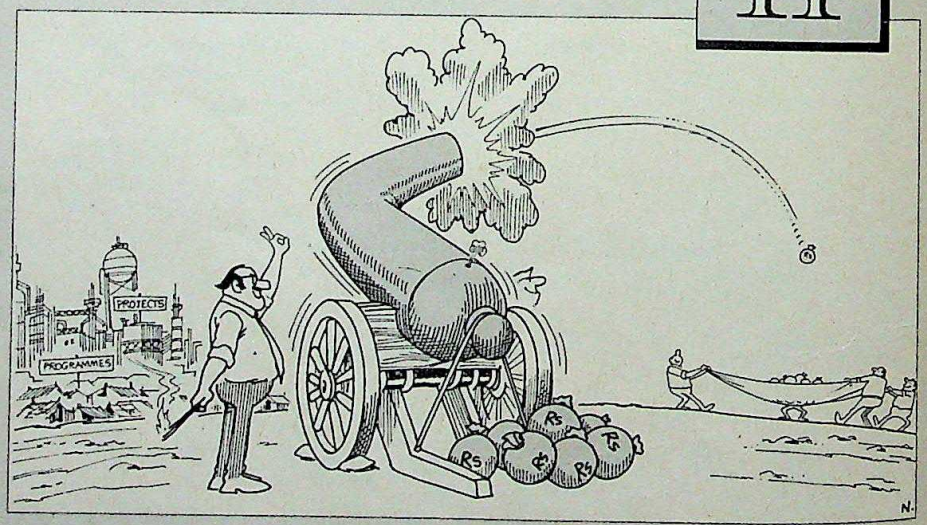
rates, but a recent enquiry found that the approved rates for drinking water pipes were 30 to 40 per cent *higher* than the ruling market rates, and that the Government stood to lose Rs 10 crore. In the Delhi Development Authority contractors build four-storeyed buildings without any foundation—as in Kishenganj some time ago. The estimated fraud: Rs 10 crore.

In yet another notable case recently, the chairman and member (engineering) of the International Airports Authority of India were removed following detection of sub-standard work at the new Indira Gandhi International Airport terminal in New Delhi; the project cost went up from Rs 60 crore to Rs 110 crore.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) raids officials regularly, and last year it seized assets worth Rs 7 crore from 135 officials. As for the state electricity boards, while, on the one hand, they generate power at 30 to 40 per cent of capacity (and sometimes even less), on the other, their

If government money can be misappropriated, it will.

LAW 11



11 IT happens in practically every government department that one can think of: customs and excise, the income-tax office, the police, jails, the public works department, irrigation, the public sector banks, the Directorate-general of Supplies and Disposals (DGS&D)—any place where decisions of officials can make or mar fortunes.

The DGS&D is supposed to procure supplies at lower than normal market

employees sell copper wiring in the market, or hold farmers to ransom by refusing power to their tubewells unless they are paid off. In parts of West Bengal, whole transmission towers disappear overnight.

None of this is new, and no reliable estimate exists of how much public money is misappropriated by malfeasant officials. Neither the CBI nor the vigilance outfit has managed to do anything more than scratch the surface. And neither the

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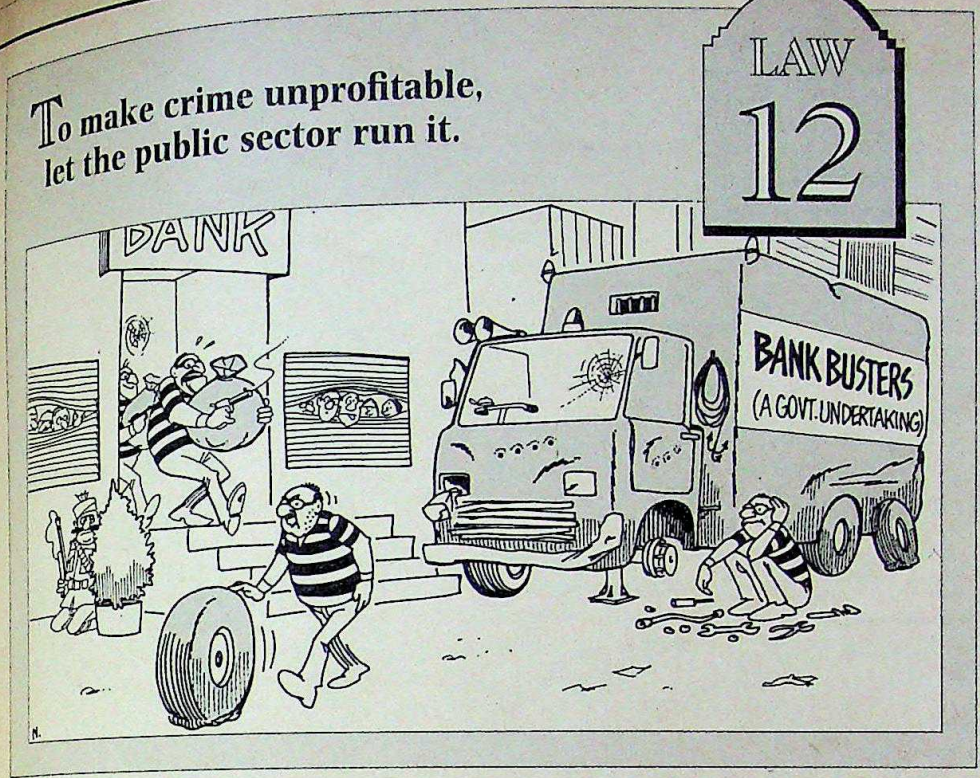

comptroller and auditor general nor the PAC has the time or the ability to go into anything other than a thin sampling of cases. As PAC Chairman E. Ayyapu Reddy says: "We leave a margin for lack of morality, what we are really concerned with is the ineffectiveness of government expenditure."

But the fact remains that corruption is the rule rather than the exception in several large areas of government functioning; and if the Government doesn't know it, those who deal with these departments do. Whether it is the beat constable's *hafta* or the chief engineer's cut on the contract, people are happier paying up rather than fighting it. In the process, if the Government is robbed of revenue or forced to spend additional money, so be it.

12 THE public sector makes money, a great deal of it. But that is because the Arab sheikhs have taken oil prices so high that the Government of India's numerous oil companies can also profit from these price levels. Indeed, it is the petro-rupee that keeps India's public sector somewhat shakily afloat. Without the oil, it would sink in a sea of red ink.

The Central Government alone has invested Rs 50,000 crore in the public sector, and the various state governments probably as much again. And great things are achieved with this money. Scooters India, for instance, manages to produce a scooter that costs Rs 22,000 and then sells it for Rs 10,500. The Uttar Pradesh Government undertaking Auto Tractors makes a tractor for Rs 2.25 lakh and sells it for Rs 64,000: it is cheaper not to produce anything at all. On a bus belonging to the Delhi Transport Corporation—whose entire share capital has been eaten up by losses—the fare will have to be raised to 250 per cent of its present level if the company is to stop losing Rs 190 crore a year. In the case of the Uttar Pradesh State Electricity Board, of course, the power tariff has already been raised thrice since January 1986 last year so as to cut the board's losses, but the losses remain.

Of some 100 companies run by the Central Government, roughly half lose money (over Rs 1,000 crore every year). And in the state Government sector, the figures are impossible to put together because dozens of companies have not finalised their accounts for years. Yet, the state electricity boards habitually lose money where the private sector doesn't, public sector transport corporations are perenially in the red while private operators do well, coal companies made a profit before nationalisation but have been incurring losses after take-over, and even trading outfits in the public sector manage to lose money.

The losses occur for a variety of reasons. The private sector Great Eastern Shipping Company has bought bulk carriers at a fraction of the cost that the public sector Shipping Corporation did. In the case of Cochin Shipyard, capacity utilisation was between 23 per cent and 35 per cent in the early '80s, so that idle man-hours remained high. Yet, overtime payments came to as much as 43 per cent of the salary bill in one year—proving the truth of the old maxim that time is money, especially overtime.

The moral of the story:

The Government is too big, and Big Government is inevitably wasteful. The Government must be trimmed, and things brought down to manageable size. And the Government must stop trying to do everything.

- Programmes must be self-limiting, and periodically reviewed to see if they still serve any purpose.
- Rules and regulations must be framed so that permission does not constantly have to be sought from the Government; if violators are promptly punished, the vast majority will automatically do what is expected of them—without the need for permits and paperwork.
- The economy has become too complex for physical control of economic activity to be effective. Such controls should be replaced with automatic fiscal controls.
- Project management must be improved, the right amount of money provided at the right time, and political compulsions in picking foreign collaborators, project sites and so on over-ridden by commercial factors.
- Sick industrial units must be closed, and severence benefits improved to make this politically feasible.
- There has to be a modicum of accountability at every step, and penalties for even delaying files.
- Government audit must be made more effective. At the moment thousands of audit objections go unanswered. Officials must be made to indemnify losses they have caused, or jailed (as in France) for extreme misdemeanour.

—T.N. NINAN with PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI and PRABHU CHAWLA
Reports were filed for this story from Lucknow, Bhopal, Calcutta and Delhi.

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CANARA BANK

Head Office : 112, J.C. Road, Bangalore-560 002

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST DECEMBER, 1986
CONDENSED VERSION

AS AT 31-12-1985 Rs. in Crs.	CAPITAL & LIABILITIES	Rs. in Crs.
29.50	1. Capital	41.50
70.50	2. Reserve Fund & Other Reserves	120.00
5628.22	3. Deposits & Other Accounts	6818.39
530.72	4. Borrowings from Other Banking Companies, Agents etc.	597.19
84.98	5. Bills Payable	294.07
304.13	6. Bills for collection being bills receivable – As per Contra	341.84
324.16	7. Other Liabilities	301.21
644.53	8. Acceptances, endorsements & Other obligations per Contra	799.27
1.01	9. Profit & Loss Account	4.66
7617.75		9318.13

AS AT 31-12-1985 Rs. in Crs.	PROPERTY & ASSETS	Rs. in Crs.
679.67	1. Cash	921.54
259.43	2. Balances with Other Banks	115.98
10.00	3. Money at Call & short notice	–
1498.48	4. Investments	2153.52
3560.23	5. Advances	4168.40
304.13	6. Bills receivable being bills for collection – As per Contra	341.84
644.53	7. Constituent's liabilities for Acceptances, endorsements & other obligations per Contra	799.27
26.30	8. Premises less Depreciation (including Lease-holds)	37.81
31.00	9. Furniture and Fixtures less Depreciation	40.04
603.98	10. Other Assets	739.73
Negligible	11. Non Banking Assets acquired in satisfaction of claims	Negligible
7617.75		9318.13

PROFIT & LOSS ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER, 1986

YEAR ENDED 31-12-1985 Rs. in Crs.	EXPENDITURE	Rs. in Crs.
391.01	1. Interest paid on Deposits, Borrowings etc.	493.34
124.51	2. Salaries and allowances, PF & Gratuity	137.04
0.01	3. Directors' & Local Committee Members' Fees & allowances	Negligible
17.17	4. Rent, Taxes, Insurance, Lighting etc.	21.93
0.11	5. Law charges	0.19
4.15	6. Postage, Telegrams and Stamps	4.27
0.48	7. Auditors' Fees & Travelling Expenses	0.68
6.58	8. Depreciation on and repairs to Bank's property	9.23
3.86	9. Stationery, Printing, Advertisements etc.	5.25
25.09	10. Other Expenditure	33.38
11.01	11. Balance of Profit	18.16
583.98		723.47

YEAR ENDED 31-12-1985 Rs. in Crs.	INCOME*	Rs. in Crs.
550.21	1. Interest and Discount	677.14
33.36	2. Commission, Exchange & Brokerage	45.86
0.03	3. Rents	0.03
0.01	4. Net Profit on sale of Investments, Gold & Silver, Land, Premises and Other Assets	0.03
–	5. Net profit on revaluation of Investments, Gold & Silver, Land, premises & Other Assets	
Negligible	6. Income from Non Banking Assets	
0.37	7. Other Receipts	0.41
583.98		723.47

* (Less : Provision made during the year for Bad & Doubtful Debts and other usual or necessary provisions)

PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

1. Gross profit increased by 32.72%. Net profit increased to Rs. 18.16 Crores from Rs. 11.01 Crores –
   THE HIGHEST AMONG ALL NATIONALISED BANKS.
2. Dividend paid to the Government of India rose from Rs. One Crore to Rs. 4.66 Crores –
   HIGHEST EVER PAID BY ANY OF THE 20 NATIONALISED BANKS
3. RESERVES – Rs. 120 Crores in 1986
   Increase in Reserves since nationalisation :
   Rs. 15 Crores in 13 Years (1969-1982)
   Rs. 55.5 Crores in 3 years (1982-1985)
   Rs. 49.5 Crores in 1 year (1986)
4. Growth in Aggregate Deposits – 21.1%
5. Growth in Advances – 17.06%

R K SWAMY/CB/2576 R

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SPARKLING ROW

THE international brouhaha over the Government's indirect partnership with South Africa's De Beers to promote diamond exports from India is now producing unexpected results. The controversy had been over the fact that the Bombay-based Hindustan Diamond Corporation (HDC) was a joint venture between the Government and the Bank of Bermuda, which is commonly believed to be a front organisation for De Beers, and that this partnership survived despite the Government's international campaign to economically isolate South Africa for its apartheid policies. Now the Bank of Bermuda has decided to pull out of HDC, and has informally sounded the Government out on the possibility of selling its shareholding in the company to a suitable party (which too could have indirect links with De Beers). Somewhat enigmatically, the Government of India has asked the bank to submit a formal proposal to that effect.

SHOPPING VENTURE

FOR those enchanted by the large shopping plazas and department stores of the west, there is now good news back home. Inter-Shoppe, armed with investment plans totalling Rs 5 crore, is planning to open modest versions of the original thing: Inter-Shoppe plazas in Delhi, Bombay and Madras. These will be places with a mini-environment of their own and provide a range of shopping items, eateries and relaxation areas. In order to get the project going, the Delhi-based clothing and export outfit is negotiating with a series of fast food chains, electronics goods manufacturers, jewellers, beauticians and leading vendors of sarees and cosmetics to come together under one roof, the first of which will be coming up fairly soon in Delhi. Discussions are already under way with Nirula's, Vichitra sarees, Ushnak Mal and Vijay Mallya, among others. Construction work has begun at posh Vasant Vihar in prestigious south Delhi and the four-storeyed structure, spread over 10,000 square feet, is expected to be complete by November.

SHAVING SWISH

THE Government has flatly turned down an application forwarded by Peico Electronics and Electricals, formerly Phillips India, to manufacture two lakh electric shavers annually. The Rs 1.02-crore venture was to have been established in a backward district in the Union territory of Goa. The Government has, however, ruled against the project on two accounts: electric shavers, they pointed out, are not open to companies that are covered by the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act. And besides this, the import content is unacceptably high.

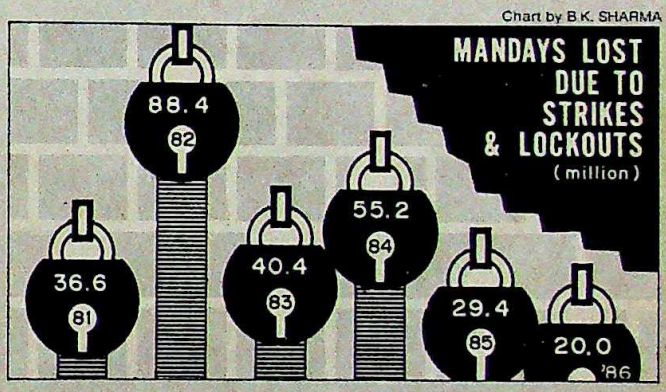
BRANCHING OUT

GRINDLAYS Bank is trying to furiously expand its area of operation. For one, the bank is readying to launch an ambitious $15 million (roughly Rs 19 crore) capital fund for non-resident Indians. The fund, which will be based in the Channel Islands, is slated to get off the ground in the next few months. After quickly building up a portfolio of close to Rs 100 crore, the bank has virtually kicked off a market for debentures by buying and selling them. The margins in the business hinge on the volumes, but the bank hopes to turn around funds more speedily in the process.

STRIKING CHANGE

THE last calendar year has turned out to be one of the most peaceful on the industrial front. The total number of man-days lost during 1986 on account of strikes and lock-outs was down by more than 30 per cent to 20 million. In fact, the loss on account of industrial strife has been falling

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



steadily since 1982, when the figure reached 88 million because of the textile strike in Bombay. There was another hiccup in 1984 when 55 million man-days were lost. And there could well be trouble ahead, irrespective of the peace in 1986. The public sector trade unions are getting restive, and a fresh round of wage bargaining is round the corner.

TAKING STOCK

SWEEPING changes are in the offing for those who invest in shares. Apart from the much-promised watchdog agency to police the stock-markets, the Government has an "over-the-counter" (OTC) share market on its drawing-boards. OTC markets exist in several other countries, and are meant to provide a forum for trading in the stocks of companies that are not listed on the stock exchanges. Initially, they evolved abroad as informal arrangements, but a more formal structure is envisioned here. The Ministry of Finance has still to work out the details, but what seems likely is a subsidiary market to trade in the shares of listed companies.

Last year, new companies without proven track records rushed to enlist on the share markets because this offered them a tax advantage, but investors who bought their shares have found them quoting at or below par. The OTC market could offer one solution, especially if new firms are required to graduate from them to the regular stock exchanges.

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INDUSTRY

Shaken by Competition

MOVE over oligopoly, competition is here. Witness the signs. Markets as diverse as fertilisers and two-wheelers are in the throes of an unprecedented shake-out. Amidst a glut, cement, synthetic fibre, computer and copier companies have either cut prices or are offering discounts even as a host of television set, two-wheeler, car and light commercial vehicle manufacturers struggle to stay afloat.

And in some industries at least, small manufacturers are tumbling down like ninepins while the profit margins of the big boys have been pared. Reports S.R. Jiwarajka, president of the Indian Television Manufacturers' Association: "About 30 to 40 small television manufacturers have closed down, and the profitability of even large units has dropped to half that of last year's levels." So, after being at the receiving end for years in a seller's market, the consumer has got a look in for the first time.

The well-spring of the turmoil in the market-place is the Government's liberal approach to licensing production capacities. A few years ago, several big and small Indian businessmen feverishly applied for letters of intent, industrial licences and the other formalities of setting up shop. But the big rush is over. Today, unwilling to be corporate lemmings in a more competitive environment, many of them have developed cold feet. Official figures show that of the 7,442 letters of intent issued between 1980 and last October, firms have converted only 2,234 into industrial licences. As many as 1,324 have lapsed and a formidable 3,884 remain in limbo. The batting average is a very poor 31 per cent.

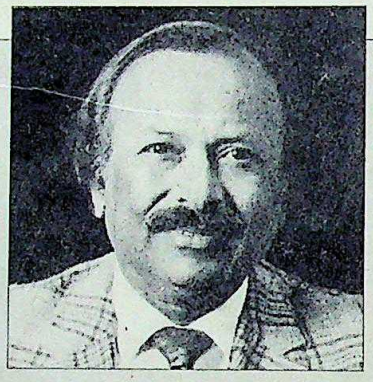
"If industry isn't implementing letters of intent, that's fine. Competition is here, and there's going to be sickness and mergers," says a cheerful Tarun Das, director-general of the Confederation of Engineering Industry, the engineering industry's apex representative body. But not everyone shares his happiness. Industrialists like Jiwarajka complain that the Government in its eagerness to open out the economy has gone overboard, and that the new ventures may have to be put in sick bay. But industry itself is divided on this. Says Blowplast Chairman Dilip Piramal: "The Indian industrialist does not like competition. Now that he has got a taste of it, he is clamouring for a return to the regulated Raj."

Both viewpoints have something going for them. The Government has been sanctioning production capacities in excess of the officially projected demand for products. In nylon filament yarn, for instance, capacities totalling 1.17 lakh tonnes have been permitted, against the seventh plan capacity target of 0.7 lakh tonnes. The story is repeated in other synthetic textiles (*see chart*). Licences to manufacture 40 million TV sets have been given to big and small alike, even though the demand by 1990 is officially pegged at six million. And the Industrial Development Bank of India said in a report to the Government last year that it had granted more than 50 licences for nearly 10 million electronic push-button phones: the demand at the end of the seventh plan is estimated at a mere two million.

Now, there are signs that officialdom has realised that it has dialled the wrong number. It has cancelled 15 licences for phone instruments. Last month, the Government also decided not to renew unimplemented letters of intent for TV sets.

But Piramal has a point when he suggests that some industrialists would prefer a protected regime. And the protection is sought under a variety of guises. Sections of the drug industry, for instance, aver that the Government's open door policy of 1985 on basic drugs will hit Indian companies in the industry. They want 143 items reserved for them. Television manufacturers too had led a long and finally abortive battle to prevent big business from entering the fray.

If nascent industries are feeling the pinch, the situation may well be worse in long-established sectors where the considerable investments involved make it difficult to cut losses and quit. In tyres, for example, manufacturers are hollering about over-capacity. Inevitably, many who had tyre projects on the anvil have either pulled out or have reconsidered. Reliance clinched a tyre project in Andhra Pradesh, only to pull out later. Larsen & Toubro has yet to implement a licence it has for tyres. "We will seriously consider not investing in expanding our capacity except to protect our existing investments to achieve economies of scale," says the vice-president of a major tyre company. He blames the Government for the crisis: "Who is going to buy all the tyres we make? What happened to all the official projections? The demand for light commercial vehicles was supposed to grow by



"Premier Automobiles is not alone. The whole car industry is going through a bleak time."

VINOD DOSHI
chairman and managing director, Premier Automobiles Limited

"Nearly 40 small units have closed down, and the profits of large units have dropped to half of last year's levels."

S.R. JIWARAJKA
president, Indian Television Manufacturers' Association

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15.7 per cent in the seventh plan. It is barely 8 per cent. In passenger cars, except Maruti there has been no growth."

The automobile sector has indeed come in for some battering. The commercial vehicles industry has hit a rough patch, especially the new entrants, and with Maruti king of the road, the other car outfits have been edged into the sidelanes. Premier Automobiles Limited (PAL) alone has witnessed a 50 per cent drop in demand over the past few months. Says the company's Chairman and Managing Director Vinod Doshi: "Premier is not alone. The whole industry is going through a bleak time." Indeed, a few months ago Premier launched a subsidiary called PAL Hire Purchase and is offering its vehicles in instalments to buyers.

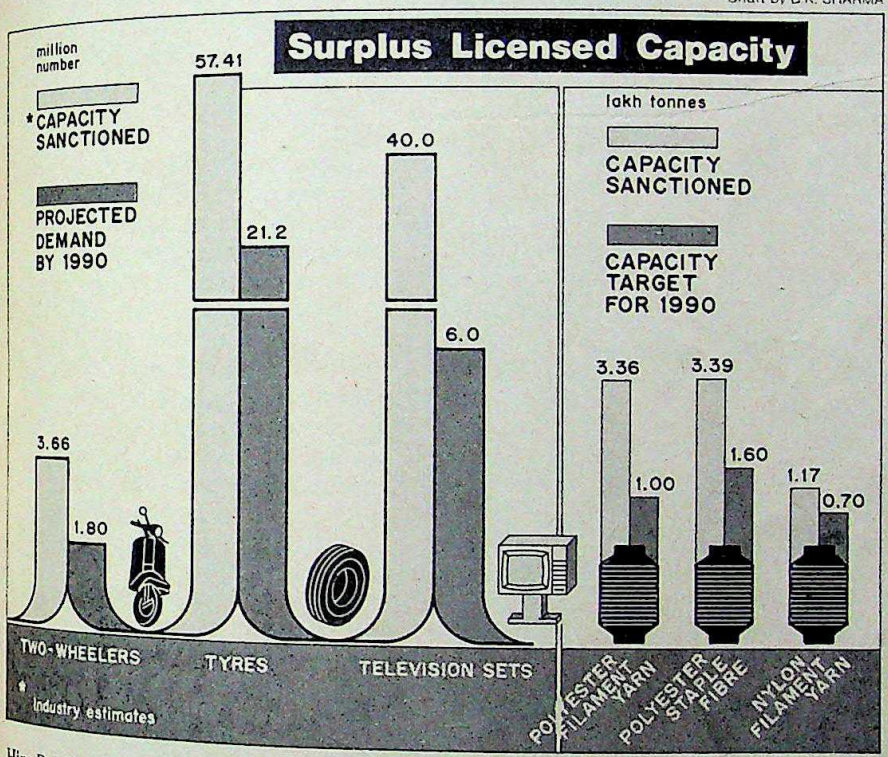
Two-wheelers are in an equal mess. Market leader Bajaj Auto has seen the waiting list for its vehicles dwindle from three years, some years ago, to a bare three months now. And industry sources claim that some of the new stars, such as TVS Ind-Suzuki, have found the demand for their vehicles levelling off. Many of the smaller among the 40-odd units are already on their last legs, having failed to cope with the front-runners in quality. "The numbers will get whittled down soon," predicts Rahul Bajaj.

The small-will-perish motif is being repeated in the drug industry too. The delicensing announced in 1985 could take a toll of the Indian small sector. Reason: whopping capacities have been created and prices have dipped. The figures tell the story eloquently. An astonishing 1,674 tonnes capacity exists in ampicillin as against the seventh plan target of 580 tonnes. So against a government-ordained maximum price of Rs 1,850 per kg of ampicillin, the going market rate is Rs 1,600. Forecasts Indian Drug Manufacturers' Association General Secretary G.G. Nair: "Only the big will survive in the end."

BUT being big is not an automatic passport to success. Many cement companies, long kept in the doldrums by the artificially low prices set by the Government, are now facing a further crunch after a brief period of prosperity following the 1982 dual pricing policy. The Government had revised prices, but the industry claims that inflation has eaten into profit margins yet again. Whatever premiums existed in the market have disappeared and cement is now available off the shelf. The result: entrepreneurs are simply not investing more money in the industry.

But, most cement and fertiliser men reckon that demand will burgeon in the years ahead. So, in a sense, both the industries are the odd men out in the overall dim scenario. Still, imports and two successive droughts have combined to bring about a fertiliser glut. "There are severe glut conditions in the market forcing manufacturers to offer margins (discounts) much in excess of allowable limits," notes the Fertiliser Association of India.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



In man-made fibres too, units have been producing much below capacity or allowing stocks to pile up. In 1985 there were only five units producing polyester staple fibre with a total capacity of 54,000 tonnes. This year, the figure is expected to climb to 2.14 lakh tonnes, more than double the demand, and to a further 3.1 lakh tonnes by 1990. This is mirrored in other synthetic fibre sectors too, and the not unexpected upshot is price drops. Partially oriented yarn prices, for instance, were quoted at Rs 182 in March 1985 but are a bare Rs 154 today.

So the evidence of competition in the market is compelling. But there are sceptics too who point out that the competition has not been sweeping, and that price-tags have not been cut for products like television sets and two-wheelers. They are only too right, but in several cases this is due to products depending on imported components, the bill for which has soared along with foreign currencies.

Many other questions beg answers here. For one, why did firms leap into markets without noting the competition? More to the point, why did the Government clear such hefty production capacities? The answer to the first may well be that the signals were not as clear then as they are now. And, as Piramal argues: "Companies are often just keeping their options open."

Equally clearly, the Government suspects that much of the capacities will not eventually be translated into factories on the ground. "Such a large number of unimplemented letters of intent makes me wonder whether they are obtained for the purpose of setting up projects or for pre-empting competitors from entering the field," Industry Minister J. Vengala Rao told his counterparts in the states at a recent meeting in the capital. Last fortnight, a senior government official echoed the argument: "There are over 40 licencees for two-wheelers but effectively there are only eight or nine of them." He also privately conceded that the official demand figures could be wrong, and contended that supply creates its own demand. "The demand for polyester is going up. No one thought that there would be such a demand for man-made fabrics." But the official case rests on one simple clinching argument: "Over-capacity is good. The consumer has a choice."

He may be right—in the long run. Over the short haul, more upheavals and a painful restructuring of the market seem inevitable.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
and PARTHASARATHI SWAMI

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RELIANCE

Excess Trouble

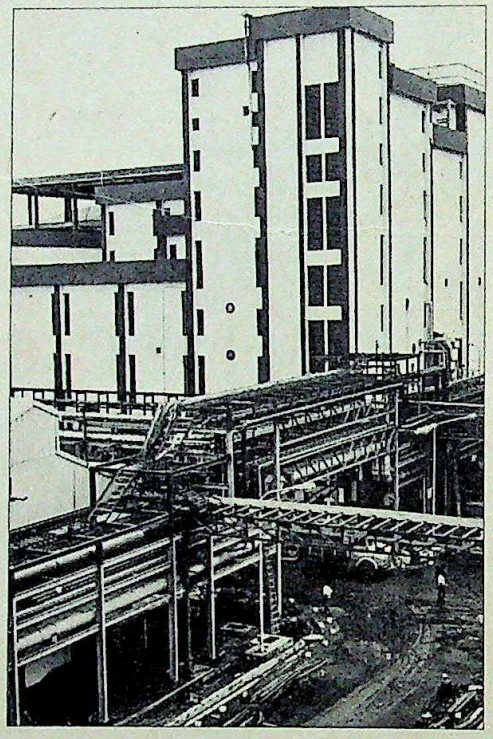
THE Reliance Industries management must have known that the bad news was coming. In late December, customs officials accompanied by technical experts had come calling at the company's polyester yarn plant at Patalganga, in Maharashtra, and had then come calling a second time three days later. The Reliance project manager knew what the officials had said in their report—they had made him countersign their findings (though he put in a note of protest).

So when the bad news finally came on February 10—in the form of a show cause notice demanding a staggering Rs 120 crore as customs duty—the Reliance management couldn't have been surprised. Asked to present its side of the case within 15 days, the company promptly submitted a detailed rebuttal charging the customs authorities with confusing technical issues and pointing out that the Industry Ministry itself had earlier cleared the company of the charges contained in the customs show cause notice.

The notice virtually takes off from a charge aired six months ago in the *Indian Express*—that Reliance had 'smuggled' in a plant worth Rs 100 crore, evading customs duty and violating licensing norms. But it remained unclear whether the company and its promoters, the Ambani family, were in serious trouble or whether overzealous officials had misread the situation and were pressing with a charge that could not be unsubstantiated. In a worst case scenario (as some publications suggested), the Ambanis could be arrested and the company's machinery could be impounded (as the show cause notice threatens to do). Industrialists have been arrested for smaller misdemeanours. But the mood in the Reliance camp showed little worry on either score.

Before the customs officials got into the act, the Government had put together a technical committee of experts drawn from three public sector companies. This team had inspected the Reliance plant for evidence of what *Indian Express* had charged, and come to the conclusion that the number of spinning machines was not the licensed eight but 12. The company denied this, and the Industry Ministry seemed to go along with this denial when it decided, after going through the technical committee's report and other papers, that Reliance was not guilty of either installing excess capacity or of smuggling anything into the country without the knowledge of the customs department. But the Finance Ministry apparently remained undeterred, and its officials even went abroad to ask questions of Reliance's collaborators, E.I. du Pont De Nemours. Informed sources said last fortnight that the officials drew a blank.

Patalganga plant: a question of capacity



The essence of the customs case is that Reliance imported equipment well in excess of what it had been permitted to, and that instead of having eight spinning machines with a total capacity to manufacture 25,000 tonnes of polyester yarn, the company had 12 machines with at least 55,000 tonnes capacity. The customs department, in fact, used three different methods to work out the production capacity, and all three came to more than 55,000 tonnes. The polymerisation capacity, for instance, is worked out to be 55,440 tonnes—using polymer production rates recorded in the factory log book.

The Industry Ministry, in contrast, had concluded that the capacity could not be in excess of 29,000 tonnes, that higher tonnage could be achieved by producing yarn of higher deniers and that all yarn manufacturers in fact did precisely this. It concluded that this practice did not mean any violation of licensing norms. The company in turn has maintained that four of its eight machines have been split "to suit layout requirements", thus making for 12 units. It contends that some of these machines had been declared as components (because they formed part of used machinery bought on an 'as is where is' basis) and that customs duty had been paid on them.

Mukesh

Dhirubhai

Anil

If the customs facts stand, the notice for evasion of a Rs 120-crore duty in importing the Patalganga plant can land the Ambanis in trouble.

Nevertheless, the customs show cause notice concludes: "Reliance appears to have unauthorisedly imported four additional spinning machines...in a clandestine manner and without payment of customs duty on these machines." The four machines are valued at Rs 53.02 crore, and the total customs duty demand is for Rs 119.64 crore.

Inevitably, the Reliance share, which had been climbing steadily after bottoming out in late November, took a sudden dip ,once again. And the key question was whether both the share and the company would recover from the shock treatment meted out last fortnight by the customs department.

—T.N. NINAN

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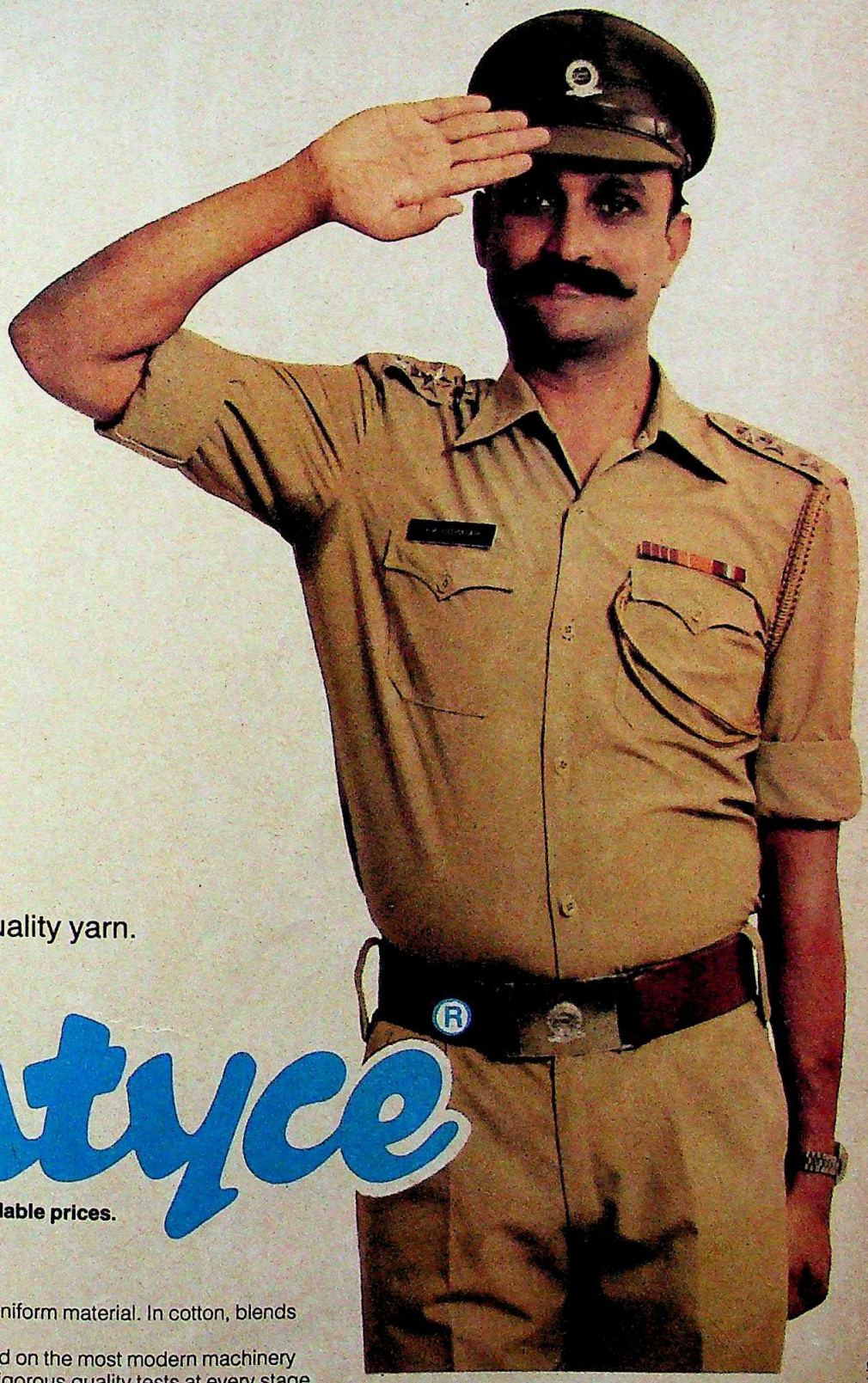

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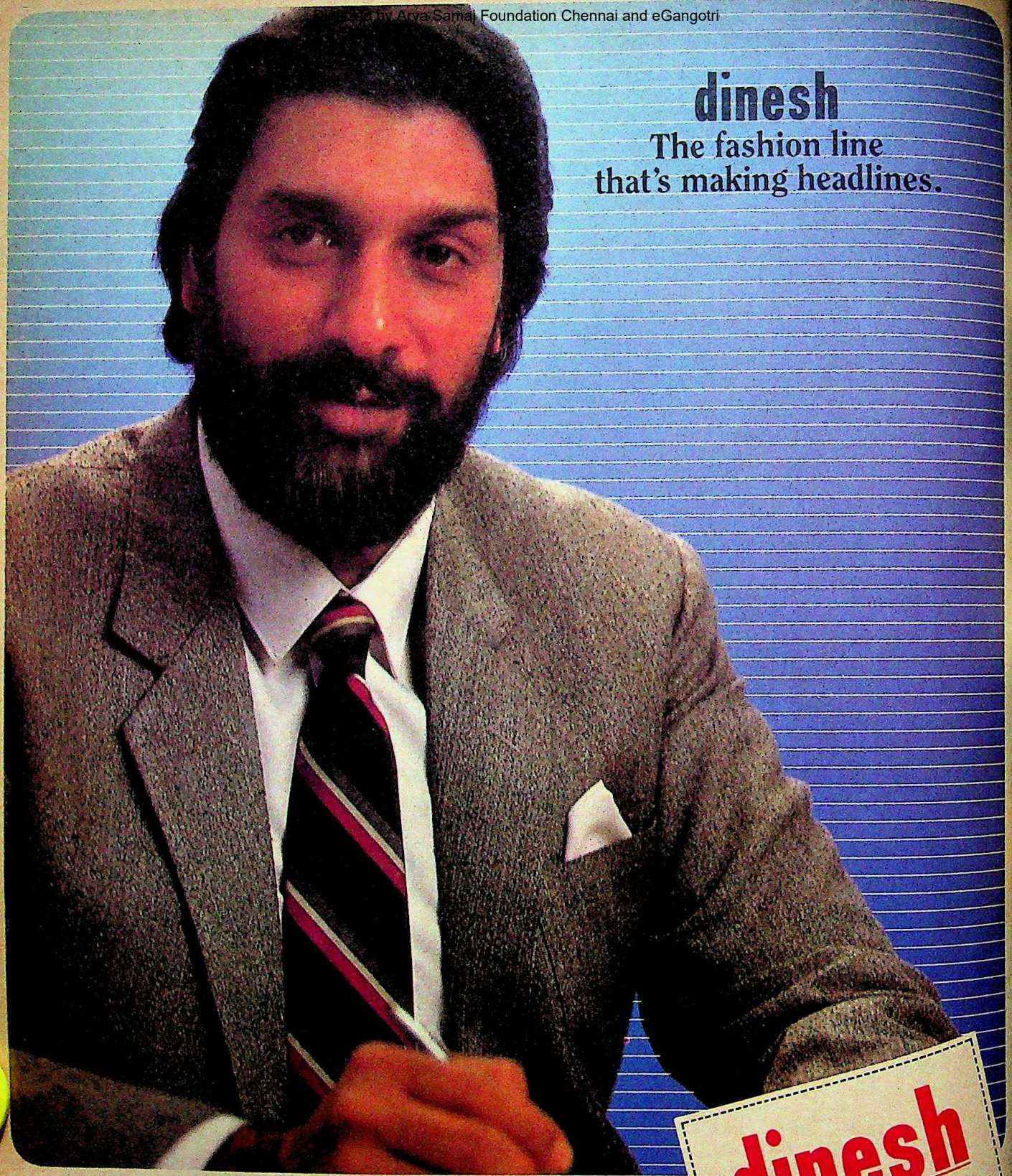

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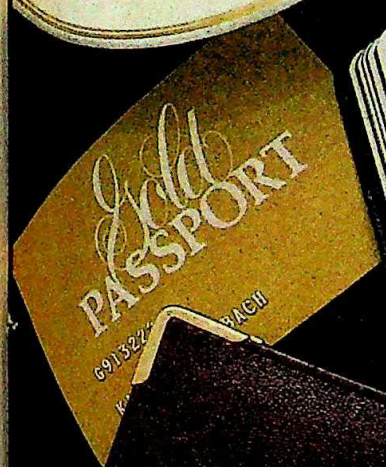

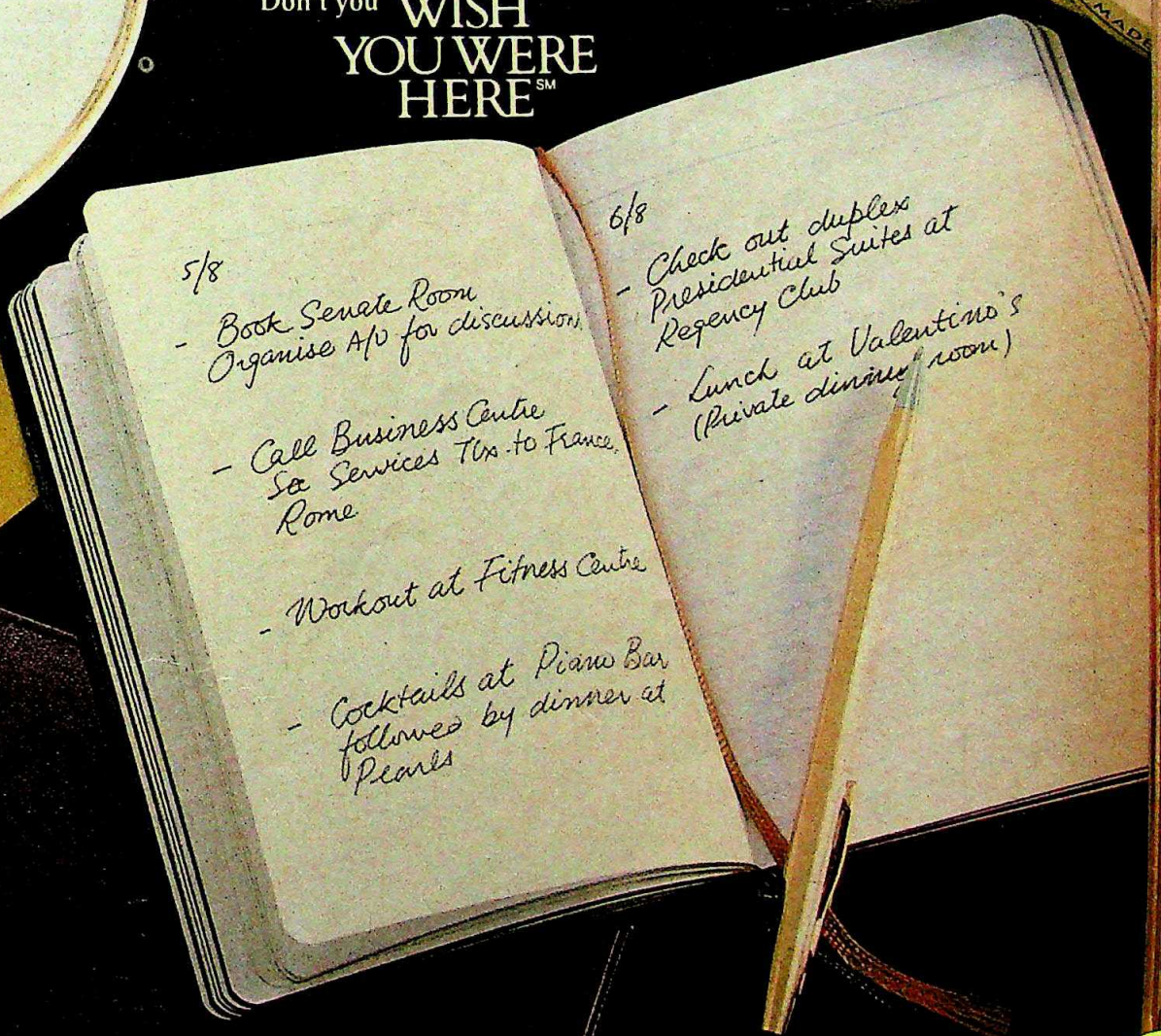

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DRUG POLICY

Ill Winds

FOR almost four years, the industry had waited for a new drug policy. It was finally unveiled two months ago. Today the industry still waits for the policy.

Weeks after the Government wrote out a liberal new prescription for the pharmaceutical industry, companies round the country still don't know where they stand because so many loose ends remain to be tied. And contradictory interpretations of key aspects of the policy abound. Drug prices will rise, but by how much? Which drugs will come under price control, and which will be set free? Nobody has clear answers.

As Harish Chawla, Cipla's director for corporate affairs, puts it: "This is not a policy but a declaration of intent. A number of things have not been spelled out." Even those who back the new policy join the chorus of criticism. Says J.S. Khambata, president and managing director of Glaxo: "A number of aspects have not been touched upon and clarification is required."

This is a sorry finale to four years of effort that saw one committee after another being appointed in the attempt to rewrite the last drug policy, finalised in 1978. More than two years ago, a committee set up by the now defunct National Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Development Council cobbled together a set of controversial recommendations (INDIA TODAY, October 15, 1984). When a storm followed, the committee's report was quietly buried. This was followed by yet another expert committee to work on alternative proposals. It came up with a policy draft which the Cabinet sent back at least four times. Finally, a broad-sweep policy statement was hastily issued to the press last December.

But this has only sparked off a fresh round of questions and committees. For instance, a seven-member committee is now looking into the key question of which drugs should be on the price-control list. Argued an exasperated Dilip Shah, director of Pfizer: "There is no need for the committee. A lot of the hard work has already been done."

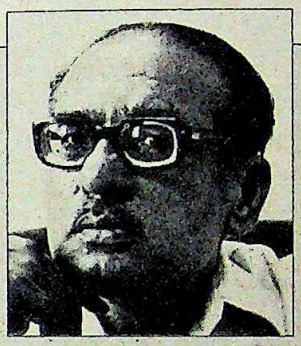
About the only thing that anyone agrees on is that a new drug policy was needed: the 1978 policy was just not achieving the intended results. Priority drugs were sought to be made cheap, so mark-ups (which include trade margins, promotional costs and manufacturers' profits) were kept low. The result: companies concentrated on the more profitable non-priority end of the market. In the five years between 1978-79 and 1983-84, industry sales of drugs with the lowest price mark-up actually dipped *(see chart)*, while sales of drugs for which the Government permits higher mark-ups grew by between 25 and 30 per cent.

The industry's profitability also nose-dived, and many started diversifying out of pharmaceuticals. Said Chandrakant I. Gandhi, till recently president of the Indian Drug Manufacturers Association (IDMA), which represents fully Indian-owned firms: "The profitability of companies producing only drugs without diversifying into other areas has been going down consistently." Finally, officialdom simply could not police the prices of the 347 bulk drugs and over 4,000 formulations that now fall in the price-control basket.

The Government's remedy for all this is the new policy. Its highlights include promises of a slimmer price control list; fatter incentives to produce price-controlled drugs; a National Drug and Pharmaceutical Authority to oversee the industry; tighter norms on exactly how much of the downstream formulations companies can manufacture in proportion to the upstream bulk drugs; and virtual permission to manufacture new drugs without seeking a licence, subject to certain conditions.

All this only raises several unsettling questions. For instance, will the National Drug and Pharmaceutical Authority have teeth or will it, like a similar high-powered body in the Health Ministry, remain a paper tiger? Since drugs used to treat common diseases—diarrhoea, malaria, and the like—will be under price control, does it mean that most antibiotics will be affected? Everyone has his own theory. Manufacturers are equally in the dark on how the new mark-ups will be calculated. Complains Pfizer's Shah: "The policy is totally silent on trade margins (which can run up to a hefty 23 per cent)."

Small units with turnovers of under Rs 50 lakh are currently exempt from price control, but the



"This is not a policy but a declaration of intent. A number of things have not been spelled out."

HARISH CHAWLA
director, corporate affairs, Cipla

"The committee could perhaps have been set up earlier, but the announcement of the measures would have been delayed."

K.R. JAICHANDRA SINGH
minister of state chemicals and petrochemicals

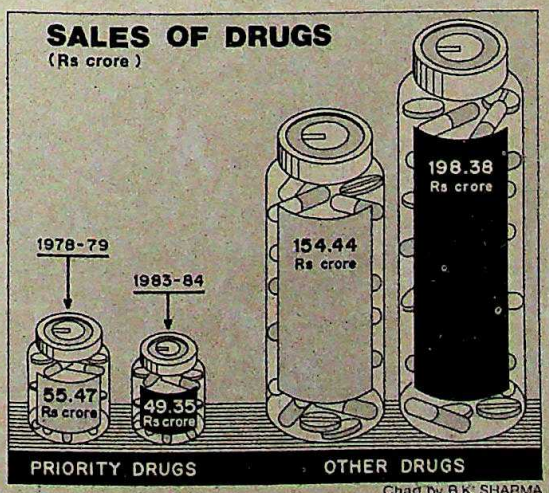


Chart by B.K. SHARMA

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new policy does not say whether they will continue to enjoy this advantage. Small-scale drug companies are also worried by the implications of some other steps proposed, which might result in big companies ceasing to buy bulk drugs from them. Charged Lalit Kumar Jain, vice-president of the Indian Small Scale Manufacturers' Association (Bulk Drugs): "The Government has forgotten that some 800 small units in the country produce only bulk drugs. They will be wiped out."

Then, cost data are vital for implementing some aspects of the policy. But with price decontrol on the cards, there could be problems in getting accurate data. Argues Cipla's Chawla: "The Government is expanding the price decontrol basket. How can it determine the ex-factory cost of a decontrolled drug? Companies do not have to report cost data for these and can inflate their ex-factory cost." For good measure, some of the 94 drugs which the Government delicensed in 1985 don't meet the new norms for delicensing.

Why then did the Government not foresee this daunting array of questions before releasing its policy statement? Minister of State for Chemicals and Petrochemicals K.R. Jaichandra Singh, under whose jurisdiction the industry falls, however insists that the policy has all the answers. Says the minister: "We have mentioned everything in the policy. The committee to draw up the list of essential drugs could perhaps have been set up earlier, but the announcement of the new measures would have been delayed further."

Singh clarifies that some of the details relating to the new drug authority have yet to be worked out, that the new mark-ups will include trade margins although packaging costs may be judged by fresh standards, and that small firms will continue to be exempt from price control. Moreover, he says, the list of delicensed drugs is flexible, and the Government will trust the industry for cost data on amounts up to Rs 10 crore. "We feel that the time has come to leave it to the manufacturers. If companies don't behave we will come down heavily on them," warns Singh.

The industry may welcome that approach, but whether the new prescriptions will work is the big question. Last fortnight, there were no clear answers because the prescriptions themselves seemed indecipherable.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI with PARTHASARATHI SWAMI

DOORDARSHAN

Ad Matter

WHEN a Rs 100-crore monopoly business decides to up the ante sharply, you can expect its customers to scream. And if the screams are loud enough, even a monopoly outfit might deign to listen.

Doordarshan listened last fortnight: Two months after announcing a hike in advertisement rates of between 50 and 100 per cent, the Government-run monopoly house finally yielded ground and rolled the tariff rates back by about 20 per cent for all but prime-time slots.

The advertisers are somewhat mollified. But the new rates have forced a revision of calculations throughout a shaken advertising world. Under the new rates, 10 second spots will now cost Rs 70,000, instead of the old Rs 40,000.

Doordarshan has its arguments clear. The number of televisions in India has risen from 6 million to 9 million in less than two years, and the viewing public is estimated at 45 million. No other advertising medium can obviously hope to rival this reach.

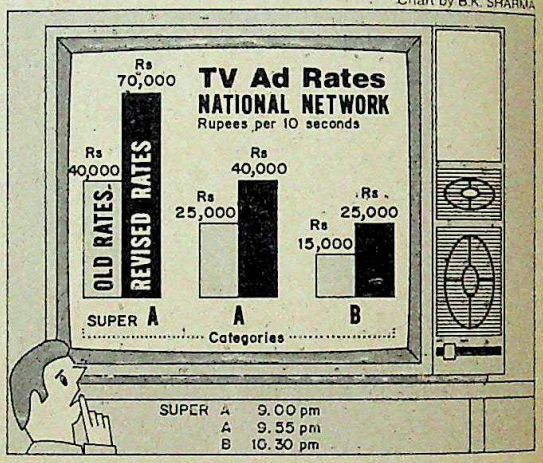
Advertising agencies have known this perfectly well and calculated that TV was the cheapest medium on the basis of 'cost per contact'. Advertising bosses like Sam Balsara of Mudra feel that the hike was justified and, based on likely viewership, remained cost-effective.

Doordarshan Director-General Bhaskar Ghose says there were other compulsions: "There was inhuman pressure for prime-time slots. So we decided to make the national network and prime-time less attractive, and divert advertisers to other kendras and areas which are not doing so well." Result: the new rates have been tailored to make the regional networks more attractive. Also, the telecast price for each sponsored programme has been doubled (to Rs 1.5 lakh), and the amount of free advertising on a half-hour sponsored programme slashed from 90 seconds to 60 seconds. Finally, since ad agencies book time and then hawk this to genuine advertisers, bookings can now on be made only for brand names, not for ad agencies.

But the ones who will be hit by the changes will be the Davids of the commercial world. Says Vishwanath Iyer, director of Creative Unit: "Like Indian Airlines, Doordarshan too will be creating two classes of advertisers: those who can afford executive class, and those who must settle for economy."

The print media is the most likely to benefit as some advertising shifts away from the tube. Advertising chiefs like Arun Nanda of Rediffusion say that they are now re-examining the cost efficacy of TV as opposed to other media. And advertisers are doing the same. Ernest Fernandes, general manager (marketing) of Tata Oil Mills says that over half the company's budget in 1985 was on TV, but this "will naturally go down and the print budget will go up 10 to 15 per cent." Adds Parle boss Ramesh Chauhan: "TV will remain important, but we will have to diversify." Firms are also considering shorter ads—10-or-20 second spots instead of the standard 30 second ones.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



But Doordarshan may finally succeed in pushing advertising to the regional kendras. Agencies like Clarion are already taking a new look at regional television with the idea of producing regional programmes.

For good measure, Doordarshan is also putting an end to the sponsorship of sports and film-based programmes—both commercial jackpots. Ghose says this is because a few big advertisers grab such sponsorships, and Doordarshan would like to be more than a commissioning agent for time, and to produce more programmes of its own. Nevertheless some things are not likely to change. Doordarshan, for instance, will almost certainly remain the biggest merchant of soap.

—MADHU JAIN and PARTHASARATHI SWAMI

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TELEPHONES

Wrong Number

IN 1979, the public sector Indian Telephone Industries (ITI) drew up a grand plan to modernise India's telephone instruments and signed a deal to produce, every year, a million modern, light-weight, cost-effective telephone instruments. Now, eight years later, the Rs 24-crore deal with Face Standard—the Italian subsidiary of American telecom giant, International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation (ITT)—has yet to result in a single instrument being added to the national network. Instead, there have been fundamental problems of quality that threatened at one stage, to blow up in everyone's face.

For the last 10 months, 1.05 lakh instrument kits imported from Face Standard for assembly in India, have been lying with ITI, fully paid for but unusable, because samples taken for testing have failed to meet the stipulated quality requirements. Another 95,000 kits are lying in customs warehouses at Bombay and Madras, with ITI refusing to clear them because of the quality deadlock. The kits, worth Rs 6 crore, may finally be salvaged following a last-minute deal with ITT last fortnight, but it provides a cautionary tale.

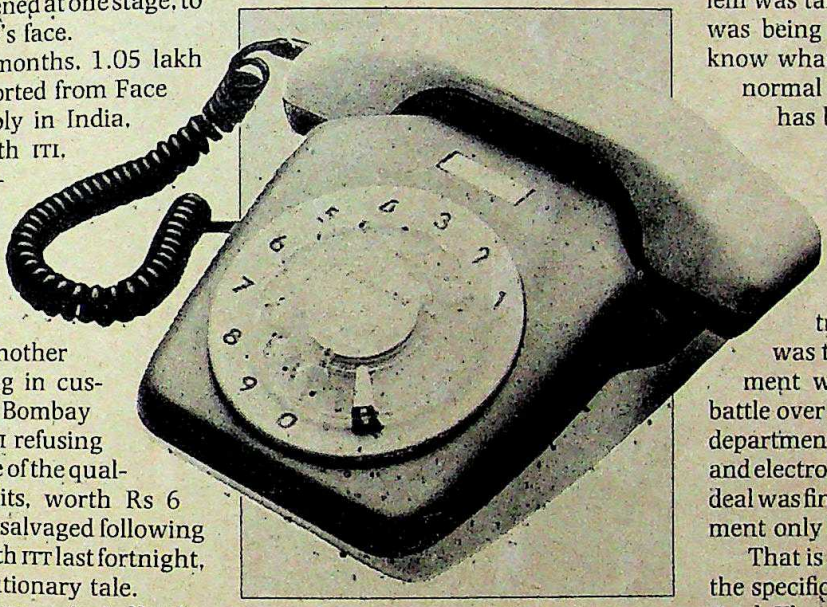
The instruments were rejected by the Telecommunication Research Centre (TRC), the research arm of the Department of Telecommunications, on three counts: the 'drop test', poor voice transmission efficiency, and no proper rubber shoes that are meant to help grip the surface on which the instrument rests.

In the first of these tests, an instrument is dropped nine times from a height of one metre, to see whether it breaks and whether components get dislodged. But the mould chipped on a corner, and the performance parameters changed.

The general level of transmission efficiency of the Face instrument was also not up to the required standard. A second attempt to pass the quality standards also failed, and the Department of Telecommunications dug in its feet.

ITI tried somewhat desperately, to get the department to relax the specifications on a one-time basis. And ITI Chairman K.P.P. Nambiar explained last fortnight, that Indian standards and quality tests were either too stringent or not the same as those used abroad. Says he: "These same instruments have been sold all over Europe, and there isn't a problem. And they are better than anything currently manufactured here." Added another technical expert: "Nowhere in the world is an instrument dropped from a height of one metre to check its strength. The quality standard tests are far too stringent."

But the department refused to yield. "Initially, any manufacturer will try to press for the sale of his product. It is for the customer to be firm," said V.M. Sundaram, member (technical development) of the department. "We will not relent on the quality criteria. We cannot accept the instrument in that form." Added another senior official: "If we had relaxed the conditions, we would have had two lakh subscribers complaining of poor instruments." Other department officials explained: "We are not asking for design modifications. We only want an improvement in the technique of quality control in production."



Face Standard Telephone: rejected

Though eight years have gone by since the signing of the Rs 24-crore deal with Face Standard, not a single telephone instrument has been added to the country's national network.

Eventually, Face Standard has agreed to make amends. The company—recently acquired by the French group Alcatel—has agreed to reinforce the mould of the instrument, but is not willing to change the transmission capsule, as this will not be an economically viable proposition. But Nambiar claimed that even the transducers would be changed so that the transmission problem was taken care of, and that all this was being done free of cost. "I don't know what the fuss is about. This is a normal commercial problem, and it has been sorted out," he added.

This amazing telephone tale has ended up with other wrong numbers too. The initial contract was for rotary dial instruments that were not fully electronic. Indeed, the argument was that a fully electronic instrument was unsuited for India. The battle over this issue raged between the departments of telecommunications and electronics for four years, so that the deal was finally approved by the Government only in 1983.

That is when the TRC chose to revise the specifications of the instrument desired. The ITT model did not conform to the new requirements. In 1984, it was decided that there was no point in continuing with the rotary dial alone, so ITI would now split the annual production of a million instruments into two equal halves: five lakh push-button, and as many rotary. In 1985, the earlier contract with ITT was extended to electronic telephone instruments as well.

Then the Department of Telecommunications—which had at one stage resisted the move to introduce push-button instruments—decided to make these 75 per cent of the total production. And now, using the impasse over quality, the rotary dial instrument is being given up so that only push-button, electronic instruments will be produced.

But at the end of an eight-year-old story, there will still be doubting Thomases who will wait till the instruments are actually delivered to the customer.

—TANIA MIDHA

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TAX RAIDS

Smoke and Fire

THERE is life—and raids—after V.P. Singh. Last fortnight, the Government pounded home that message to the cigarette industry. In a headline-grabbing raid, nearly 500 tax officials swooped down on the offices and factories of tobacco giant ITC and 90 of the company's wholesale dealers, and hauled away some 5,000 files and documents.

Simultaneously, the Finance Ministry's Department of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), has served a notice to the Sanjay Dalmia-owned GTC Industries, alleging excise evasion of over Rs 40 crore and an evasion of Rs 91 crore by New Tobacco Company. Both denied the allegations, but the latest offensive clearly signals a hardening of official suspicions that tax evasion is rampant in the industry—one official even put the figure at over Rs 300 crore annually, and by the official count, ITC's tax dues right now, could total Rs 116 crore.

ITC was the biggest target, and local tax officials came to know of their targets only on the morning of the raid: over 20 sealed envelopes containing a list of company premises to be raided, and a 34-point check list, were despatched by air from Delhi to Calcutta, Bangalore, Patna, Bombay and Hyderabad.

So ITC executives who arrived for work at Virginia House in Calcutta, found the excise men waiting for them. Company Chairman Jagdish Sapru himself was questioned about ITC's cigarette division. The files of the division were impounded, and the 10-member ITC board had to cancel a scheduled trip to the company's factory in Bihar. Sapru soon flew to the capital to meet Finance Ministry officials.

The tax men claimed to have struck paydirt. Affirms B.V. Kumar, director-general of revenue intelligence: "Our preliminary reports and investigations have confirmed that we were right on the mark." Specifically, the Finance Ministry's investigative wing maintained that ITC had encouraged its dealers to charge smokers more than the price printed on cigarette packets, and that it circulated a separate "effective price list" for this purpose.

Moreover, claimed the DRI, the difference between the two prices was funnelled back to the company, through a complicated system of compulsory deposits that wholesalers had to maintain with the company, and dealers had admitted as much. Alleged a tax official: "If a stockist bought cigarettes worth Rs 1 lakh, Rs 80,000 was credited to the deposit. Only Rs 20,000 was shown as payment." Dealers were charged 18 per cent interest on their outstandings, while they were paid 9 per cent on their deposits. The deposits now total Rs 42.9 crore. Finally, the company allegedly charged wholesalers an unincurred administrative expense to help explain money flowbacks. Indeed, when the DRI charged ITC's Bihar unit with tax evasion last year, the company promptly agreed to Rs 2.5 crore.

Sapru however, denies any wrong doing, insisting instead that the tax men have incorrectly understood the three issues. He says they had been discussed threadbare with the Government and a senior official had adjudicated in the dispute. In step with his order, ITC began forking out Rs 32 crore in instalments since around last October, and the last one of Rs 4.5 crore is due in March. "There has been no deliberate effort to try and defraud the exchequer. We've been in discussion with the Government and were under the impression that the matter had been resolved," he declares.

As he tells it, retailers have been charging more than the printed price ever since the Government introduced a new excise structure, almost two years ago, simply because tobacco companies began squeezing trade margins once it became clear that the new tax rules left manufacturers with meagre profit margins. The effective price list was therefore meant to internally assess consumer spending in the industry.

On the second charge, Sapru says that ITC had been collecting security deposits from its dealers, a practice common to other companies. "There is nothing surreptitious or sinister about this. The industry's turnover has shot up from Rs 80 crore in 1961-62 to Rs 2,300 crore now. The turnovers are large. If someone defaults, you need cover."

On the third count, he says that the company had been shipping its products to dealers and charging them both freight and the indirect administrative expenses it incurred on this.

Why then the raid? Sapru says he doesn't know. The DRI maintains that its suspicions were bolstered when Harish Rawat, Congress(I) MP from Uttar Pradesh, wrote to the Finance Ministry last year, claiming that the Government was losing revenue on ITC cigarettes. The DRI alleges that the company had attached another price list to the one it circulated to dealers last July.

The truth is difficult to determine. The only thing the two sides agree on is that the current excise structure leaves tobacco companies with unreasonably thin margins. ITC may not go to court on its latest dispute with the Government. Nevertheless, the skirmishes between the Government and cigarette manufacturers is unlikely to end with the peace pipe being smoked, for quite some time to come.

—PRABHU CHAWLA with bureau reports

"Our preliminary reports and investigations have confirmed that we were right on the mark."

B.V. KUMAR
director-general, Department of Revenue Intelligence

"There has been no deliberate effort to try and defraud the exchequer. We have done nothing surreptitious or sinister."

JAGDISH SAPRU
chairman, ITC

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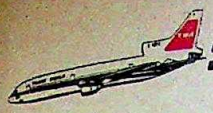

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3. Absolute assurance in the fact that Blue Star – for over 40 years, leaders in refrigeration and air-conditioning – backs the Leonard in your home.

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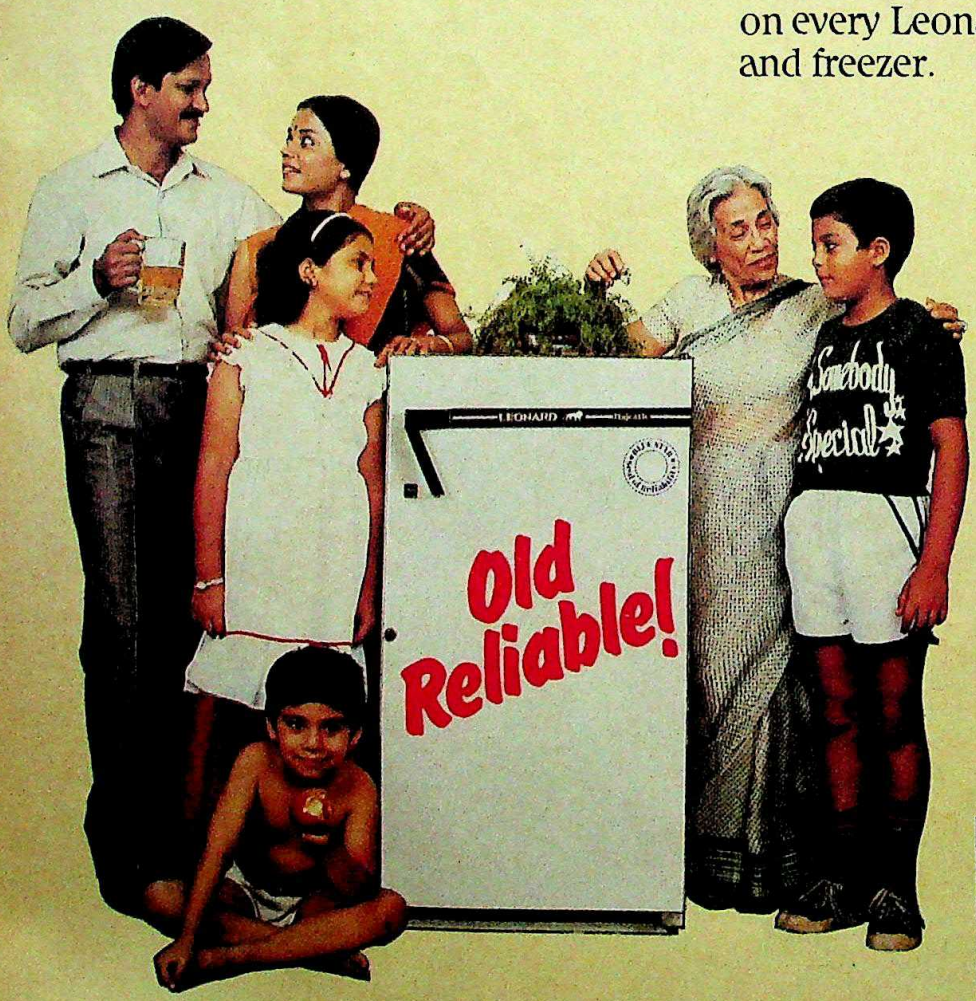

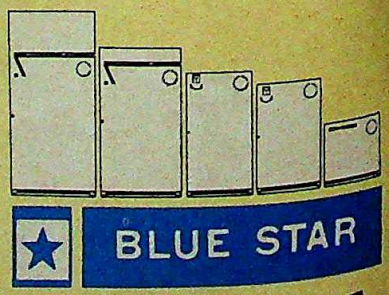

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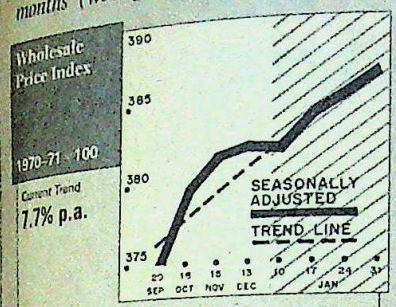
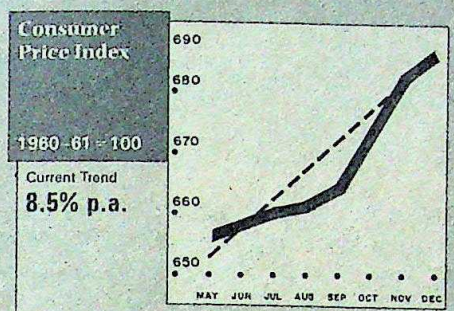
THE Government should carefully and very judiciously watch its spending. The gain as a result of increased revenues from taxes has been largely and unfortunately frittered away, and defence spending in particular is causing a very acute haemorrhage. The precious yellow metal, gold, has been on a roller-coaster climb; is it time for a drop?

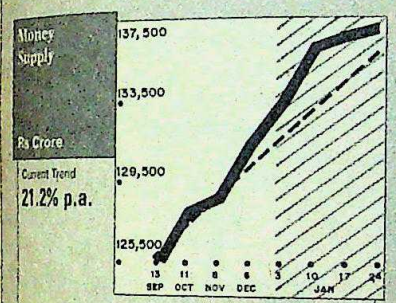
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months' (weekly data) or two years' (monthly data) figures.



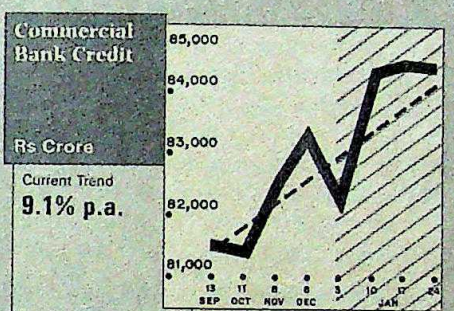
The danger of high inflation has temporarily passed. But it will reappear unless the Government begins to mend its profligacy.



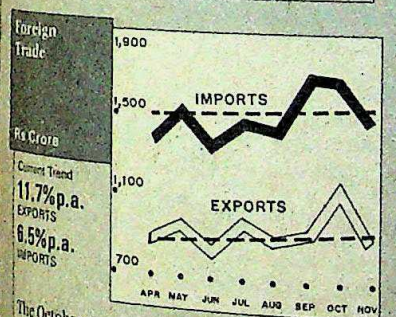
The sharp price upswing in October and November has flattened out in December, and may have levelled off further in January.



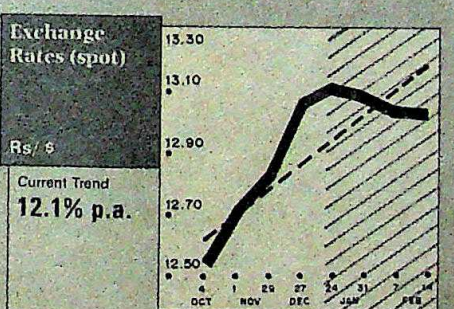
Money supply growth remains at a high level, and has, in fact, accelerated through the month of January.



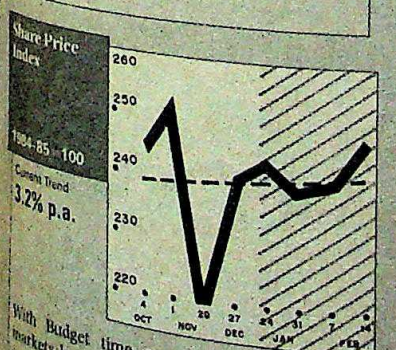
The divergence between bank credit growth and money supply is unhealthy. The private sector is paying for the dealings of the Government.



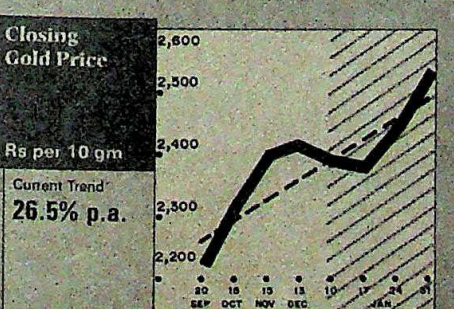
The October spurt in exports was not sustained in November. Imports, however, seem to be under control.



The protestations of a basket of currencies notwithstanding, the rupee seems fixed to the dollar. The short-term trend is not different from zero.



With Budget time approaching, the share markets have picked up, climbing out of the trough after the first week of February.



Whether it is smuggling or the lures of the exchange rate, the gold train keeps rumbling along. This indicates anticipated inflation.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items in January, 1987

	% Growth
Silk Raw	29.56
Logs Timber Bamboo	25.76
Wheat	15.35
Gingelly Seed	14.16
Groundnut Oilcake	13.34
Raw Cotton	11.85
Coir Fibre	10.72
Arhar	9.77
Linseed	8.64
Butter	7.98
Mustard Oilcake	7.48
Mustard Oil	6.29
Gingelly Oil	6.14
Linseed Oil	5.18
Rape & Mustard Seed	4.83
Khandsari	4.77
Groundnut Seeds	4.75
Sugar	3.23
Jawar	3.19
Onions	3.05
Groundnut Oil	3.04
Coffee	2.9
Cotton Yarn	2.53
Turmeric	2.47
Tapioca	2.42
Fish	2.32
Copra	2.3
Trucks	2.24
Milk	2.04
Mining Machinery	1.98
Urad	1.91
Aluminium	1.8
Ragi	1.72
Zinc	1.69
Vanaspati	1.68
Woollen Cloth & Woollen Khadi	1.53
Solvent Extracted Oil	1.49
Jute Textiles	1.46
Ceramic Tiles	1.45
Gur	1.36
Soda Ash	1.15
Utensils	1.06
Tyres	.96
Bars & Rods	.95
Pig Iron	.95
Rails	.93
Moong	.93

Of the 139 series considered, 92 of them with a total weight of 59.858 had a positive growth and 47 of them with a total weight of 26.768 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1987	1986
Crude Petroleum Thousand Tonnes, January	2519	2749
Petroleum Refinery Products Thousand Tonnes, January	4142	3773
Letters of Intent Issued Numbers, January	50	42
Industrial Licences Issued Numbers, January	50	58
Call Money Rate Percent, January	9.8	10.0

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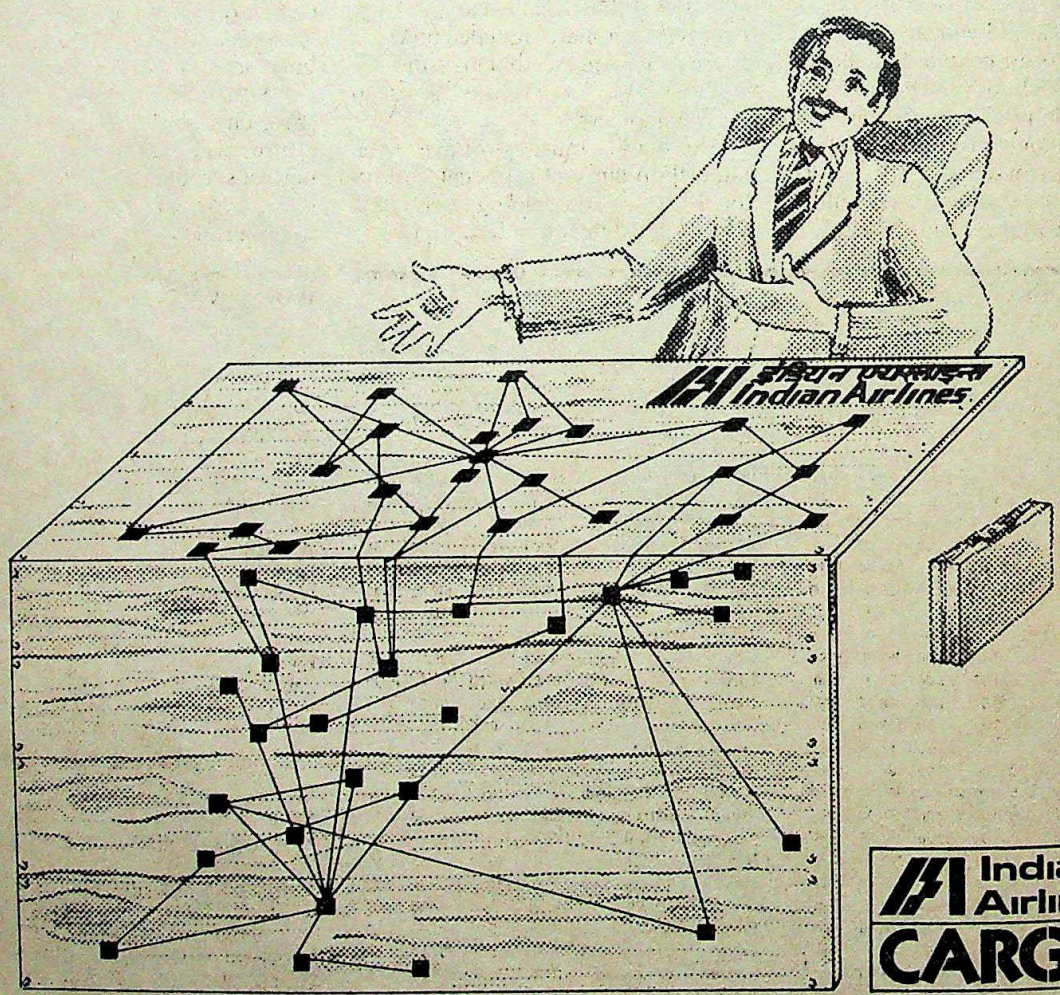

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CARGO

Better economy in the long run.

CLARION D 216

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THE MARKETS

Hopeful Mood

THE stock-markets were in a very hopeful mood last fortnight, with expectations of a favourable budget building up to almost fever pitch. Share prices, in fact, began moving up in early February, and by the close of last fortnight had gained 6 per cent in just three weeks. Some of the optimism was almost certainly based on the stray budget indications given by the prime minister himself, and it now remained to be seen whether the optimism would prove justified.

Meanwhile, several leading scrips scored handsome gains. Garware Polyester was up by 30 per cent, Century Enka by 21 per cent, Mukand Iron by 17 per cent and Tata Chemicals by 16 per cent. Several drug companies—Boots, Eskayef and Richardson Hindustan—also recorded impressive gains, perhaps because of the new drug policy details that are being worked out.

The widespread gains are difficult to understand when several leading industries face problems of insufficient demand. Whether it is cement, polyester or trucks, demand is sluggish. Perhaps the market has already discounted for this factor, and perhaps investors expect the prime minister to offer incentives in the budget for reviving the problem-ridden industries. Whatever the case, the fact that even cash shares notched up widespread gains suggests that investors are finally flocking back to the market in sizeable numbers.

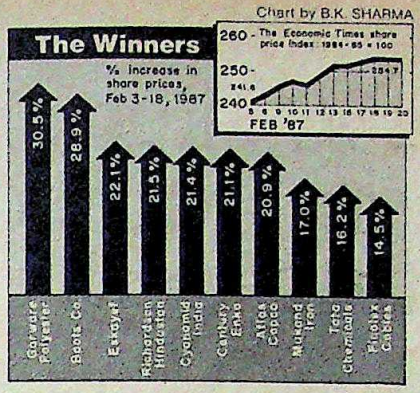
The market must also have taken note of the promise of large-scale institutional buying in the coming weeks, with the Unit Trust having substantial funds waiting to be deployed. On the other hand, however, if several new public issues of shares and debentures are floated in the coming months, investors are likely to sell their existing holdings in order to gain liquidity and invest in the new offerings. This will almost certainly depress the market.

Meanwhile, Tata Steel experienced a hiccup following the reports of a steel price hike being turned down by the Finance Ministry, but subsequent reports spoke of a price increase still being on the cards.

The other development was the slight slump in Reliance Industries after several weeks of sustained rise. This followed reports of a heavy tax demand having been levied on the company and an application for an industrial licence having been turned down. Also, the company is still to announce its results for 1986, suggesting that profits may have taken a dip.

With pulls and pressures acting both ways on the market, the trend of the future will be determined by the market's reading of the budget. March is going to be an eventful month in the trading ring.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



ACTIVE STOCKS

	1987 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 20.2.87	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	33.00	29.00	30.00	0.75 –
Asian Paints	247.50	207.50	243.75	22.50 +
Associated Cement	236.00	207.00	227.00	15.00 –
Atlas Copco	139.00	112.00	138.00	16.00 +
Avery India	166.00	150.00	164.00	9.00 +
Bajaj Auto	4600.00	3950.00	4525.00	300.00 +
Baroda Rayon	232.50	215.00	225.00	2.50 +
Bata India	150.00	128.50	150.00	13.50 +
Bayer	760.00	620.00	750.00	120.00 +
Bharat Forge	74.00	66.00	70.00	2.00 +
Birla Jute	49.50	47.00	48.75	1.25 +
Blow Plast	126.00	92.50	118.00	2.00 –
Bombay Dyeing	59.50	40.50	56.50	4.50 +
Brooke Bond	86.00	77.00	84.50	6.50 +
Ceat Tyres	565.00	480.00	565.00	35.00 +
Century Spinning	810.00	670.00	755.00	20.00 +
Chloride India	148.00	89.00	91.25	1.25 +
Colgate	377.50	327.50	367.50	10.00 +
DCM	39.00	32.25	33.00	0.50 –
Dunlop	75.25	71.25	74.50	1.50 +
Elecon	107.50	88.75	100.00	5.00 +
E.I. Hotels	56.00	44.50	46.50	nil
Escorts	84.00	76.00	78.00	1.00 +
Eskayef	231.25	171.25	226.25	40.00 –
Finolex Cables	155.00	114.00	149.00	16.00 +
Food Specialities	187.00	165.00	185.00	11.00 +
Garware Polyester	94.50	69.50	90.00	17.00 +
G.E. Shipping	22.50	18.00	19.00	3.00 –
Gujarat St. Fertilisers	183.50	140.00	168.00	nil
Grasim Ind.	94.00	80.00	92.00	6.00 +
Hind. Cocoa	262.50	223.75	250.00	15.00 +
Hindustan Lever	188.00	167.00	180.00	3.00 +
Hindustan Motors	35.35	29.70	32.00	0.20 +
Hind. Dorr	332.50	295.00	325.00	27.50 +
IEL	61.50	54.50	58.75	4.25 +
Indian Organic	78.00	67.00	75.00	6.00 +
Indian Rayon	76.00	68.00	73.50	2.50 +
Indrol	510.00	260.75	328.75	66.25 +
Ingersoll-Rand	305.00	272.50	302.50	25.00 +
ITC	78.00	63.00	64.00	5.00 –
J.K. Synthetics	93.50	70.00	81.00	6.50 –
Kinetic Engineering	312.50	255.00	285.00	25.00 +
Kirloskar Cummins	755.00	670.00	745.00	45.00 +
Larson & Toubro	100.00	82.00	97.50	11.00 +
Lipton	74.00	60.00	74.00	10.00 +
Lohia Machines	28.00	22.50	27.50	nil
Madura Coats	70.50	66.00	68.25	1.25 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	46.00	38.00	42.00	3.00 +
Motor Industries	385.00	357.50	382.50	13.75 +
National Organic	577.50	517.50	557.50	20.00 +
Nirlon	22.50	18.00	22.00	0.50 +
Otis Elevator	185.00	155.00	175.00	10.00 +
Orkay Silk Mills	115.00	86.00	98.00	6.00 +
Peico Electronics	57.25	45.00	47.50	1.50 –
Ponds	370.00	335.00	367.50	27.50 +
Premier Auto	29.50	21.00	26.00	2.50 –
Ranbaxy	135.00	111.00	125.00	10.00 +
Raymond	79.00	68.00	79.00	8.00 +
Reckitt & Colman	200.00	174.00	186.00	7.00 +
Reliance Industries	277.00	202.00	243.00	25.00 –
Shriram Fibres	36.00	30.75	32.00	nil
Sandoz	140.00	87.50	107.50	11.25 +
SPIC	53.50	43.50	43.50	3.25 –
Tata Steel	1207.50	1025.00	1145.00	10.00 +
Telco	665.00	550.00	625.00	10.00 +
Vulcan Laval	52.50	45.00	52.50	2.50 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.7950	8.7148
Austria	Schilling	100	101.6212	100.6764
Bahrain	Dinar	1	34.8500	34.0000
Bangladesh	Taka	100	43.2998	43.2766
Canada	Dollar	1	9.8965	9.8197
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.9018	1.8872
Egypt	Pound	1	9.5580	9.5220
France	Franc	1	2.1551	2.1413
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.7181	1.6792
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0780	0.0700
Iran	Rial	100	17.1730	17.1280
Italy	Lira	100	0.9400	0.9200
Japan	Yen	100	8.6000	8.5000
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.8000	0.7899
Kuwait	Dinar	1	44.6400	44.5900
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1634	5.1177
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.9700	0.9601
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.5899	0.5760
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.3483	6.2984
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7499	0.7300
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.1464	6.0907
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0960	0.0948
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4499	0.4330
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.0176	2.0020
Switzerland	Franc	1	8.4666	8.3957
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.2800	0.2700
Thailand	Baht	100	50.0000	49.0000
UK	Pound	1	20.0702	19.9440
USA	Dollar	1	13.1500	13.0625
UAE	Dirham	1	3.3100	3.2900
USSR	Rouble	1	9.4998	9.3998
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.1787	7.6555

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 21.2.87.

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ISMAIL MERCHANT

The Merchant from Bombay

WHO is that crazy Merchant from Bombay?" Over the years, it was a common question asked in the film world in London and New York. They are not asking any more. They know the man they called crazy is laughing all the way, as the saying goes, not only to one bank but to banks all over the world. Film producer Ismail Merchant is now known as the legendary fund-raiser who, without any studio backing, has created financial packages that break all traditional film making concepts.

Merchant is being talked about today because despite his mom-and-pop store method of film making, his latest venture *A Room With A View* has grossed over $50 million (Rs 65 crore) since release. It has also been nominated for eight academy awards, including the most prestigious best picture award. The elegant film, based on the E.M. Forster novel, is the first picture to bring such commercial success to the 26-year-old production team. "We grossed Rs 1 crore in one cinema in the first 16 weeks," chortles Merchant with unabashed glee.

More than 100,000 records have been sold of the hauntingly exquisite soundtrack and book sales have shot up to 80,000. The film has defied traditional business trends and set new house records in small cities in mid-west America where "art" films are unheard of.

The news coverage they have received could well be called a media blitz. Seventy four newspapers and maga

Merchant and (left) *A Room With A View*: making good

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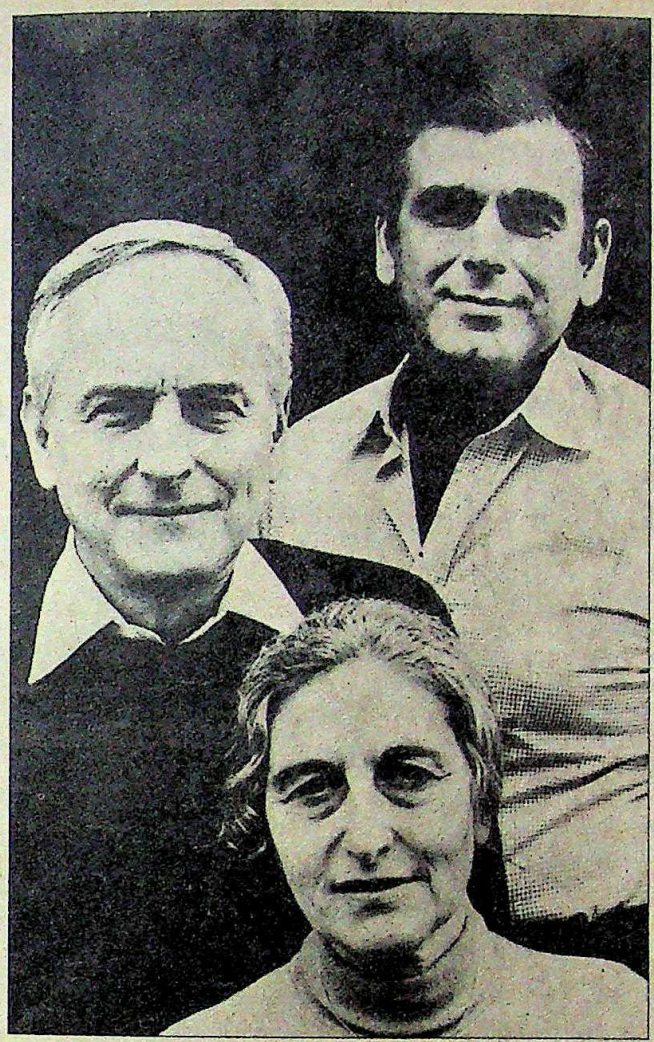
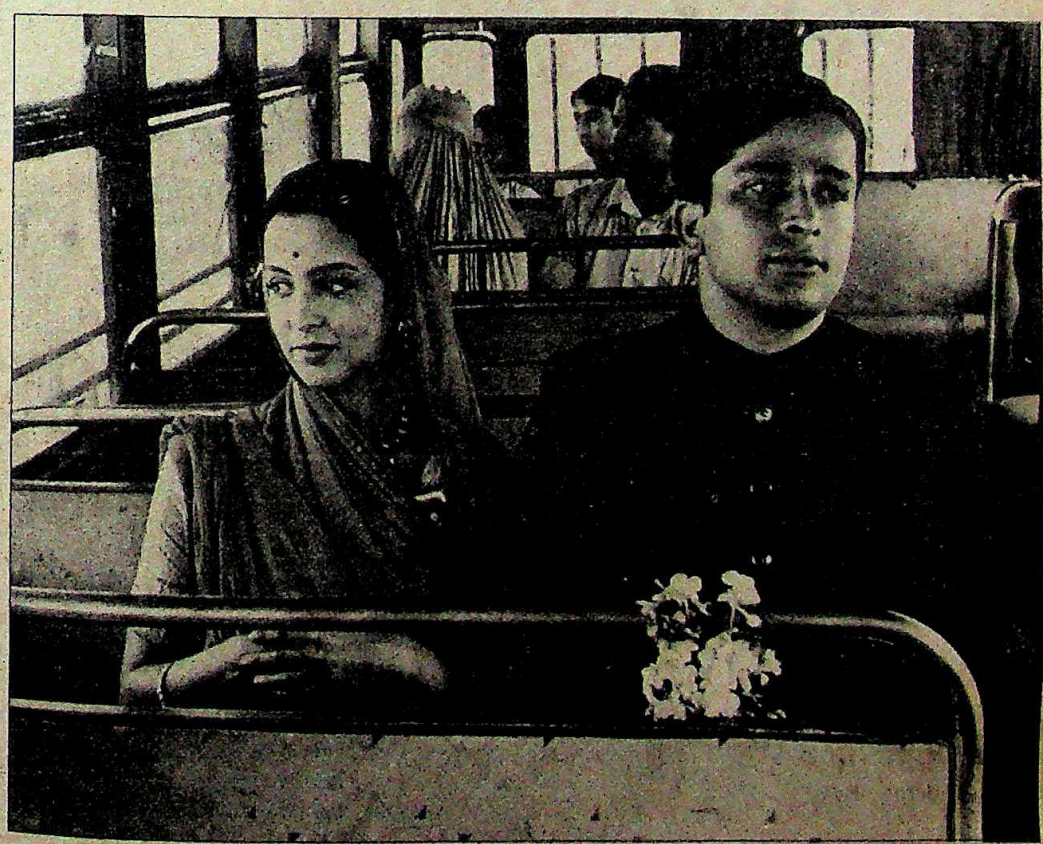
zines have independently chosen the film as one of the best of the year. Retrospectives of Merchant-Ivory films have been held in major museums in New York, Los Angeles, London and Paris. Merchant was named one of the top producers of the year by *Millimeter*, a major film magazine. A book about the production team, called *The Wandering Company* was published last year. And a film based on the book itself, highlighting their unique method of work accompanied by acerbic and hilarious interviews with people who have worked with them, was shown on channel 13. As if that is not enough, the American Film Institute in Washington will honour the team at the premiere of their newest film *Maurice*, also based on a novel by Forster.

In 1973, critic John Gillet wrote about director James Ivory and Merchant in *Sight and Sound*: "Whatever the outcome, these two resilient international optimists continue to plan and organise in the firm belief that the best is yet to come. Ivory suggests, half-jokingly, that Merchant is bound some day to have a really big financial success. Anything less would seem a betrayal of destiny." Fourteen years later, destiny has caught up with them and dealt them the "best". "What all this money and success says to me is, all these years, what you've been doing has been right, and you have achieved what you wanted on your own terms. And, that," says Merchant, "is the reward".

Carefully avoiding Hollywood, the team has prodigiously made low-budget, artistically superior films over the years. It was in 1963 that pristine and refined American director James Ivory teamed with the joyously egotistical hustler Merchant and the reclusive Polish-German writer Ruth Prawer Jhabvala to produce a gem of a film, *The Householder*, starring Leela Naidu and Shashi Kapoor. Although Merchant has good reason to gloat now, out of 20 films they have produced, only six showed a profit, two flopped completely and the others just covered expenses.



Despite the financial losses, the Merchant-Ivory team have had few critical failures. In an age where violence-gorged, sexually devouring, expletive-filled escapist films are pulling in jaded audiences, whose appetite for instant-thrill films seems insatiable, a market for graceful, low-key movies would seem unlikely. The biggest successes in recent years have been films like *Rambo* that plays cheaply on a crude and falsified notion of patriotism. Merchant-Ivory films, on the other hand, are unashamedly literary in choice, visually enthralling with authentic locations and though passionate, it is always passion with great civility, irony or humour. Their films are pointedly timeless and would superficially seem to belong to another age. But with a marked resurgence in post-modernism in art, music (David Byrne), architecture (Phillip Johnson), fashion (Ralph Lauren), clearly there is an audience which has simply tired of the "quickie" film.



The trio; and (right) still from *The Householder*: timeless classics

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INTERVIEW

"We're successful on our terms"

BUSTLING between appointments, producer Ismail Merchant met with INDIA TODAY *Correspondent* MADHU P.TREHAN *and spoke expansively about his life and work. Excerpts:*

Q. *When did your involvement with films start?*

A. It started when I became enamoured with the actress Nimmi and her first film *Barsaat*. She became my idol and ideal. I went to the premiere of *Barsaat* with her. I was shaking with excitement. Those adoring crowds.... when you see the adoration of the masses, you can either become a guru, or a politician or get in the motion picture business.

Q. *What did you connect with when you met James Ivory in 1960 other than the fact he was interested in India?*

A. It was like knowing somebody who knew India like no other westerner. He was the first westerner that I met who saw Indians as human beings and as people. Not maharajas and snake charmers.

Q. *You have not done anything overtly dishonest, yet many people who have worked with you call you a con man. Ruth Jhabvala went as far as to say she did not know where the money came from and didn't want to know. She said: "I have a persistent vision of visiting Ismail in jail." People find you exasperating and irresistible. Why do people say all these things about you?*

A. Well, I say a film will make a lot of money but who is to know that it will. Ruth doesn't want to be involved in anything financial. For example, when we were about to start shooting *The Europeans* the financier backed out at the last minute. The second financier would not put his money in unless I showed him a cheque from the first investor. So I borrowed the money and put the money in and then they did too. I juggle. I do acrobatics. Jim and Ruth don't want to know anything about it.

Q. *Why are so many people responding to* A Room With A View *when there are many other good films?*

A. It is because we have gotten commercial success on our terms. To have a writer, director and producer produce something consistently so good has just never been heard. I am the first Indian to have made a name in the world market in cinema. Satyajit Ray is a genius but how many Indian producers have made $50 million (Rs 65 crore) from one film?

Q. *You have used your cooking as a seduction tool with financiers, actors and actresses, haven't you?*

A. Yes, sure. How many producers actually cook for their crew or their actors? I cook for 70-80 people. People bring their friends. People bring wine and all inhibitions are lost.

Q. *How do you take all the rejections that come with looking for financiers?*

A. Not seriously. Somebody described me as a huge elephant standing by the door, swaying until somebody notices. How can you not notice an elephant?

Q. *So what angers the great optimist Ismail?*

A. I get upset when somebody is cheating me. That's right. I don't cheat anyone. Even if I pay little. It's a very sad thing that 90 per cent of the people in this business are rogues. If you are involved with people on that level, you have to have a sort of sixth sense to be on top of them. Ruth and Jim don't want to be a part of that. But I certainly am a fighter.

Q. *People have called you a hustler, wheeler-dealer, rascal, all kinds of things. How do you describe yourself?*

A. I take all this as sheer admiration or sheer jealousy or whatever it is. I take it in my stride.

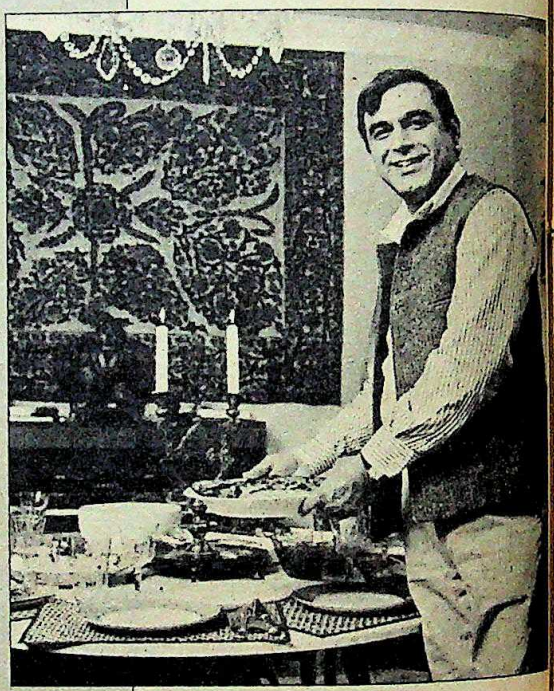
Q. *So how do you see yourself?*

A. I see myself as really hard-working. You can do anything if you have an aim in life or you have something which you believe in. I want to do things nobody else can do.

A Room With A View has clicked because it appeared at a time when people are looking to the past, culturally, when things of beauty were savoured, not used as cheap thrills.

Shot in Italy, *A Room With A View* is visually splendid, the soundtrack is post-modernism at its best, classic Puccini opera with contemporary composer Richard Robbins. The technical quality could not be more modern but in theme and rhythm, it is pure Forster. *A Room With A View* is unintentionally a film of the times.

Though Ivory may have a special talent for visionary direction and Jhabvala an unmatched eye for characters and



Merchant: deals over meals

an uncanny ear for dialogue, it is Ismail Merchant who glues the projects together and makes it all possible. But how did an ordinary boy from a middle class, Muslim Bombay family end up criss-crossing three continents to tie up million-dollar deals, acquire an estate in Hudson Valley, New York, apartments in Manhattan and London and all the other accoutrements of success? The answer is clear when Merchant appears on the scene. His delight in his own success is infectious. In his exuberance, Merchant is not above displaying fan mail and headlines from a British paper, "Gentle English Conquering America, Even Stallone Is No Match For Them". He demands: "Who would get a headline like this but us?"

Merchant's interest was fired when, at the age of seven, he gave a 14-page

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oration on Islam to a congregation of 10,000. The effect he had on those people convinced him of a career that would deal with audiences. "Anyone who, at seven, can draw the attention of 10,000 people, has a charismatic personality," he says. "If you can convince 10,000 people of what you believe in, you can convince a handful of financiers to invest in your film. If you can sell your ideas to 10,000, you can sell them to 10 million."

Never has a man enjoyed his self more that Merchant has, much of it clearly stemming from being the only son in a family of six daughters. At St Xavier's College, Bombay, he spent more time organising shows and acting in student productions than in studying. The foundation for his financial modus operandi was built in those early student days. "We used to sell space in the programme to finance them. I'd get two beautiful girls and we would go to big companies. I'd charm the secretary till she opened the door to the managing director. Out of hundreds of doors you knocked on, maybe 20 or 30 would buy space," he recalls. His approach to potential investors is the same today.

Merchant's father, a businessman in textiles, was apprehensive about his son's interest in films and would have preferred Ismail to go into medicine or law. But the show-biz bug had already bitten Ismail, when he headed for New York University in 1958, to gain a degree in Business Administration. Merchant worked part-time as a messenger at the United Nations, where he brashly invited financiers to lunch at the exclusive Delegates Dining Room. "There was a Brazilian woman in charge at the entrance and she would call me an Indian delegate. You know what Indian delegates look like and I had something special about me," he says.

Apparently, Merchant managed to impress financier Charles Schweppe enough to invest in his first short film, *Creation of Woman*. Typically, Merchant took off for Hollywood with the film, self-billed as a Mogul producer. It gained him an Oscar nomination but little else.

The turning point came when he met James Ivory in New York after he saw Ivory's film *The Sword and the Flute*. They both saw something in each other that resulted in their first film together, *The Householder*. The author, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, shy and reclusive, wanted nothing to do with them until Ismail chased and wore her down. This rather odd triumvirate, Ismail with his hedonistic self-confidence, James with his careful sensitivity and Ruth with her zealous, literary industriousness have a yin-yang balance in their work that extends into their lives and relationships. As Ivory says: "Our great subject is our love-hate about India, our love-hate about America, or our love-hate about each other."

Jaffrey in *Autobiography of a Princess*

Their early projects centered around India. Ruth, married to an Indian, lived there, Ismail's family home drew him and Jim's fascination with a special culture attracted him to the country. The classic *Shakespeare Wallah*, the commercial flop *The Guru* and *Bombay Talkie* were all films about people who this team would be exposed to in their own lives. Satyajit Ray exposed India's poverty as no other film maker had done. But Merchant-Ivory films had the courage to make films about the middle class, the arty and yes, even the elite—a definite no-no in Indian "intellectual" circles. Their films grow out of an idea one of them might have had or a book read and Ruth is asked to spin a screen-play out of it. The input is definitely threefold in all aspects of the product, which does not mean things go smoothly. "None of us is particularly restrained," confesses Ivory. "There's a bit of shouting and screaming in the editing room." "Of course we quarrel and violently disagree about things," Merchant counters smoothly, "because we are all so emotionally committed and we want everything to be right".

So committed, in fact, that there seems to be a thin line between their work and personal lives. Ismail and Jim share apartments in London and New York, with Ruth in the apartment below them in New York. Ruth more often than not joins them in their 14-room Hudson Valley manor in upstate New York, when they are not in the city. The corners of their triangular kaleidoscope puzzle seem to fit perfectly, juxtaposing when necessary and slipping away when required. All three have a common larger perspective of the end result, but a tunnel vision in their role to achieve it.

Unlike other film makers, Merchant-Ivory productions do not have big studios backing them. The trio first puts the project together, the idea stemming from a book, a house or place they have visited. Then Ismail gets into his act of raising funds from the most improbable of investors. Usually they are admirers, people who are attracted to the glamour of the film industry but know nothing of it and sometimes even the British Film Institute. "Hollywood is full of lawyers and accountants with no personal commitment to cinema," Merchant points out. "I could never make a mindless film. They are only interested in how much money they are going to make."

Their "we-are-a-family" method of film making has been a point of much puzzlement. Other film producers rarely show up on the sets but for Merchant his producer's presence is not only welcome but essential. Collaborators report that Merchant will do anything and everything on the set to keep the shooting

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going. He will not only cook for the whole crew (to keep production costs to the minimum), gain entry to impossible locations (like convincing the mayor of Florence to allow them to film in the Piazza Della Signoria), and run around fixing seemingly impossible problems.

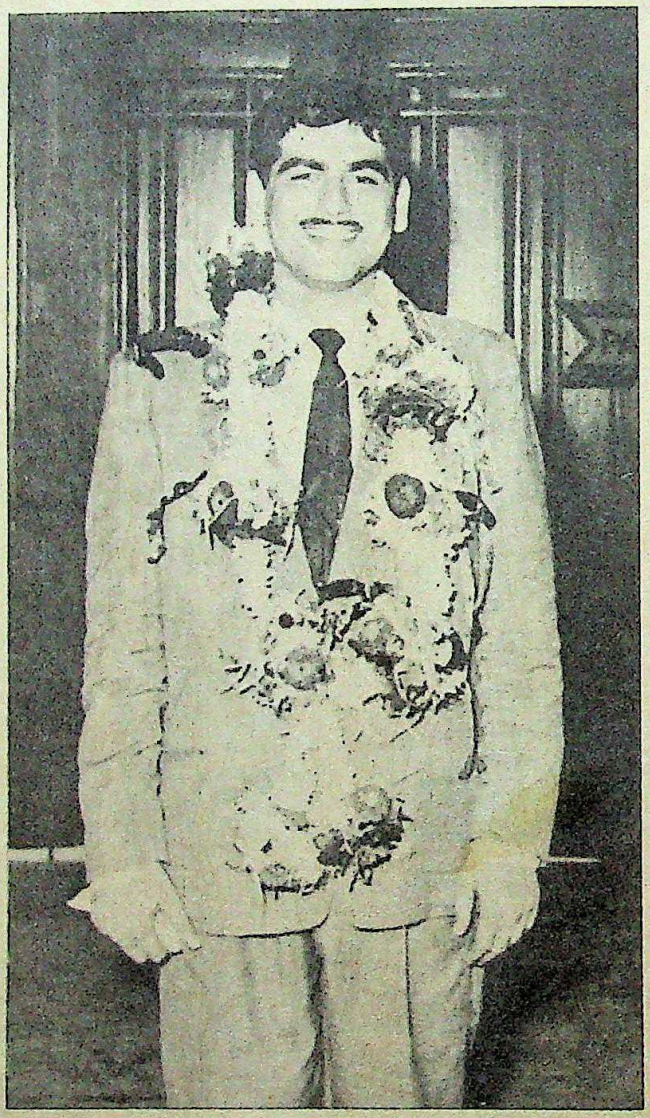
Merchant's role has been self-defined from the start. He is an obsessive fund-raiser. Although he is notorious for being a skinflint and most who have worked for him complain about his stinginess, he is also known for being there when the chips are down for one of his "family". Shashi Kapoor recalls: "When Jennifer was in hospital, Ismail knew I was in trouble. He showed up at the hospital with money. He was there to help."

Stars work with them for a fraction of their usual fee and it is a common occurrence, in the middle of filming, for money to run out and salaries to be put on hold. This happened on the set of *Heat and Dust* and Madhur Jaffrey, who acted in the film, recalls that as the money began to disappear the crew began to get restless. Sensing this, Merchant wangled a visit for all of them to a stunning palace with a beautiful picnic thrown in. Madhur laughs: "You don't want to forget how he is conning you, but you do. This rascal has done it again, you say. Again he's charmed us."

Madhur adds: "An actor wants to work with good directors and you know that their work will be seen." She recalls that at the Cannes Film Festival this year, Merchant typically invited 70 people for dinner. "So we all did the shopping and cooking. It's just not Ismail's style to get it catered. And he was out there serving everyone." Madhur smiles, adding: "There is great method to all this. Not only is he saving on waiters, but he's also making sure nobody eats too much."

So how much does he pay his actors? "It is so negligible, I'd be embarrassed to tell you." Merchant himself is not embarrassed at all. Now that his latest project has earned him enough, will he pay his actors a little better? "Not at all," he says indignantly. "We just made *Maurice* the way we always did." As Madhur points out: "Merchant prides himself in getting a lot for nothing."

Why do they work for him, in spite of all these problems? "Because it is a privilege to work with us," claims Merchant blithely. And there is no doubt. The best of them do. As Madhur says: "Even though you suspect you are being used, we always have so much fun filming with them, one tends to forget."



Merchant in 1958: brash confidence

Some years ago, Merchant was invited to the Harvard Club to show his film *Shakespeare Wallah* and give a speech. After he spoke, Merchant says somebody asked him: "How do you get people to invest in your films?" Ismail says he answered: "After seeing this film, wouldn't you contribute?" As he elaborated: "You don't have to be shy over anything. If you want anything, you knock at God's door and say 'I want this'. God has to think about billions of people and unless you express yourself forcefully you can't get anything."

Indisputably, he does have charm. One of Merchant's tools has been his cooking. He has been known to appear in an unstocked kitchen and create dishes out of nowhere. He has convinced many an investor and plenty of stars, including Vanessa Redgrave, after pumping them with a good Indian meal. His cookbook published last year, though not very professional, is adventurous. Recipes are thrown together and invented with whatever is there in the kitchen and have snappy titles—"*Omlette fine herbs/Sookhi patyoon ka aam-late*".

Merchant has lived the better part of his life abroad, but his roots in India are still strong. Why then does he not make films in India? "There are no good script-writers, no good directors. Visual beauty is not even considered in Bombay films. They are just copying Hollywood. The masses are totally controlled by the trash and because of the absurd Government of India policy on the import of foreign films, the Indian public sees only Hollywood trash, like *Cave Girl*. None of the great films are brought in," says Merchant. "It has brought the public's standard to such a low ebb."

However, his next project will be filmed in India where he will direct Anita Desai's *In Custody*. The team has just completed filming *Maurice* which will be released in September. Also in the works is Naseeruddin Shah in *The Perfect Murder* based on the book by Harry Keating. Merchant is also contemplating films based on the books *The Innocent Millionaire* as well as *In Praise of Older Women*.

It is doubtful whether money or investors will be a problem this time around. But even if they were, then as the old joke goes: If dauntless Ismail was put in a room full of horse manure, he'd start digging, saying: "There's got to be a financier here somewhere."

—MADHU P. TREHAN

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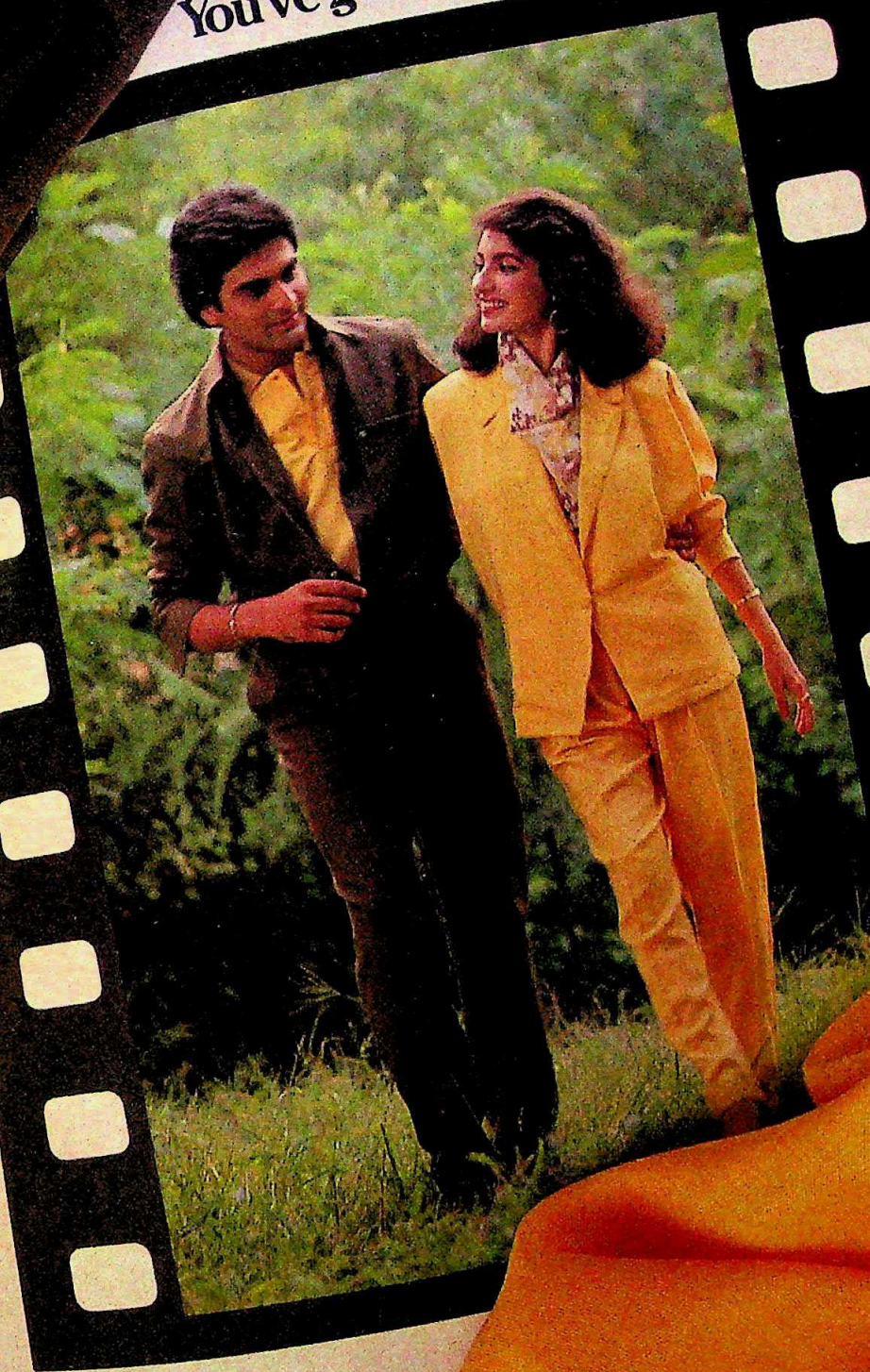

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BUDDHISM

Revolt of the Nuns

IN Buddhist tradition, the wheel holds a special significance, symbolising as it does, the advent of a new era or a new society. And last fortnight it was obvious that the wheel of Buddhism had come full circle. In Bodh Gaya, at the same spot where, 2,500 years ago, a village girl offered a cup of porridge to a fasting Gautama, leading to the birth of a new revolutionary religious order, a large gathering of Buddhist nuns staged the closest thing to a revolt against male-dominance in Buddhist tradition.

The international conference, the first of its kind in the religion's history, established the formation of *Sakyadhita* (daughters of Sakya), a world-wide Buddhist women's organisation to fight for their reinstatement and, in the words of Sister Ayya Khema, conference coordinator and internationally-known meditation teacher, to "work out ways to reintroduce the *bhikshuni* tradition which is no longer in existence".

The 150 Buddhist nuns and laypersons displayed a fierce determination to uplift their religious status and give new life to the *bhikshuni* tradition of ordaining women, which is all but extinct although it survives in different forms. Their call, apart from throwing an open challenge to the dominant position of the monks and theologians in the Buddhist order, also opened up a Pandora's box of disturbing questions.

But even as the Buddhist clergy and scholars debated the implications of the move, the presence of Dalai Lama—spiritual head of the Buddhist world—at the international conference of Buddhist nuns lent an element of legitimacy to the purpose of the exercise. His Holiness applauded the women's fight for equal status admitting that women all over the world were striving for equality and "Buddhists cannot be isolated". That set the trend for the rest of the conference, evident in the decision to set up the *Sakyadhita* and the final resolution which established 16 goals for Buddhist women to achieve equal status.

One of these included the formation of an international *bhikshuni samgha*, which, the nuns claim, the monks had always resisted since "Buddhist tradition has always been taken to be the sphere of men". The nuns are serenely confident of achieving their objective. "This is a turning point in the Buddhist order," claimed Sister Khema.

But some observers read a deeper meaning into the conference. To them it amounts to a call for making basic changes in the Buddhist order, a system that has stood unchanged for the last 2,500 years. Argued prominent Buddhist C.K. Pandey: "Women within the order can preach and render service but they cannot be *bhikshunis* as Lord Buddha had never sanctioned it."

History, in fact, records that Buddha's foster-mother Mahaprajapati Gautami, had urged him several times to accept her as a *bhikshuni* and admit other women to the order but to no avail. It was only when Ananda, Buddha's cousin and closest disciple intervened, that Buddha hesitantly relented. But Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, professor of Asian religion and philosophy at the Thammasat University in Bangkok, states that Buddha's hesitation was based not on his objection to women but the social problems likely to stem from their admission.

However, Buddhist monks have always remained firmly opposed to the idea of women joining the order. In fact, nobody is sure of how many *bhikshunis* are left. "The figure may be around 1,50,000 but this is just guesswork," says Khema.

Whatever their number, their plight is unenviable. Staunchly Buddhist Thailand has never encouraged *bhikshunis* and the 20,000-odd *Ji's* or female ascetics are actually lay-workers. There are no historical records of the ordination of *Ji's* and they enjoy no social recognition.

On the cards is a proposal to establish an educational institution in India to provide religious and general education to Buddhist women from all countries, and a training programme for nuns contemplating ordination to the highest level. The mood was summed up by Kusuma Devendra, a Sri Lankan nun: "If the Buddha had broken stark and rigid social barriers to enable women to enter the order, why is it not possible for these *bhikshus*, who are now custodians of dharma, to merely accept an older order which was fully approved by the Buddha?"

Whether the male-dominated Buddhist order accepts the resolution or not, the wheel has been set in motion. And if the decision to organise another international conference in Sri Lanka to recapture the spirit of Sanghamitra, devout Buddhist daughter of Emperor Asoka, is any guide, the *bhikshunis* will not be denied their saffron robes much longer.

—FARZAND AHMED in Gaya

Bodh Gaya conference: open challenge

K.M. KISHAN

The conference of Buddhist nuns at Bodh Gaya not only challenged the dominant position of male monks but opened up a Pandora's box of disturbing questions.

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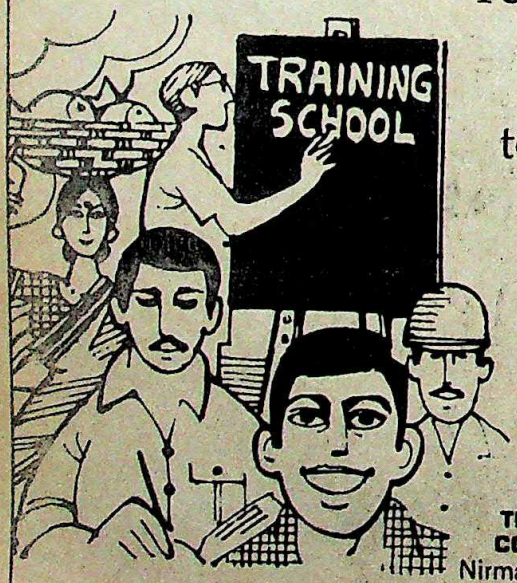

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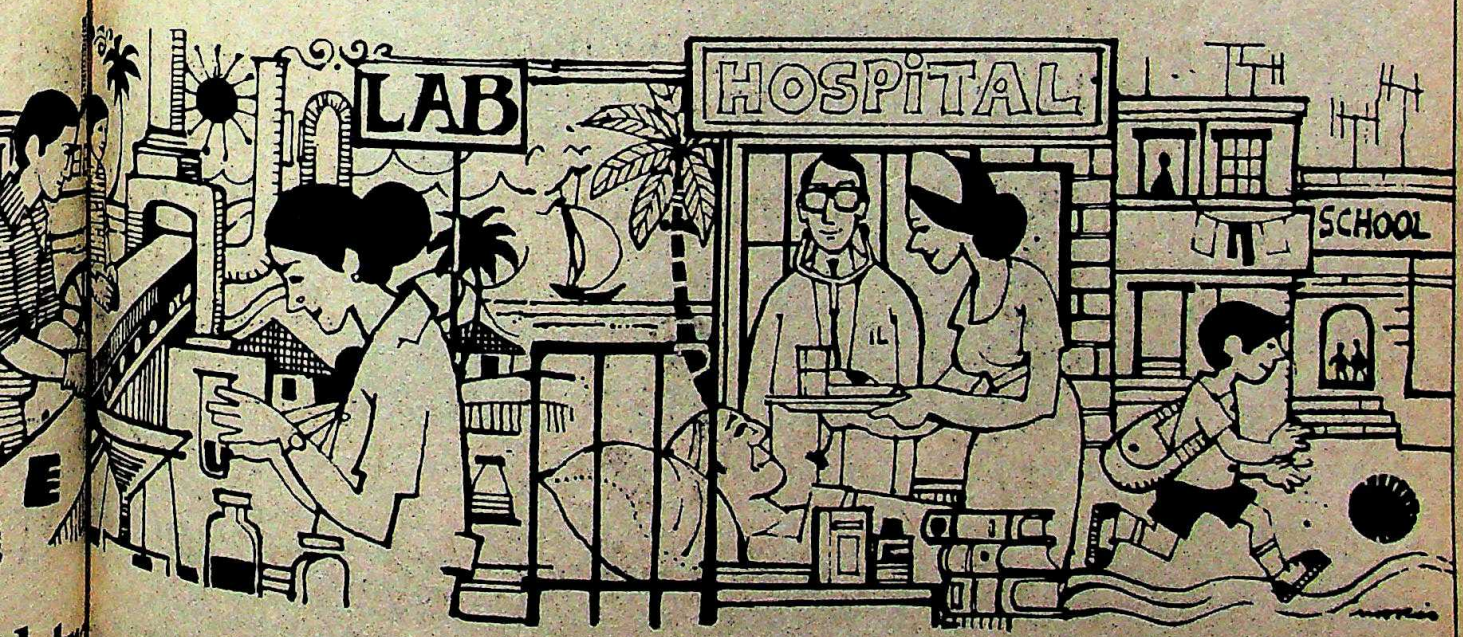

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DR B.G. RANCHOD

"Apartheid will not go by force"

DR Bhadhra Galu Ranchod's stylishly designed office in downtown Brussels is studded with personal memorabilia: photos of his law school and research days in Cape Town, Cambridge and Leiden University (the Netherlands) and family portraits. But on the wall facing his gleaming desk are two daunting framed photographs: those of President P.W. Botha and Foreign Minister Pik Botha. As South Africa's first-ever non-white ambassador appointed by the apartheid regime, and moreover, of Indian origin, Dr Ranchod has caused a considerable stir in diplomatic circles throughout the world. The post, which he assumed last month, is regarded as one of South Africa's key appointments, next only to that of the parallel post in Washington.

The dapper and suave Dr Ranchod, 42, enjoys an enviable reputation in legal circles. After graduating in law from the University of Cape Town, he did his research from Queen's College, Cambridge and obtained a senior scholarship from the Dutch Government where he completed his thesis. After practising briefly at the South African Supreme Court, he was appointed a senior lecturer in private law at the University of Durban-Westville in Natal, where he became its dean. He is a visiting scholar at Columbia Law School in New York and a guest lecturer at the law schools of Harvard, Yale, Princeton as well as the law schools of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and London Universities.

At first impression, it almost seems like a nimble move by the artful Pretoria Government in having found a convenient brown face to carry the can for its odious policies and interpret them as "reasonable" to hostile audiences. Instead, Dr Ranchod, as an articulate academic heavyweight, does an efficient job of explaining South Africa in its "totality" and forcefully argues that he is a stern opponent of apartheid: "I am a proponent of effecting changes through constitutional methods, not by force," he says.

His case is unique since he represents a government under which, on grounds of skin colour alone, he can neither vote for nor belong to the ruling party. Dr Ranchod, now glutted with requests for interviews from the western media, granted his first interview to the Indian press to London Correspondent, RAMESH CHANDRAN. *Excerpts:*

Q. *Your appointment seems to have been cannily timed by the Pretoria Government, just prior to the* EEC *foreign ministers debating economic sanctions.*

A. I had been approached by the Government several months earlier. I don't believe the announcement had anything to do with the fact that the EEC were debating sanctions. It was a coincidence.

Q. *Were you surprised that you had been chosen as the first non-white to represent South Africa as ambassador?*

A. The signals were there. In March last year there was a very positive spirit in South Africa. The Government had committed itself to repealing some of the apartheid laws, the pass laws for example, laws affecting Indian immigration. Th was a limit on the freedom of movement Indians within South Africa. In the pro ince of Orange Free State, there was a to ban on Indians owning property. Th law has been repealed as well as t prohibition on Indians living in the nort ern districts of Natal. In terms of freedo of movement, these were significa changes and was a hopeful period for u

Q. *But these were cosmetic change Racial segregation still di tinguishes official policy.*

A. Yes, in residential se regation, the Governme has had difficulty in relaxi them, primarily due to th pressure from the growi right-wing elements. But t changes have been ma gradually.

Q. *There has been fier criticism in certain quarte in South Africa about yo accepting the ambassado ship. They have branded y a "collaborator" and a "st oge" of the apartheid regim Did you not experience an moral pangs?*

A. Well, one must expe in a society so highly pola sed as in South Africa whe people are intensely em tional about issues that if o does accept a position with that society which lends cr dence to the reform proce one will face a degree of cri cism. It applies to all leve On the one hand we say th system needs to be chang and the whites are co pletely in control. I think o can anticipate that whoev breaks the barrier is going to encoun criticism.

**Q. *But don't you see South Africa an abnormal case? After all, you are n say for instance, a critic of a normal go ernment who has been offered a post b in a normal democratic country. T charges levelled against you are, fir that the appointment smacks of 'tok ism' while the majority of the populati is firmly under the heel of a racist regim And second, that when you represent t Government as its ambassador, you*

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in fact defending or even endorsing its policies—literally an "ambassador of apartheid".

A. Look, I am a South African. It is my country. But I feel very strongly about apartheid and I have made no bones about it. My views are known within the country since they have been voiced on South African media. My views have not changed because of this appointment. In South Africa, I was a member of an independent commission which did 17 separate studies over four years examining the whole aspect of race relations in the country. I chaired the legal working committee of this commission. Its findings were unequivocal: that apartheid provided no solutions to South Africa, instead it provoked a great deal of conflict which impinged on human dignity and human rights. The Government accepted the findings and it has proceeded gradually towards dismantling the structures of apartheid. You made allusions to my endorsing the system. Instead I wish to work towards a free and democratic society in South Africa. There is, of course, a body of opinion that believes with deep conviction that the only way to achieve the ideal change is through the use of force. I certainly do not belong to that school of thought. But at the same time, I have firm views on racial discrimination.

Q. Firm views are fine but what can you hope to achieve in changing an entrenched system?

A. We could—through legal and constitutional means for instance. My inaugural address as a professor tried to portray how Indians in South Africa through Gandhiji's efforts and encouragement used the courts to challenge apartheid laws. And we Indians have in fact contributed substantially to the jurisprudence of South Africa and many of the landmark cases in the human rights fields affected Indians. I ended my address by calling for a "bill of rights"—which is rather controversial—because underlying the notion of a "bill of rights" is the principle of equality.

Q. Didn't your own students at Durban-Westville campus criticise your decision and burn your effigy?

A. That is not correct. In fact numerous students in my class stood up to congratulate me. I do not intend to get into an argument to see who is right or wrong. I am confident that there is some means as a diplomat that I can explore to accelerate the process of reform. I am committed to using the law rather than the gun. It is a question of one's ideology. At the end of the day, we all would like to see a peaceful and democratic society within South Africa.

Q. This "bill of rights" which is so much after your heart and which you have consistently espoused in your career, is it actually feasible? Why should the South African Parliament ratify it?

A. I believe the best way to effect transition in South Africa is through the courts. If the courts could have a little more muscle since it is the one institution that is respected even by the radical groups. You can turn to the Supreme Court in South Africa. Even during this emergency period, the court has taken a tough line on the behaviour of the police and even governmental decisions.

Q. We are surely not assuming that a "bill of rights" and apartheid can coexist. Shouldn't one give way to another?

> "Sanctions have led to a slowdown in the economy, to a growth of the right-wing. There is a misconception that in replacing the present government, one is going to get a nice, liberal one."

A. Indeed. It does not mix since one of the principal elements in the "bill of rights" is equal treatment. There is a commission now working hard on examining the issue. As a law professor, I have constantly propagated federalism in South Africa so that it may cater to the needs of groups who may wish to maintain their language and cultural rights.

Q. Of course, all this is in theory.

A. Yes, it is. The mechanics of how to get there is problematical because of the polarisation in our society.

Q. You have not been a great admirer of the tricameral parliamentary system where Indians and coloured participate. What is your objection?

A. You are placing me in a difficult position now. As a university professor I can go to great lengths criticising the system but as a diplomat obviously I have limitations. However I might say the major difficulty with it is really a transitional arrangement. What we need is a constitutional arrangement which will reflect what South Africa is.

Q. You mean include the blacks in the process of governing the country?

A. Yes. A constitution in which all South Africans will be able to participate.

Q. The Indians in South Africa who form 3 per cent of the total population seem divided on many issues. Especially when it comes to the question of the black majority and the question of whether to cooperate with the white Government.

A. There is a twofold reaction when it comes to our people. One of which is the real one. We must recognise that we are all South Africans and must not do anything that antagonises the majority. In other words, for 3 per cent of the population to play boss over the blacks is foolish. What many Indians would have liked is a transitional arrangement that catered to all sections of our society. It puts us in a very vulnerable position when you belong to a minority group and you are seen to be enjoying some advantages. Although the reality is different. Until 1961, Indians were not even citizens of South Africa.

Q. You must be aware that South Africa is suddenly very high on the Indian Government's agenda, especially under Rajiv Gandhi, who has been a strident advocate for implementing economic sanctions against your country. How has this been received among the Indians there?

A. Now look, what is the purpose of sanctions? You are trying to change the methods adopted by the South African Government. But changes have not caused faster reforms. They have led to a slowdown in the economy. It has led to the most vulnerable sections, those who are unskilled or semi-skilled, losing their jobs. It has also led to a growth in the right-wing. And there is perhaps a misconception that if one succeeds in replacing the present government in South Africa, one is going to get a nice, multiracial, liberal, democratic government. But whoever takes over will have to enjoy the support of the police and the army in South Africa. So the scenario could be a more negative and hardline one. Besides South Africa is not a colony. It is a country of considerable wealth, the 12th industrial power in the world and has the resilience to withstand sanctions for some time. As far India's efforts are concerned, its intentions may be good but the methods are wrong.

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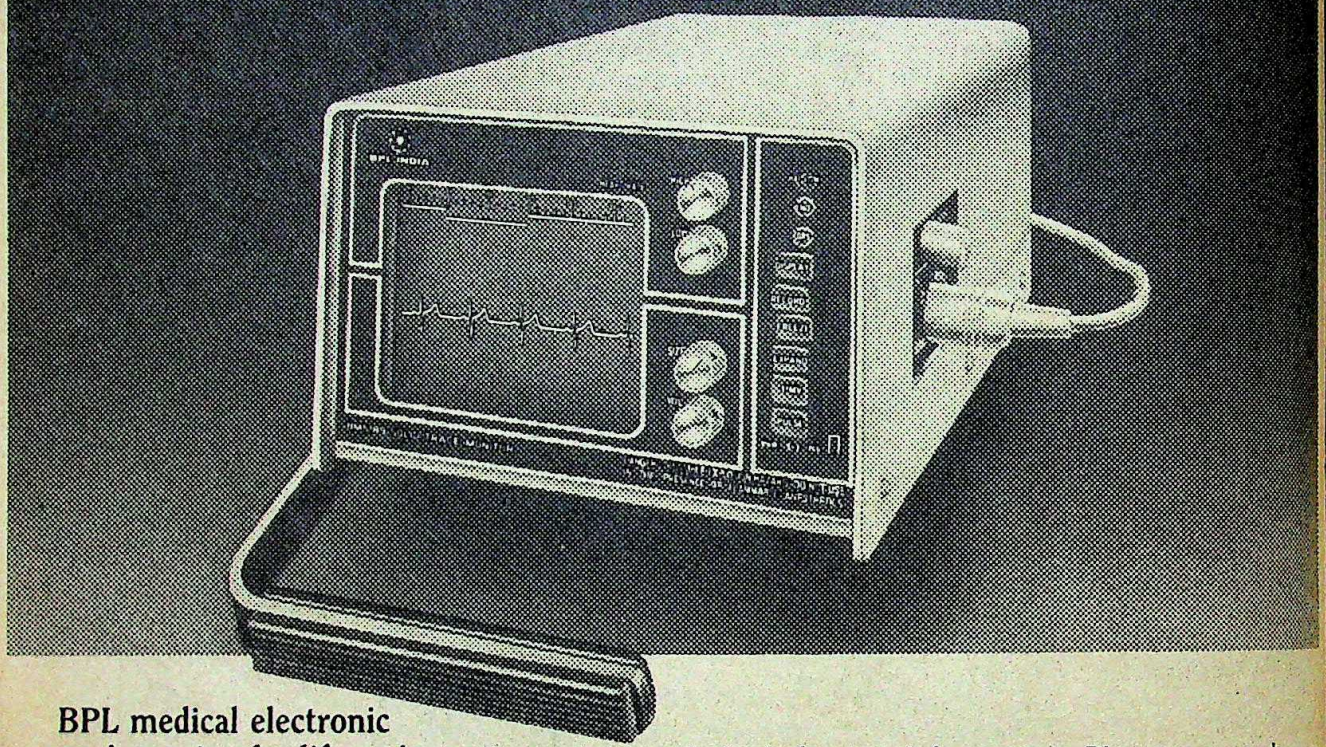

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WORLD TABLE TENNIS

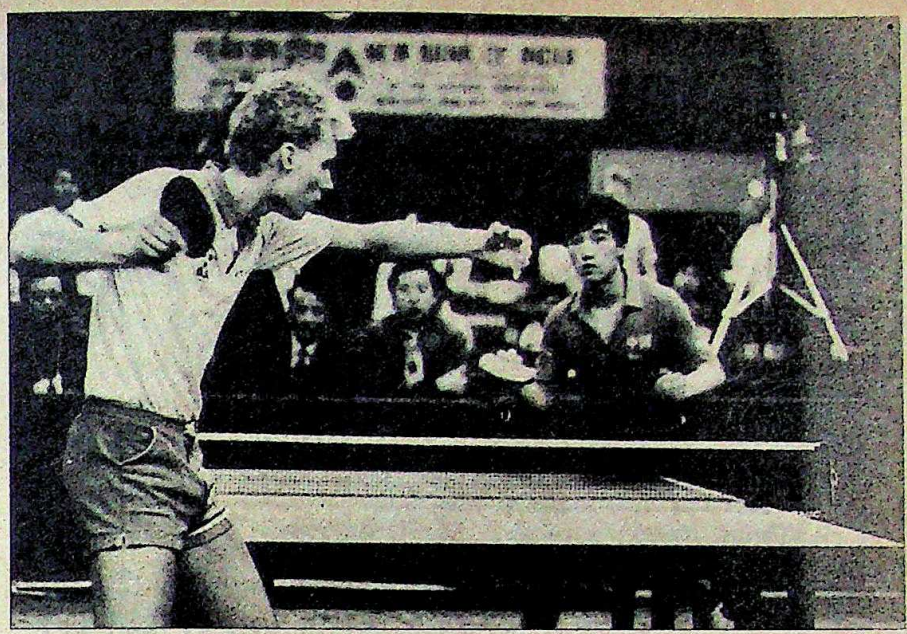
China Rules

IT was like a sports festival inside a spaceship. In the cavernous, futuristic Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium at New Delhi, bright arc lights hung high up from the ceiling, sharing the space with hundreds of balloons. Colourful flags of several dozen nations dwarfed the tables below. And in an arena circled by 25,000 orange and brown plastic bucket seats, men and women from every corner of the world played with total devotion. But by the end of the first week of the 39th World Table Tennis Championships, it had become evident that the festival was Chinese.

In the all-important team championships—they provide the best indication of a nation's standing because individual events can have many upsets—Chinese men brushed aside Sweden 5-0 while their women had to work a little harder to dispose of South Korea 3-0 in the finals. Their total domination showed in the fact that the Chinese men dropped just one match—to England—on their way to their fourth consecutive title. The women were bested in only two doubles matches—by Japan and Yugoslavia—while claiming their seventh consecutive team title in a run that began in Calcutta in 1975. They were faster, had a more deadly variety of spin, and were simply mentally and physically more agile than the competition.

It was a frustrating experience for the Swedish men who ended as runners-up for the third time running. In 1983 at Tokyo and in 1985 at Gothenburg they had been put in their place in the finals with the same ease. Worse, it was the strongest team that Sweden had fielded in recent years: Jan-Ove Waldner is ranked fifth in the world; Erik Lindh, Mikael Appelgreen and Jorgen Persson are seeded 8th, 9th and 10th. But it just wasn't good enough against a country that—in Jiang Jialiang, Chen Longcan, Teng Yi and Chen Xinhua—has the top four players in the game today. China's huge base of players—running into many millions—and elaborate coaching system won the day again.

But the tournament went beyond just winning the title. What makes this championship different is that instead of being knocked out and dismissed, teams keep playing each other to decide standings right down to the very last—a privilege that went this time to the Isle of Man among men and Ecuador among women. The primary aim for most nations, therefore, is at most to create an upset or two and move a few ranks up the ladder in this fiercely competitive game.



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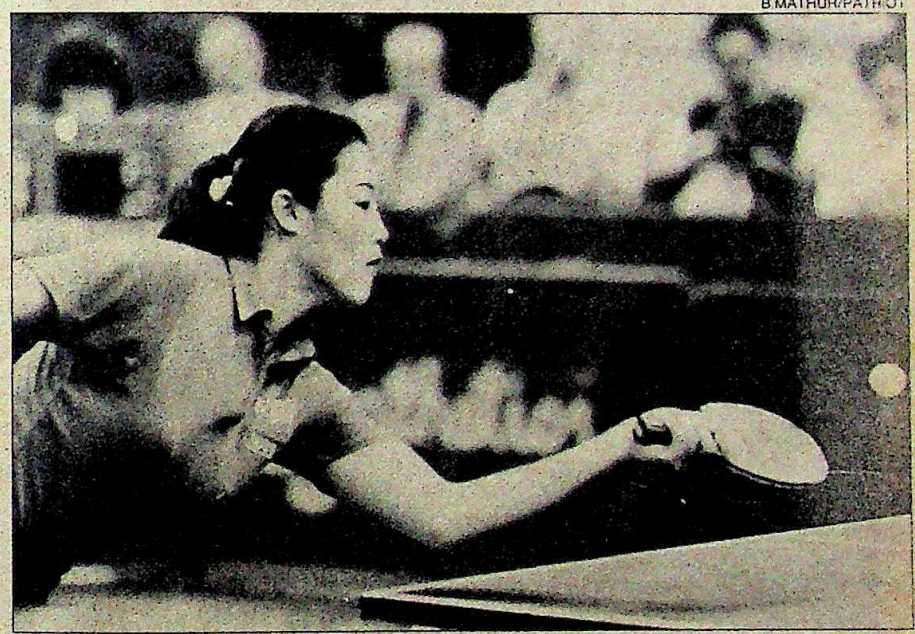

(Top) The China-Sweden tie and China's Jiao Zhimin in the finals: easy wins

This meet also provided a better chance to create upsets because there was a new format. In the past, the top 16 teams formed an exclusive group in which they played one another. This time, following complaints from many members of the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF), the game plan was altered so that the weaker teams would have a chance to play the top teams.

And that upsets are possible was proved by a number of teams. But the most striking was undoubtedly the progress of West German (from 17th to 7th place) and Taiwan men (from 18th to 8th). The Germans even came close to beating the Swedes, but went down 4-5. Georg Bohm, who doesn't figure in the world's top 50, won all his three matches against the Swedes—a fine indication of how big names can go tumbling.

Unheralded and tiny Taiwan (population: 20 million), playing in only its second world tournament, should also be a country to watch in the coming years. Says coach Lin Chung Hsiung: "We are a little surprised ourselves—we had come here aiming only to get into the last 16." But the Taiwanese teams are young—most of them are students—and should do even better after more international exposure. The

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women almost upset Asiad winners, South Korea.

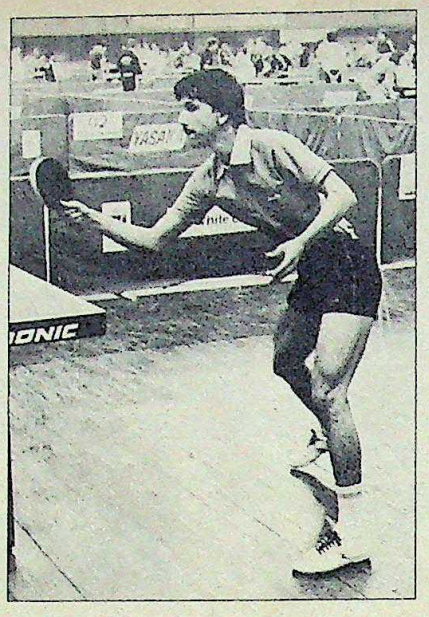
The disappointment of the tournament were the South Korean men who, after their upset win over the Chinese in the Seoul Asiad last year, were widely tipped as the team most likely to trouble the Chinese, but only succeeded in retaining their ninth position. The schedule of the championship can be extremely gruelling—players can end up playing up to 18 games at full stretch on a single day. And it was this that spelt their doom, although they had in their side Kim Wan and Kim Ki Taek, seeded 12th and 13th, and the redoubtable Yoo Nam Kyu, seeded 21st but the hero of Seoul.

South Korea went all out against Sweden at the league stage matches so as to avoid meeting China before the finals. It developed into the tie of the tournament—with the Swedes pulling back from a 2-4 deficit to win at 5-4 in four-and-a-half hours of tense and acrobatic table tennis—but the exertion, and the weight of the loss, left the Asiad champions drained. Back at table after a cruelly short gap of two-and-a-half hours, the Koreans proved easy meat for the unfancied Taiwanese, who swamped them 5-0.

The holding of a championship at home obviously doesn't seem to do the Indians much good. In Calcutta in 1975, their performance had been average, and this time the men slipped from 12th to 16th place and the women from 19th to 26th, the lowest they have gone in more than 20 years. Oddly, the Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI), which went to such great lengths to organise the tourney, did no more than arrange for foreign coaches for the Indians for a totally inadequate period of just a few weeks.

Both teams exhibited their total dependence on one player to deliver the goods. In the past, the burden for women had been borne by Indu Puri, and with her exit, it was left to Monalisa Barua from Assam to salvage some prestige on the way downhill. The new national title-holder Varsha Chulani obviously has much to learn.

Among men, national champion Kamlesh Mehta was the only redeeming feature. In the early stage, against lowly Egypt, Palestine and Finland, the other Indians seemed to do well but the moment they entered the big-boy league, they were totally at sea and couldn't win so much as a single match. Against North Korea, Mehta was the only winner, beating 44th seed Gun Sang Li.



Mehta: one-man opposition

Against Japan, Mehta alone beat 19th seed Kiyoshi Saito and Hiroshi Shibutani. Against both Austria and Hungary, Mehta won one of his two matches though he did fail against the USSR. Says Mehta: "Being the main player in the side means learning to bear the tension of people's expectations." Mehta says he can't see India's standing improving dramatically unless the coaching system—like China—learns to pick players at an early age. Says he: "I, for instance, came to know what coaching meant only after I turned 20."

The tournament was important also for events away from the table. It signalled the first serious challenge to ITTF President Roy Evans, who has held the post for 20 years. Evans, who is seen by many Asian members as not only too old but also dictatorial, is up against Japan's Ichiro Ogimura, a former world champion and one of the best coaches in the game today. The election can prove important to table tennis which, over the last few years, has seen a serious discussion on the standardisation of bat surfaces to prevent any player from gaining an unfair advantage.

The crowd turnout on most days was dismaying, except during the important matches, when a few thousand people were present. But says I.S. Bindra, TTFI president for over four years: "I am not disappointed because Delhi doesn't have any sports culture. But we decided on the capital instead of Calcutta—where the crowds would have been big—because this is part of the process of popularising the game."

What did upset Bindra, however, was Doordarshan's attitude. Although television coverage of the championships was spread over 56 hours, Doordarshan refused to pay any money to the organisers for the coverage. Bindra says the TTFI wanted Rs 35 lakh, an amount equivalent to what organisers in the last two championships at Tokyo and Guthenburg had received from their domestic networks for TV rights. Doordarshan's argument, according to Bindra, was that their coverage had already meant that the TTFI could collect more from advertisers within the arena, hence there was no need for them to pay for TV rights as well. Says Bindra: "Across the world, TV companies pay organisers for rights for televising any sport. Doordarshan can get away with it because we can't even haul them before the Monopolies Commission. If it carries on like this, Doordarshan will successfully kill not just table tennis, but even a popular game like cricket within the next decade." The state of Indian sport is bad enough without television jumping in to ruin the finances of the already poor sports associations.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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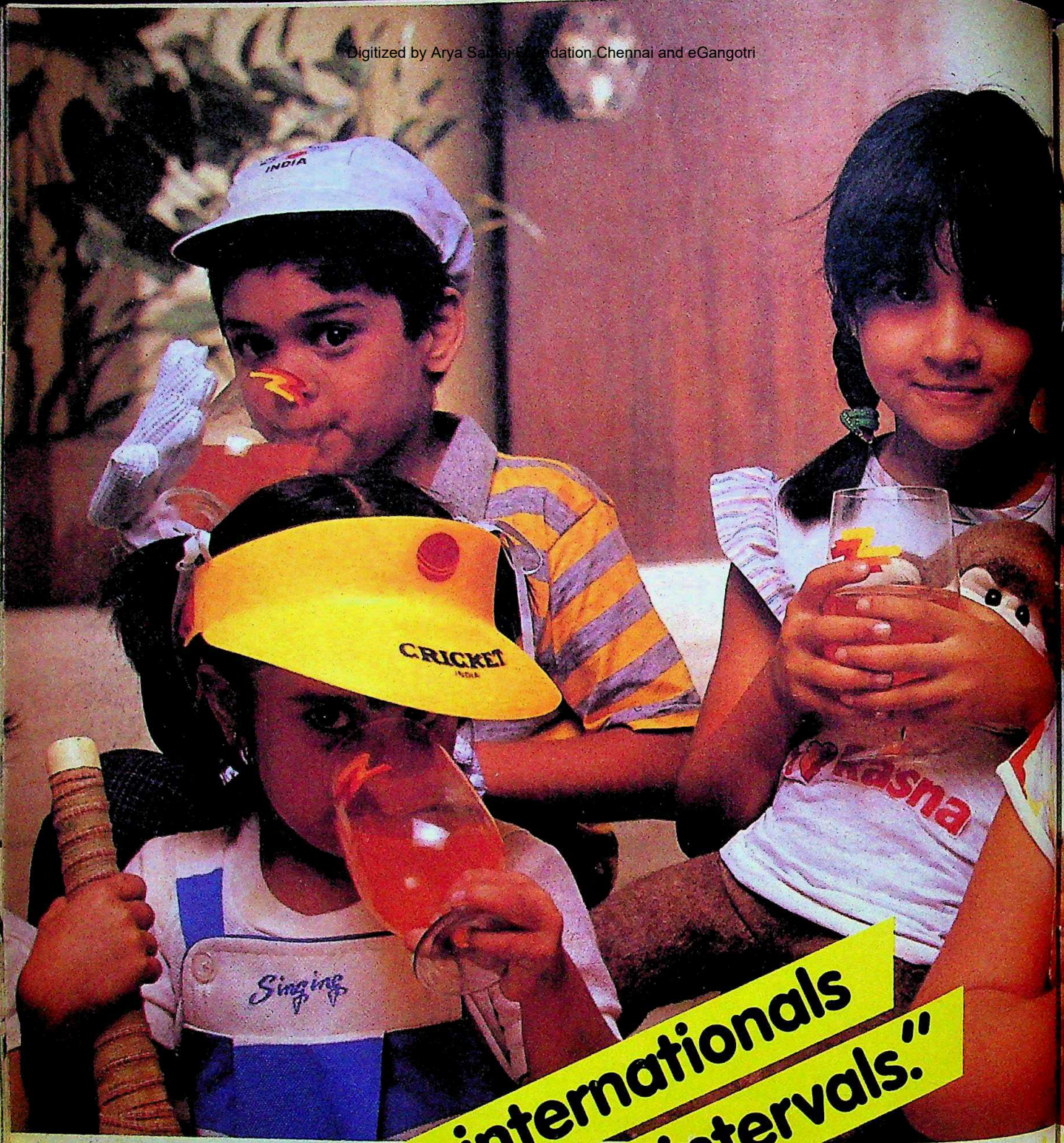

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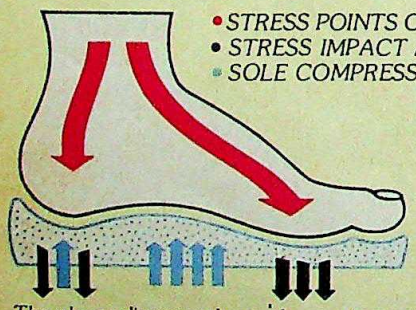

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PRASHANT PANJIAR

Stony cinder track: poorly maintained

U.P. SPORTS COLLEGE

On the Wrong Track

FOR months on end now, sports has taken a back seat at the prestigious Uttar Pradesh Sports College, Lucknow, one of five such institutions in the country. Activity at the college—which has given rise to several international players—has been crippled by a prolonged agitation by the school's 75-odd teachers. Their main target is Anand Shukla, a former Bihar cricketer and principal since 18 months. The school—mistakenly called a college—imparts free education to a selected lot from class nine to the plus two stage and provides them specialised training in cricket, football, hockey, volleyball and athletics.

Since the agitation began last September, the teachers have submitted four memorandums to Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh. In one of these they even said that they had been threatened by the henchmen of a known mafia don who knew Shukla. And early last month, the teachers decided to boycott the school's sports day functions and wore black badges in protest.

Caught in the mess are 227 students, who sympathise with their teachers but can afford to say nothing. Apart from the hockey team, which continues to win laurels, the teams in the other disciplines have been doing disastrously in tournaments across the country. The school's seven permanent coaches have a long list of successes under their caps. But there has been little to add after 1985.

Inevitably, the issue has also been politicised. Singh was all set to act against Shukla—on the basis of the report of a committee set up by him—when he realised that at least four of his ministers backed the principal. But pressure against Shukla continues to mount too. The state units of the Youth Congress(I) and the party's students wing—the National Students Union of India—have also entered the fray and Singh has now hastened to assure them of action soon.

Shukla: under attack

The trouble began last August when a dozen opposition MLAs submitted a memorandum to the chief minister alleging gross irregularities in the school's finances. But Singh took note only after the school employees came out with their list of charges against Shukla and Office Superintendent, Zahid Husain. The major ones among them are:

► Illegal awarding of work contracts worth over Rs 50 lakh in the last two years to a single contractor. This, when there is a board resolution against getting work done on a contract-basis.

► Large-scale bungling in mess funds. According to the school's Medical Officer, Jai Singh, though government funds provide for a daily diet expenditure of Rs 12.50 per student, the diet provided is worth only Rs 8. While the students' daily intake should be 4,500 calories, it is actually only 3,000 calories.

► Unscientific and faulty purchase of equipment, against the coaches' advice. This explains the purchase of a brand of football banned by the All India Football Federation.

Shukla says that he has the authority to award contracts, that the diet is not substandard and that the coaches' recommendations have been followed in all cases, except where the brand demanded was not available. He claims the coaches have turned against him because he wanted to discipline them and because he has increased their workload. The head also claims that he has substantially improved the state of the school's playgrounds.

But Shukla's claim is doubted by the school groundsman, Sheo Dan Singh, who says that but for the hockey ground, "the others are in a bad way and not even fit for practising." Students also substantiate the allegations about poor ground conditions, substandard equipment and poor diet. The school has the only cinder athletic track in Uttar Pradesh but the track has too many big pebbles and is as hard as a rock. Said Shri Shanker Uttam, an 18-year-old student: "Running on this track is ruining my career. I have developed a bone injury near the foot and swelling of my calf muscles by practising on it."

The state Government spends more than Rs 30 lakh every year on the institution. That should be good enough reason for it to intervene and bring an end to the mess. For starters, the Government should ensure that a regular accounts officer is appointed for the school. Right now, Husain is doubling as the accounts officer-cum-head clerk-cum-office superintendent. More importantly, only state intervention can save the students' careers from being ruined for no fault of theirs.

—DILIP AWASTHI

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TEHRI DAM

Under Fire

THE Tehri valley in the Garwhal Himalayas has for decades been the ideal advertisement for peace and rustic tranquility. But the valley, and its inhabitants, are now hostage to progress, trapped in the all-too-familiar cross-fire between doomsayer ecologists and officials in charge of the ambitious Tehri Dam Project (TDP).

Located at the confluence of the Bhagirathi and Bhilangana in Uttar Pradesh, the valley has been engulfed in controversy as the proposed Rs 2,200-crore project, mooted back in the '60s, became a reality after the Soviet agreement to provide financial aid. After commissioning, the dam is expected to generate approximately 6,000 million units of power to supplement the present state-wide generation of 14,000 million units. It will also irrigate 270,000 hectares of land and act as a flood-prevention cushion with its capacity to store water during the peak discharge season.

But notwithstanding its obvious benefits in a state starved for power, the proposal has come under attack from ecologists who have even filed a petition against the project in the Supreme Court. Their objection is that the project is situated in a seismically-sensitive area and the possibility of a major earthquake translates the TDP into a high-risk venture, specially for the inhabitants of the area. Charges Prem Singh, a journalist and social worker who is spearheading the campaign to stop the project: "Ecological considerations have been largely ignored. The construction of the dam is a political decision."

Singh and the ecologists who echo his strident objections have collected an impressive mound of evidence to support their stand. One prominent exhibit is the letter to the Government written by Sunil Roy, chairman of the Working Group set up by the Department of Environment to study the ecological consequences of the project. The letter says: "I have from the outset held the view that work should be halted on Tehri Dam but lacked an adequate data base." It adds the query: "Who will be ready to respond to future generations for the most appalling consequences of any possible error in planning, or miscalculation, or the incalculable disasters following a major earthquake in the area?" Roy, and ecologists opposed to the project, base their views on previous project surveys. One, conducted in 1978, concluded: "It is not possible to forecast as to when a catastrophic earthquake may occur in the region but it is a potential seismic area...it (TDP) would be a very risky venture."

AJAY GOYAL

Tehri project site: seismic zone

Scientists involved in the project insist that ecological and other safety considerations have not been ignored.

Despite the ominous rumbles, officials and scientists involved in the project insist that ecological and other safety considerations have not been ignored. Says M.M.L.Khanna, TDP's chief engineer: "Experts from various research and technical institutions have studied the project from every angle and the decision to go ahead with it was taken only after all due considerations. We also recognise the importance of ecological factors and at no place have we compromised on this ground or taken any risk in the design".

Other experts concur. Says Dr L.S. Srivastava, a geologist and professor at Department of Earthquake Engineering of the University of Roorkee: "There is no place on the face of the earth where you can rule out the possibility of an earthquake. And the design of the Tehri Project incorporates all these factors with certain in-built safety arrangements based on state-of-the-art technology available in the world today."

But another potential earthquake is the prickly question of rehabilitation of the inhabitants of Tehri town and the 23 villages around it which will be submerged in the reservoir, apart from the 72 other villages which will be submerged partially at the maximum flood level of the dam affecting about 8,600 families. Says Prem Dutt Dobhal, a Tehri resident: "The people who are being ousted are being paid compensation in instalments, making it impossible for them to go ahead with the construction of new houses."

The authorities admit that resettlement is not very satisfactory. Says A.K.Das, state power secretary: "The project has suffered in the past because of non-availability of funds which should not be any constraint now. We are facing certain problems at the moment but the Government is committed to provide acceptable alternatives to people." Adds S.S.Panti, commissioner of Garhwal who, as ex-officio Administrator of TDP, looks after the rehabilitation: "The Government is exploring the possibility of acquiring more lands in Dehradun and Saharanpur districts but large chunks of land are not available so easily. Also, the Government thinks that providing the evicted a similar physical environment would help them resettle better and that is the reason we are looking for land in Shivalik hills."

But till then, the TDP, already delayed, will obviously continue to be submerged in controversy and mud-slinging, specially considering the fact that its ultimate destiny still precariously hangs on the decision that the Supreme Court will take on the petition.

—SHEKHAR KUMAR JHA

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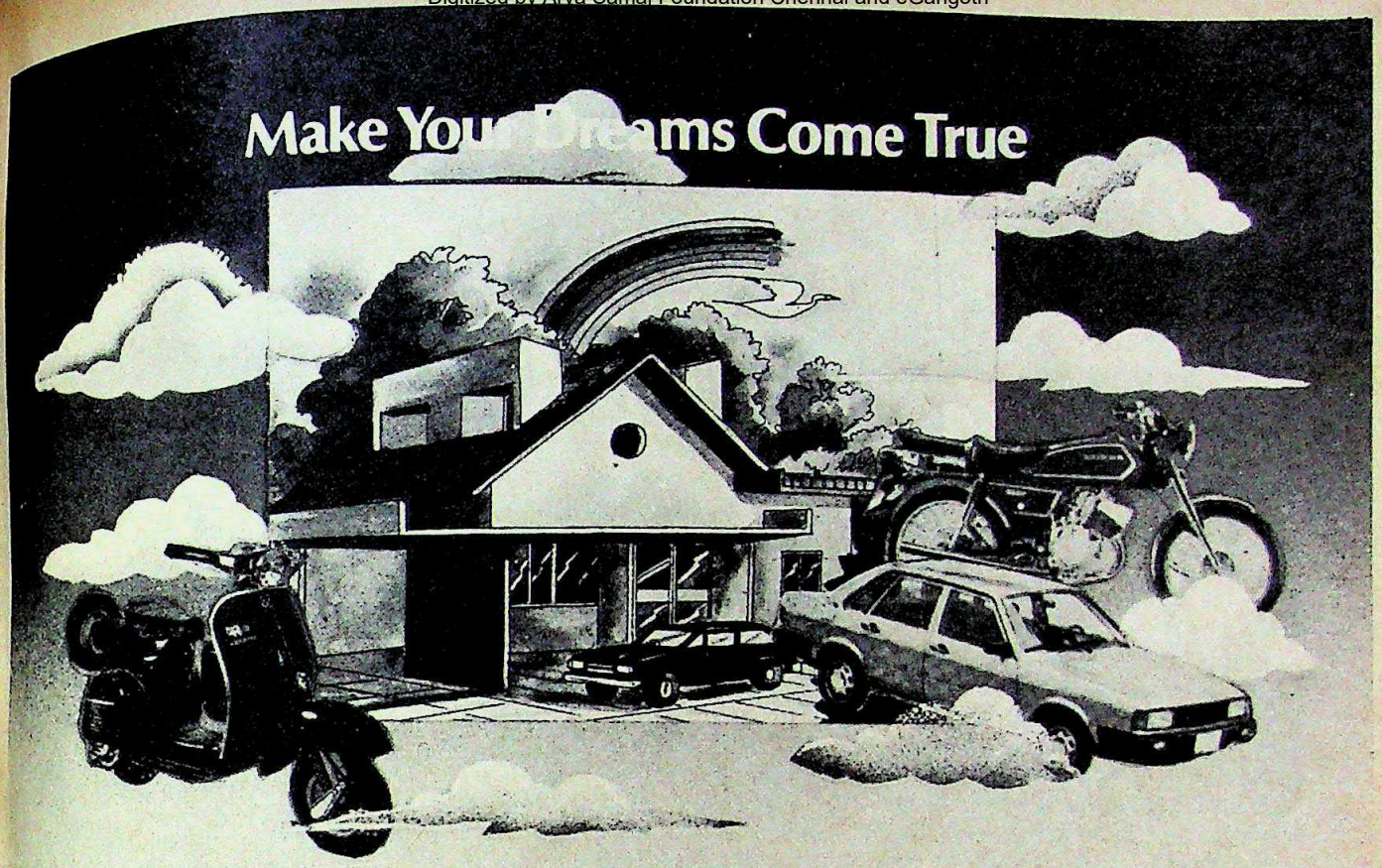

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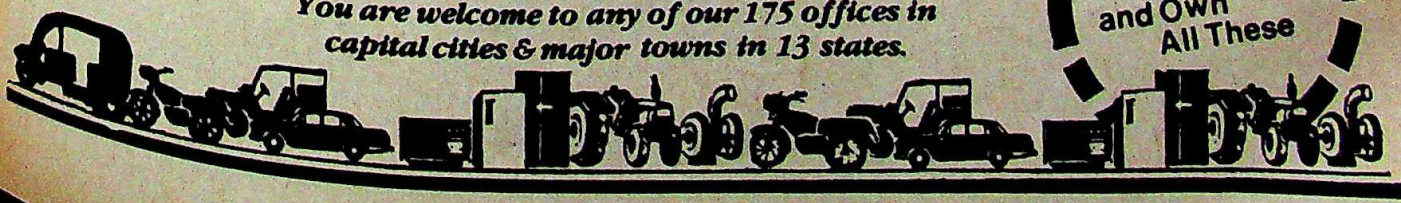

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CONTRACEPTIVES

Making it Easier

NEWLY-weds Kamala and Mohan strolled across to their local gynaecologist to consult her on one of the oldest problems in the world: which was the best contraceptive to use? The doctor's friendly smile put them at ease.

Opening a drawer she removed a strip of tablets and said: "Now you don't have to take a pill daily. You can take it once a week." Then displaying a loaded syringe, she added: "If Kamala took a shot of this she would be protected for two months."

Kamala wasn't keen on having her arms jabbed so regularly. So the doctor pulled out two tiny rods from a drawer and said: "These are injected under the forearm painlessly and could protect you for around three years. It's ideal for spacing your children."

Kamala wanted to know why is it that all contraceptives are designed for women only. Pulling out a strip of tablets, the doctor said: "Now we've got one for males too."

The doctor hadn't finished. Taking out a vial marked Birth Control Vaccine she informed: "This makes women immune to pregnancy for a year and is undergoing testing. We are also testing a vaccine for men. In a year or two they may be ready for use."

Centchroman
Usage: Weekly oral pill (females)
Protection: As long as taken
Side-effects: Delayed menses
Availability: Awaiting Drugs Controller's clearance

LOOKS too good to be true? But even as Indians continue to be the world's most prolific baby-makers, new imported contraceptives and research underway in Indian laboratories promise a wider range of birth control methods for the country's 120 million couples. Hardly three years from now a spate of contraceptives will hit the market and launch what scientists optimistically describe as a "second birth control revolution".

Several of the newer methods are already in advanced stages of testing. Awaiting clearance for commercial distribution is a weekly pill called Centchroman developed by the Central Drug Research Institute (CDRI). The institute claims it as effective as the oral pill with no major side-effects.

Women visiting primary health centres in 15 medical colleges across the country are being injected with the imported contraceptive Norethisterone Enanthate (NET-EN). The drug, which protects women from pregnancy for two months, has already been cleared by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) after extensive trials. Meanwhile the Supreme Court, acting on writ petitions filed by three women's organisations, has to decide whether the Government was ethically right in conducting the trials.

Another imported contraceptive, Norplant II, which is embedded in a woman's forearm, is in an advanced stage of clinical trial. Said to have a life-span of three years, initial results indicate that Norplant II has no serious side-effects. The ICMR hopes to have it cleared by next year.

More significantly, Indian research institutes are currently testing a host of new indigenously devis contraceptives. The National Institute Immunology in New Delhi has develope an anti-pregnancy vaccine. Recently initiated trials on 121 women volunte at five centres to test its efficacy. T National Institute of Health and Fam Welfare (NIHFW) is awaiting clearance f a multi-centre trial on a male contrace tive pill. In Bangalore the Indian Instit of Science (IIS) is working on a ma contraceptive vaccine.

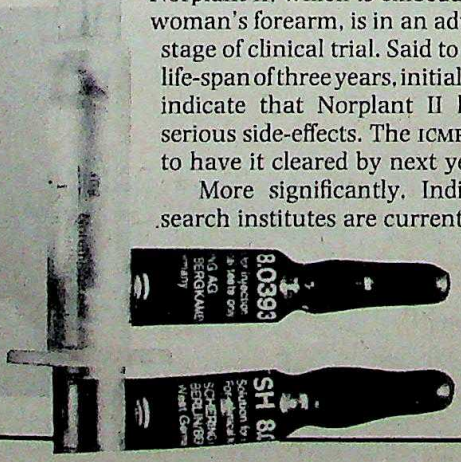
Most of the research on these contr ceptives has been going on for more than decade now but it received fresh impet when a National Programme on R search on Human Reproduction w launched in 1980. The work on contr ceptives began to be co-ordinated and research institutes were set up to evalu the effect of the drugs being develope "We have never been on such a go wicket," says Badri Saxena, ICMR's seni deputy director-general and coordinat of the national programme.

CPA & TA
Usage: Oral pill plus injection (males)
Protection: As long as taken
Side-effects: Not known
Availability: Awaiting clinical trials

The resurgence of contraceptive research in the country hasn't come a too soon. With only 34 per cent of Indi couples using some kind of protecti India's population curve shows no sig of dipping. Further, existing methods contraception have not gained the m acceptance needed to make the fam planning programme a success.

While the use of Nirodh has show marked increase (current sales: 300 m lion), it is still not the best bet. The int uterine devices, popular in the '60s, n have hardly 4 per cent couples us them. The oral pill is yet to catch on. A sterilisation is only popular among th who already have an average of 5 children. Sadly, those sterilised form t thirds of the couples that the Governm claims are protected.

Realising this, the Family Wel



NET-EN
Usage: Bi-monthly injection (females)
Protection: Two months
Side-effects: Irregular menses
Availability: With gynaecologists

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Ministry conceived a new strategy last year. With 4.5 million couples—potential baby-makers—being added every year the Government shifted its emphasis to spacing of children. For this it is looking out for better contraceptives that are safe, simple to use, easy to distribute and cheap. As a health official said: "We would grab any safe contraceptive, Indian or foreign."

The search for longer acting contraceptives has led the Government to import NET-EN and Norplant II. NET-EN is mixed with an oil base that allows only a slow release of the drug in the bloodstream. In Norplant II, the agents are stored in tiny non-toxic rods and released in low doses for up to three to five years making the women infertile during these periods. The major problem with these types of drugs is that around 40 per cent of the users suffer from irregular menstrual bleeding leading to high drop-out rates. And currently the country's health services are not adequate enough to administer and monitor their effects on a mass scale.

But Indian researchers are developing contraceptives that are more suited to local conditions. CDRI's weekly pill is a good example. It was known that the hormone estrogen prepares the uterus for pregnancy. In the '60s CDRI synthesised centchroman, a compound that neutralised estrogen's action on the uterus, making it hostile to a fertilised ovum and thereby preventing pregnancy.

Initially it was developed as a 'morning after' pill. While it did work well when high doses were administered, two women showed signs of developing ovarian cysts. The cysts disappeared when the drug was withdrawn but the doubts remained.

Using extremely low doses the CDRI launched the multi-centre trial in 1982 on 648 women. The drug proved highly effective. The drop-out rates were low and only 27 of the 648 women became pregnant—normal for such tests. The only side-effect noticed was that a few women had delayed menses. However, none of them developed ovarian cysts.

The advantage with Centchroman is that, unlike the pill, it doesn't use steroids to prevent pregnancy thereby avoiding its negative effects. But the Drug Controller of India wants to see whether the drug has any serious side-effects if given for long periods. The drug has an interesting spin-off. When women suffering from breast cancer were given the drug a quarter of them showed a marked reduction in tumour growth. Tests are being done to develop it as an anti-cancer drug.

The male contraceptive pill developed by the NIHFW uses a compound, Cyproterone acetate(CPA), to curb male fertility. Initially the major problem was that the drug seemed to lower the level of testosterone, the primary male hormone, leading to a loss of libido. Researchers at NIHFW then gave volunteers fortnightly injections of synthetically prepared testosterone to compensate for any loss of libido. The tests were successful but the efficacy of the pill will not be proved unless multi-centre trials are initiated which is what the NIHFW has asked for. Says Professor Somnath Roy, director, NIHFW: "Developing a male contraceptive is difficult but we are getting closer to it."

BUT probably the most promising contraceptives being developed are in an area where angels fear to tread: immunological control. As one of its leading researcher Professor G.P. Talwar, director, National Institute of Immunology, says: "Population is a problem of epidemic proportions. Vaccines have been used to control such breakouts. What is needed is a vaccine against birth." The trick is to use the body's natural defence mechanism to block the reproduction process.

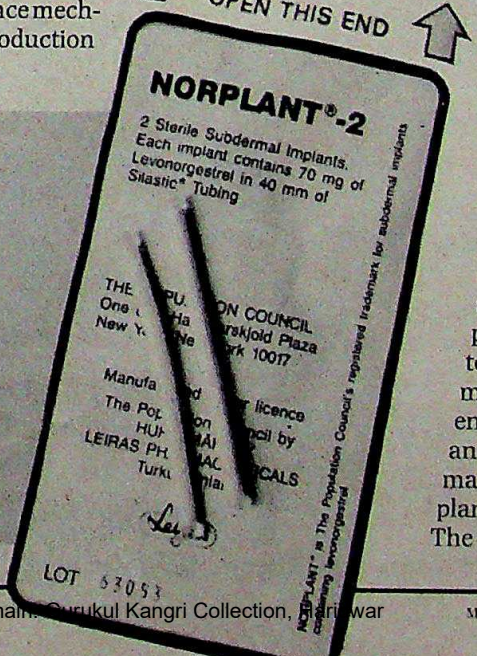
Anti-pregnancy vaccine
Usage: Yearly injection (females)
Protection: One year
Side-effects: Not known
Availability: Under clinical trials

The institute plans to do exactly that with the anti-pregnancy vaccine. When conception occurs the fertilised ovum secretes a hormone called human chorionic gonadotropin (HCG). HCG helps the ovum to implant itself on the uterus where it grows into a foetus. If the body's immune system could be manipulated to produce antibodies against HCG then the pregnancy could be prevented. But the problem was getting the body to fight its own secretions.

Talwar hit upon the novel idea of linking HCG with the tetanus toxide vaccine and fooling the body into developing immunity against both. But when clinical trials started in 1976, not all the women seemed to generate the same level of antibody reaction. The trials were stopped and Talwar worked on better ways of stimulating anti-body response to the vaccine. Now human trials have been initiated again.

In Bangalore, Professor N.R. Moudgal of the IIS is in an advanced stage of developing a male fertility vaccine. Moudgal's vaccine blocks the action of one of the hormones that stimulates sperm production. His extensive studies on monkeys have shown encouraging results and Moudgal is awaiting permission to test humans.

Indian researchers are working on other leads too. In Bombay the Institute for Reproduction and Research is working on a unisex pill. The research team is concentrating on perfecting the pill to control male fertility. Their method is to control the protein, inhibin, which is known to regulate glandular secretions necessary for sperm production in the testes. Tests on animals have shown encouraging results and trials on humans have been planned for next year. The institute is also



Norplant II
Usage: Sub-dermal implant (females)
Protection: Three years
Side-effects: Irregular menses
Availability: Under clinical trials

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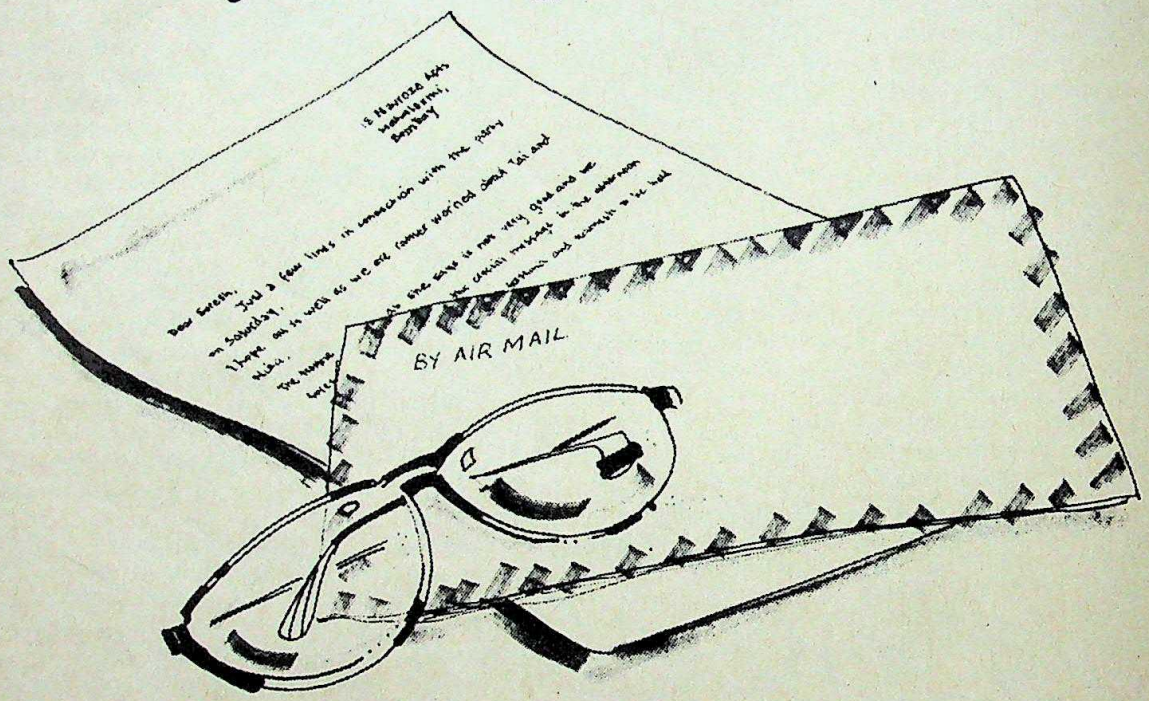
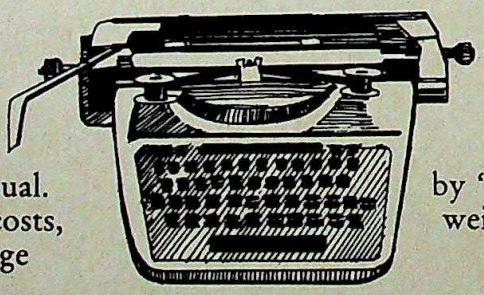


The Manual does.

A Rs. 9000/- Electronic Typewriter
is nothing more than a portable version
of the Manual Typewriter.
In fact it is a lot less.
A lot less rugged.
A lot less economical.
A lot more expensive to buy.
It costs twice as much as a Manual.
Apart from high maintenance costs,
you pay almost 2 rupees per page
as operational cost.
It is definitely not built
for everyday office use.
It best serves as a personal typewriter.
Nothing more.



The Manual on the other hand is a lot more.
A lot more rugged.
Used for over 20 years.
A lot more economical.
Maintenance and operational
costs are negligible.
So before you get carried away
by "dirt cheap" electronic marvels,
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The Manual is still the most
practical, hardworking, sensible
office machine for most of your
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So choose wisely.

The Manual: It's a sturdy machine.

Issued by the Indian Typewriter Manufacturers' Association

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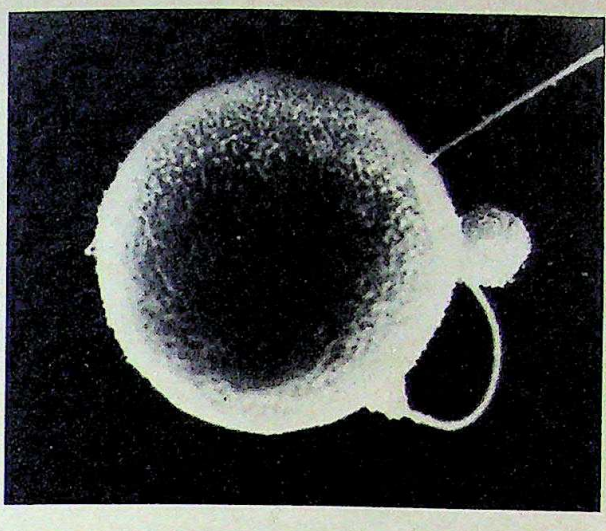
working on a nasal spray for women as a substitute for the common oral pill.

But the immunological approach is fraught with risks. No one really knows the long-term impact of playing with the body's natural defence system and the health hazards it poses. In fact, contraceptive research the world over is plagued by big question marks. The road to a safe and effective contraceptive is long, arduous and taxing to most governments. Results are slow by the very nature of the field.

Since contraceptives are something that people would have to use right through their reproductive life tests have to be extremely stringent. The new drugs have to be first tested on animals to see whether they work without any harmful side-effects. Then a series of human clinical trials have to be done that may take a minimum of five years before the drug is cleared for commercial use.

The ethical aspect is crucial because any failure on volunteers or on mass users would lead to unwanted pregnancies and serious health hazards. Irked by repeated government queries to show quick results, NIHFW's Roy snaps: "You tell me that there won't be a population problem in 1995 and I'll stop work on contraceptive research right now."



The moment of conception when a sperm enters an ovum

Contraceptive research the world over is plagued by big question marks. Results are slow.

While there is optimism that some of the contraceptives being developed in the country may work there is an equally strong possibility that many may fail to make the grade. But, as the late Indira Gandhi told the WHO Assembly in 1981: "Family planning programmes are awaiting a big breakthrough. Without a safe, preferably oral, drug which women and men take, no amount of government commitment and political determination will avail." The search for better contraceptives must go on.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA with bureau reports

THE PILL

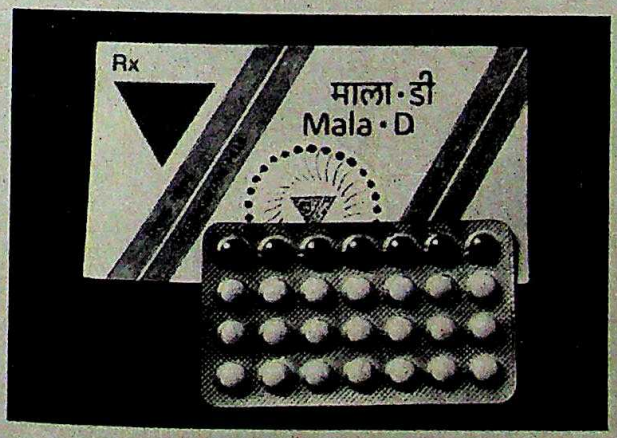
Hard Sell

IN New Delhi's Nirman Bhawan, health officials are putting the final touches to the most massive promotional campaign since Nirodh was launched. Their goal: by end-1990 more than three million women are to be wooed into using the pill.

Although the pill was introduced into the family planning programme in 1974, it hasn't caught on in a big way as yet. But with the popularity of intra-uterine devices and sterilisation methods remaining stagnant the Government has singled out the pill for special treatment.

It will be marketed under a new name, Mala (the pills in the packet look like a row of beads) and sold at a subsidised price of Rs 2 for each course. Several private manufacturers have been given licences to manufacture and market the pill under the same brand name. Meanwhile, health workers all over the country are been given special training on how to educate people to use the pill.

But the decision to popularise the pill is controversial. There are still fears that prolonged use of the pill leads to cervical cancer, hypertension and heart disease. The drop-out rates are high because of its side-effects like nausea, vomiting and irregular menstrual bleeding. The negative effects of the pill on women in developed countries is well-researched. But there is hardly any research to show whether it would be safe for undernourished Indian women. Nor has its effect been studied on lactating women.



The oral pills in new package

Introduction of the pill is being backed by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the country's premier medical research institute. Citing research done abroad ICMR experts say that the pill is high risk for only those who use it regularly for more than five years, are over 35 years of age, have complaints like diabetes and hypertension or are smokers. The studies also show that women who use the pill for prolonged periods do not have a high rate of breast cancer but run a marginal risk of getting cervical cancer.

But senior Health Ministry officials point out that the decision to introduce the pill has to be weighed against other considerations. Teenage pregnancy is on the rise, adversely affecting the health of both mother and child and leading to high death rates. Multiple pregnancies, especially for women above 30, are also known to be extremely harmful. As one official said: "The risk of not taking a contraceptive like the pill is as great as using one. So it's for the women to choose."

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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Faces that dreams are made of are touched with Special magic

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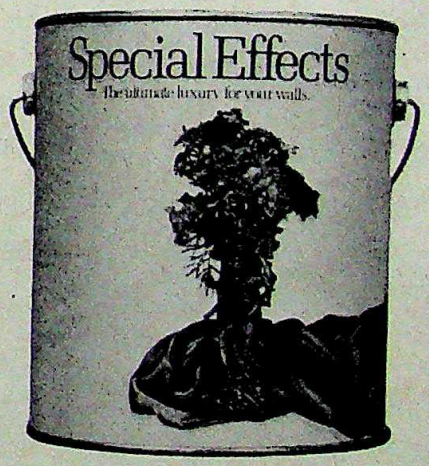
Give your walls a touch of Special Effects and a star is born.

Special Effects



Special magic for your walls.

A premium plastic emulsion paint from Jenson & Nicholson.

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AJANTA PAINTINGS

Monument to Neglect

AJANTA may not be dying yet. But like Venice it is incurably sick. The unique cave paintings of Ajanta and Ellora which, for decades, have awed visitors from all over the world, are rapidly becoming a tragic monument to archaeological neglect. The condition of the famous Buddhist cave paintings has visibly deteriorated over the years and even though the caves—one of the world's oldest monasteries—have now been put on the world heritage list, the historic works of ancient Indian art are being starved of the expert attention they urgently require.

The biggest threat to these ethereal cave paintings—which date over various centuries from the second century onwards—comes from gawking visitors. The 22 isolated caves, situated near the modern-day city of Aurangabad, were originally inhabited by the handful of Buddhist monks who created the paintings. But since 1819, when the caves were accidentally discovered by a British soldier from the Madras army, a flood of people has invaded their serenity.

Today, on an average, the caves are visited by between 3,000 and 5,000 people every day. Not surprisingly, therefore, carbonisation caused by human breath has affected the paintings adversely. An expert committee had limited the number of visitors in the caves to 20 at a time in order to maintain the temperature and humidity at levels which would not damage the paintings. But the rules have not always been strictly adhered to: there are usually more people than the stipulated number and there have even been instances when rather large college groups have barged in.

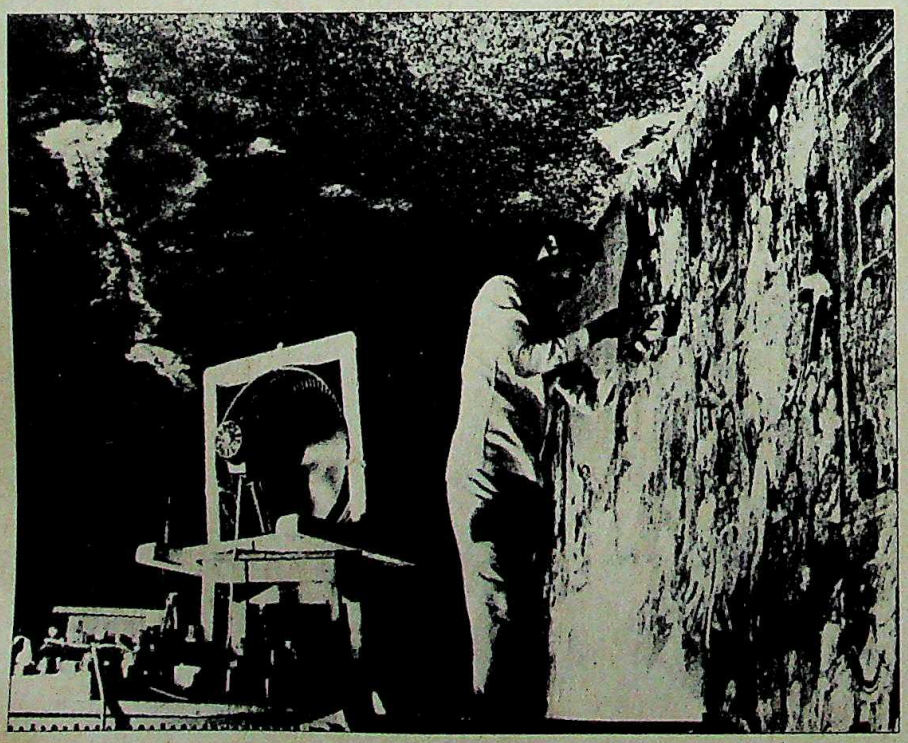
Worse still, some carry umbrellas or sticks which often leave scratches on the exquisitely painted pillars. The caves are dark and the few attendants present are literally in the dark about what the visitors are doing. In fact, many of the attendants who ought to keep an eye on the paintings are busier playing guides to tourists for that extra buck.

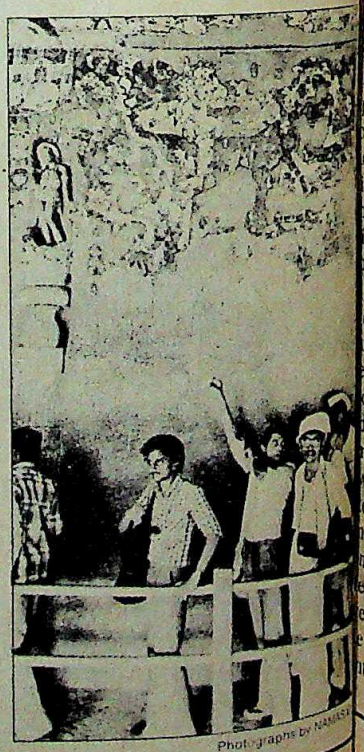
Lights pose yet another danger. Tourists can hire 40 watt bulbs for one and a half hours for certain caves, provided they do not spend more than 15 minutes in each cave and not too long before any one painting. But this rule is observed more in the breach: the lights are focused well beyond the allowed time on the more well-known works like the *Black Princess* and the *apsaras* with the famous swaying curve. Ultra-violet rays are harmful to the paintings and make them fade, say restorers. Moreover, visitors bring in dust on their shoes and on their person—adding considerably to the dust already on the paintings. The denuded hill opposite the caves only aggravates the dust problem.

Besides the deterioration caused by age and the callous visitors, there are the more deliberate acts of man damaging the paintings. A few have been destroyed by restoration work. Others have been tampered with by over-zealous restorers. Says a former guide: "I have seen attendants put their own strokes, changing there the expressions, depth and perspective of the paintings in Cave 17. Attendants also clean paintings and in the process rub hard things against them."

Ajanta also has its own painter's sde shellac, a varnish used by Italian expert L. Cecconi who was called to restore the paintings by the Nizam of Hyderabad when the caves were in his care. Over the years, the shellac, which was not uniformly applied, attracted carbon and other matter. It first became brittle and then translucent. Some of the paintings even became chalky. And when the

Restorer at the caves; and (right) damaged painting: shoddy work





Photographs by NAMASH

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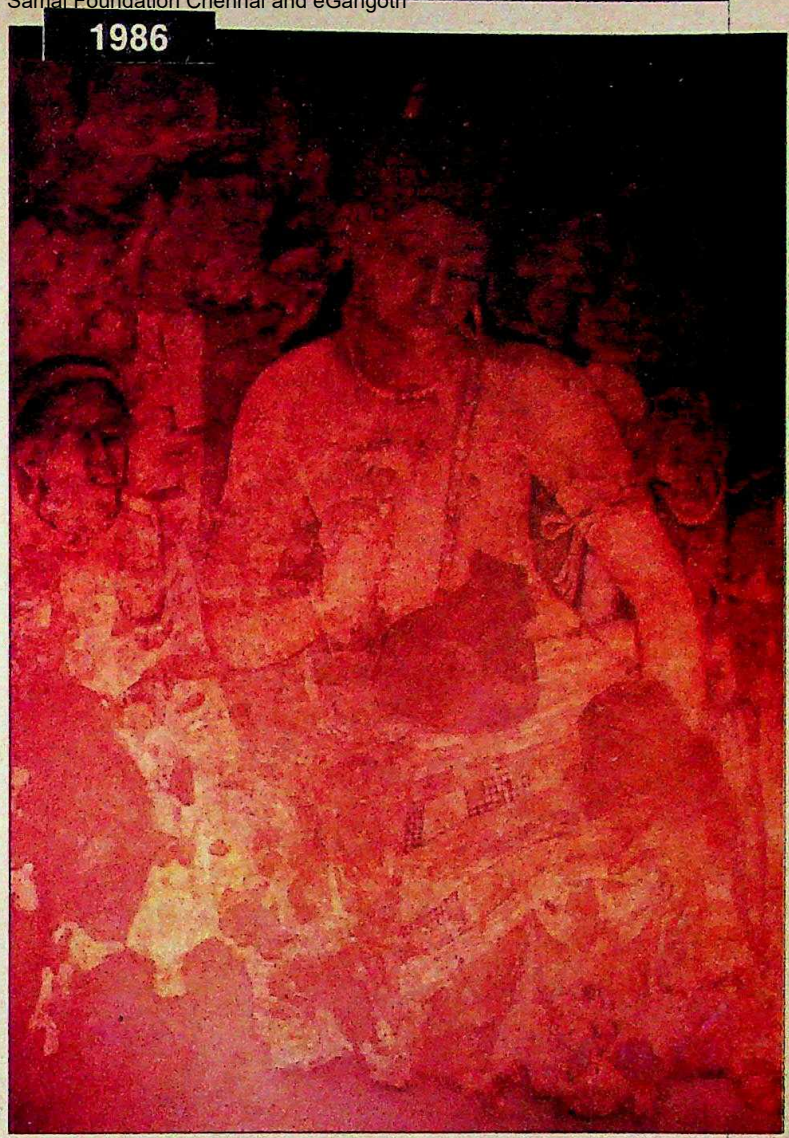

Bodhisattva Padmapani: crumbling over the years

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aeological Survey of India (ASI) restor-
s tried to remove this varnish, bits of the
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onks did not paint directly on the walls
d ceilings; they painted on a one-inch
ick paste of rice, gum, clay and mud
hich was applied on the cave surfaces.
th gradual decay of the binding me-
rm, chunks of paintings have fallen off.
The paintings have also suffered from
certain amount of bio-degradation,
used by microbes and spores settling on
eir surface. Smoke and beeswax have
o altered their tonal value. Insects have
ten at the works. Bat excreta has created
y designs on the paintings. Unfortu-
ely, only two of the caves have been
rigated because there isn't enough
ter. All the caves need to be fumi-
ed, according to the experts. The Bagh
e paintings in Madhya Pradesh which
e from the same period as the Ajanta
ntings, have already passed beyond the pale of restoration.

And, then, there are the problems of the archaeological survey men themselves. Nobody wants to go to Ajanta. Because of its location, it is considered the last frontier, a punishment post for the employees of the ASI. The caves are in a sort of wasteland, miles away from normal civic amenities. And for the keepers of one of India's prize possessions, they might as well be at the end of the world. Some years ago the son of a senior chemical assistant, V.R. Mangiraja, was ill and could not be taken to a doctor in time. Mangiraja packed his bags and left.

The best ASI conservationists or restorers are reluctant to be posted there. At present there are two senior chemical assistants, three chemical assistants, one photographer, two modellers, one lower division clerk, two attendants and a deputy superintendent. But there ought to be 10 senior chemical assistants, and the same number of chemical assistants, complain ASI employees at Ajanta.

Says a bachelor technician: "Nobody wants to marry us. The water is not potable. There are no houses, schools, medical facilities or transport....The village is 15 km away and we have to walk to buy vegetables." Adds another: "We live in mud houses which are like stables; they have no proper floors. We have to take leave to go to the bank in Phardapur. There is a doctor in Ajanta but he is not always there and we have to go as far as Jalgaon or even Aurangabad (over 100 km away)."

Under such conditions, it is little wonder that the beauty of the paintings and its historic legacy is being gradually buried under layers of neglect and official apathy. And if the present situation is allowed to continue, it won't be long before the enigmatic smiles on the serene faces of the *apsaras* are wiped out forever.

—MADHU JAIN in Ajanta

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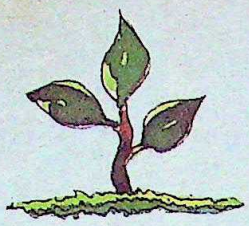
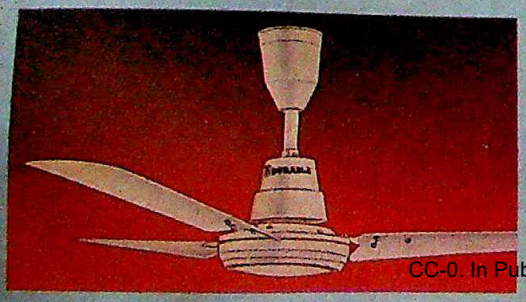
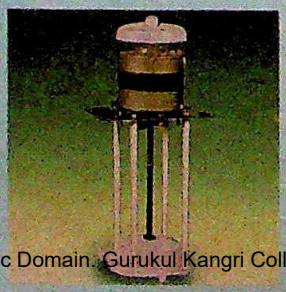
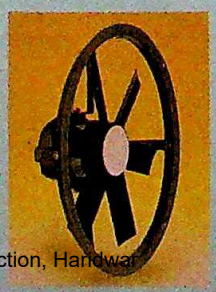


From a name that was virtually unknown 8 years ag

to one that today 'says it al







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We have come a long way

We began almost a decade ago with exhaust fans. But we did not see ourselves as just another one-product company. Over the years, our name has gained recognition and as we grew, we diversified. First into cooler kits, followed by water heaters, then ceiling fans. More recently, we introduced 'Big Pop', a handy snackmaker. And this is just the beginning.

Today, our name is trusted by those who have our products at home. And to those who don't need an electrical product immediately, we are a name to look for when they do.

In eight years, we have come a long way.

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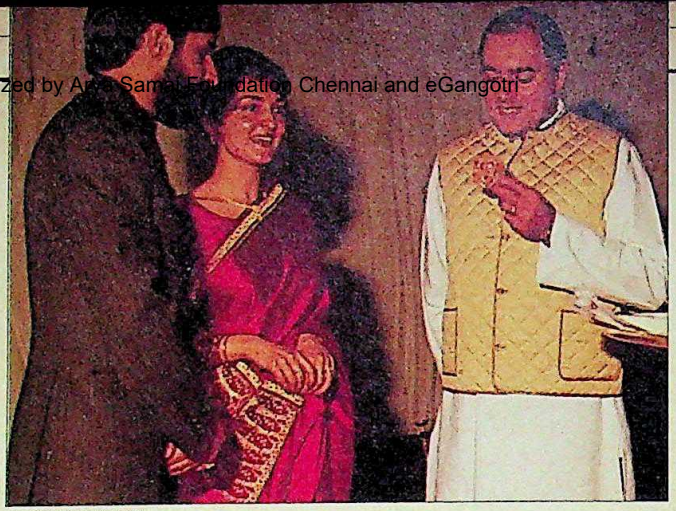
◆ **Imran Khan** on your mind? Now have him on your chest. Pakistan's glamorous cricket star is plugging Cinthol soap on his T-shirts for Parmeshwar and hubby Adi Godrej. "Instead of wearing an Adidas T-shirt, why not Cinthol for a friend? I have known them for a long time," he says. In his own country, Imran pushes tea: in a mellifluous voice-over in Punjabi, *Sone desh de waste soni chai* (Beautiful tea, for a beautiful country).

Imran: a piece of cake

◆ M.F. Husain is not the only barefoot ingenue with paint on his hands. Bhil tribal **Bhoora Bai**, 26, who has won a Rs 21,000 Madhya Pradesh state award for folk arts is a construction worker. Pouts Bhoora: "I had never painted before. The *saheb* (J. Swaminathan, noted painter and a director at Bharat Bhavan) said, 'Come and paint. I shall pay you as much as you are earning'." She was feted at Bharat Bhavan, which is ironically, the house she built.



PRASHANT PANJIAR

Sharma and bride with Rajiv

◆ It was a hectic day for **Anand Sharma**, 34, president of the Indian Youth Congress and Rajya Sabha member; two marriage ceremonies and attending the opening day of Parliament. In the morning, Sharma, and **Zenobia**, a final year medical student, tied the knot in a civil ceremony; and later, sanctified it in the Arya Samaj way. Sharma's comment: "I am following my leader who believes in national integration." Four years ago, he was asked to help Zenobia, the granddaughter of Ibrahim Aswat, Mahatma Gandhi's comrade in South Africa, get into medical college. He got her to the altar too—and in the bargain a doctor in the house.

◆ Where do all good stars go before they fade out? Parliament of course. That's the big apple they now lust after and **Rajesh Khanna** is the new debutant in the Congress(I). Bombay grape-vine has Murli Deora, city party chief, spending sleepless nights about The Khanna unseating him. The matinee idol has learned his lines: "I have already tasted name, fame and money; I want to involve myself actively in politics to serve the nation better." And, given his nosediving popularity, Khanna has a good script-writer: "Right from childhood I have had a soft corner for Congress." Of course, the r role might be only a gu appearance.

◆ The tacky taffeta a moth-eaten tails didn't qu do queen and country pro The group of **203 Englishm and women** shepherded b British travel agency, throu "Victorian" India for £2,0 each to celebrate the cen nary of the Golden Jubile her rule was to climax at Grand Victorian Ball in "durbar" of a Delhi five-s hotel. They gaped at the lu ied attendants with lances rode in carriages and anti cars. But the other India them shell-shocked: "I not prepared for the pov and the dirt," said one of th

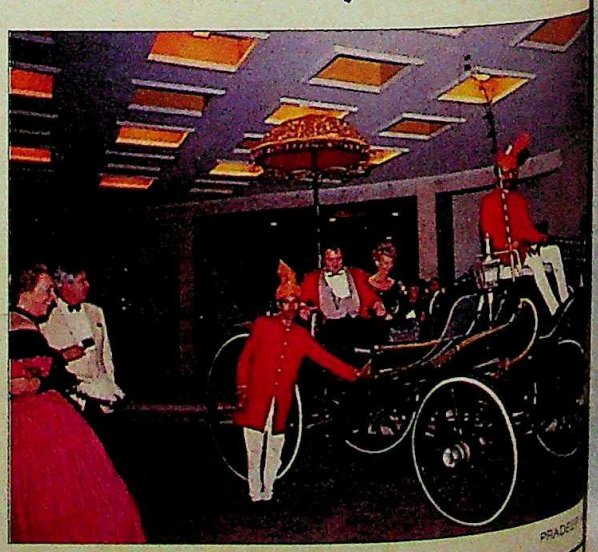
RATHJIT G

Khanna: a new script

Bhoora Bai at work

GHANSHYAM SHARMA

Tourists in "Victorian" India



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Crumbling Citadel

The verdict in last week's assembly elections represents a major set-back to the Congress(I) and Rajiv Gandhi. The electoral reverses will also weaken the prime minister's hold over the party and government. An analysis:

COVER STORY 68

Unresolved Controversy

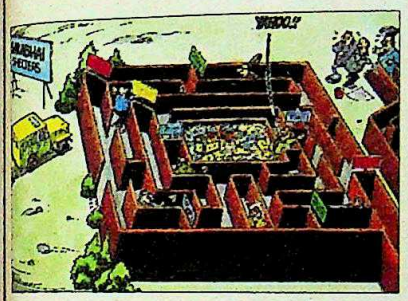
Though the prime minister finally held a two-hour meeting with the President last week, the cold war in the relationship is far from over. All the signs point to the makings of a major constitutional crisis of the kind never seen before. A report:

SPECIAL REPORT 26

Pandora's Box

The arrest of *Indian Express* columnist S. Gurumurthy provoked a nation-wide controversy involving an investigation abroad, prime minister's closest advisers, a cabinet minister, a leading press baron and industrialists. An exclusive report.

SPECIAL REPORT 32



Trading in Trusts

The Sarabhais of Ahmedabad have been known as a business family with a difference. But they are now embroiled in tax disputes about some 2,000 family trusts and 400 companies. A look at an extraordinary exercise in tax planning.

INVESTIGATION 94

Hard Lessons

The just-concluded series against Pakistan came as a high-voltage shock to Indian cricket fans. Kapil Dev and his men were outplayed by Pakistan in every department of the game to be beaten for the first time ever on home soil.

SPORTS 102

Setback in the Sky

The failure of the ASLV mission less than a minute after a perfect blast-off is a major blow to India's ambitious space programme. The launch represented a quantum jump in space technology. An analysis of the implications of this set-back.

SCIENCE 112

पुस्तकालय
गुरुकुल कांगड़ी विश्वविद्यालय
हरिद्वार

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Cover Illustration by JAR

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SELF-RESPECTIN' COWBOYS WORE NOTHING BUT FRENCH CLOTHES.

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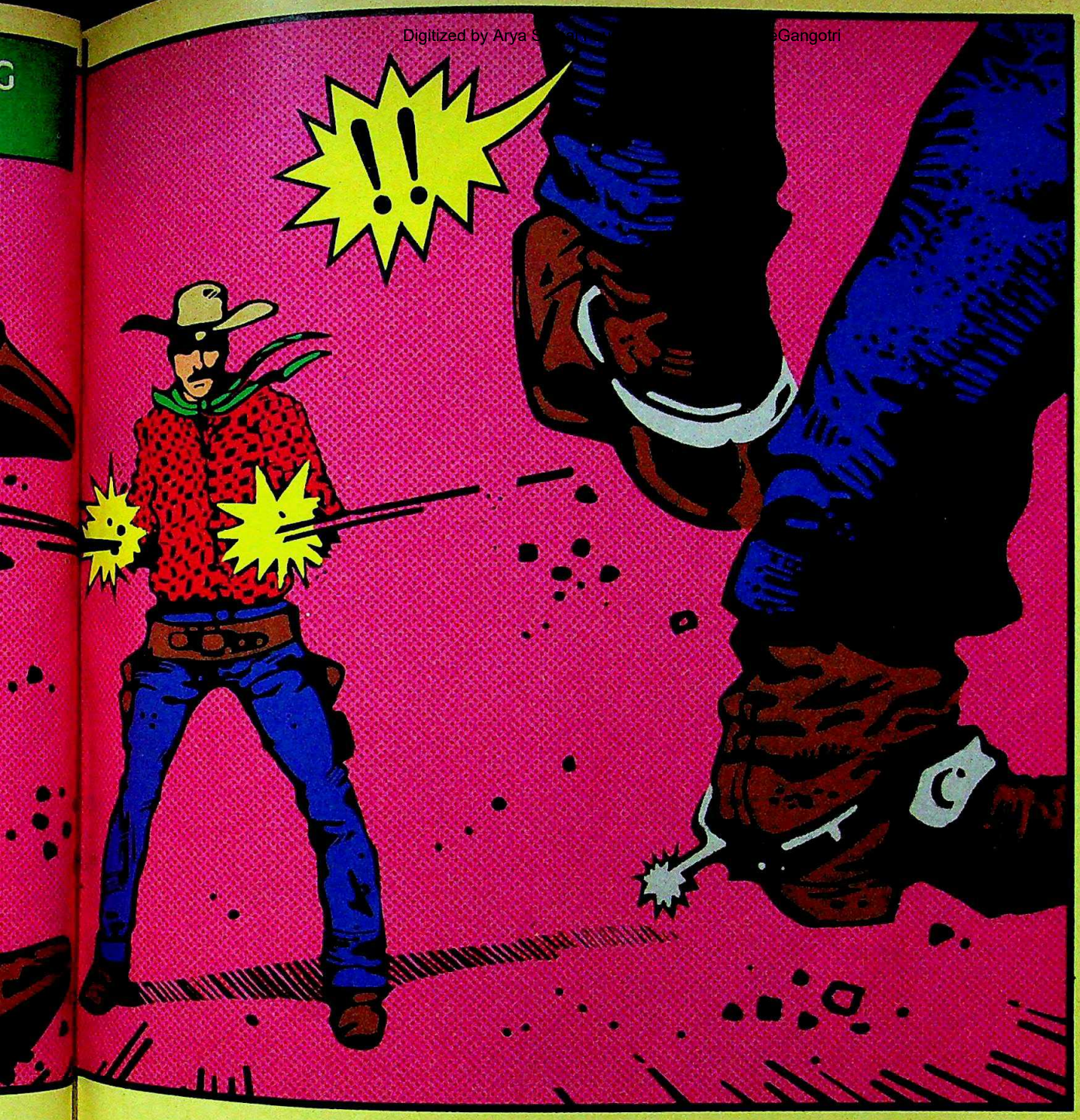

One and a half centuries before Pierre Cardin, a French fabric made a name for itself in America.

It was called Serge-de-Nimes, which was a bit much for the rough-talkin' cowboys.

So without much ado, they trimmed the name to 'denim'.

Denim cost next to nothing.

It was dyed blue only because indigo was the cheapest dye around.

And it was tough enough to build a tent.

In fact, that's just what the first consignments of denim were imported for.

Until someone realised it could also make a great pair of jeans.

The rest is history.

The scene now shifts from the wild West to Western India.

Where the Arvind Mills have set up India's first plant to manufacture genuine denim.

The quality of denim used by Levi Strauss, Calvin Klein, Vanderbilt and Co.

Arvind denim will be sold in India and exported to the fashion capitals of the world.

C'est fantastique, n'est pas?

ORIGINAL Arvind DENIM

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ARVIND. THE LONE RANGER OF ORIGINAL DENIM

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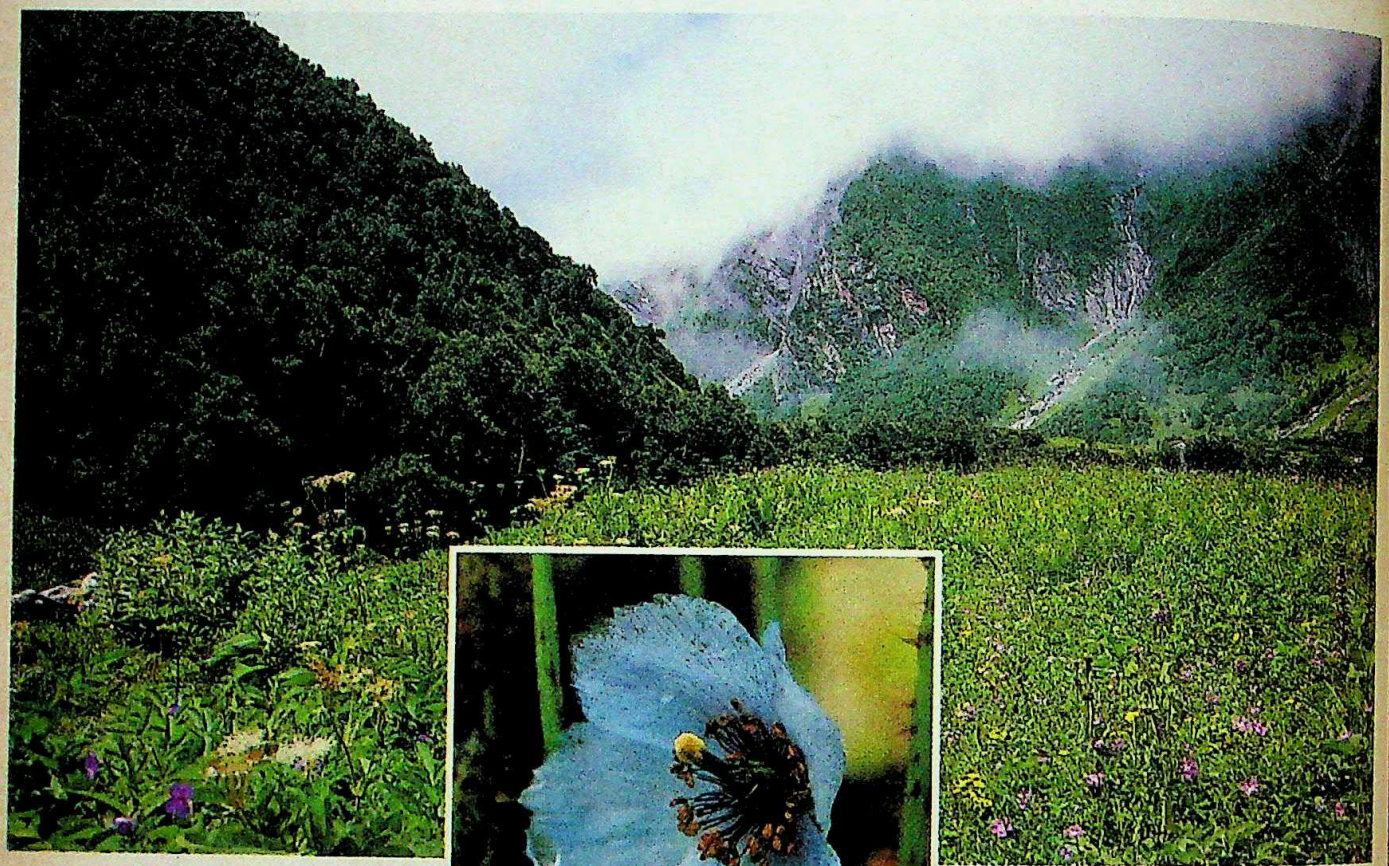
The exquisite flowers tempted even the great Bhima to steal them from the Gods...



The ancient books called it Nandan Kanan, a garden so beautiful, it rightly belonged to the Gods. A valley of flowers asleep through the long winter months, waiting for the call of summer. When the melting snows leave a trail of colours on every slope and meadow. Primulas and gentians, wild irises and anemones, geraniums and lilies... even rare blue poppies. Come, visit the Valley of Flowers.

ACCESSIBILITY
Nearest railhead and airport is Dehra Dun. From here, it is 228 km by road to Joshimath and a further 44 km to Badrinath. To begin the trek to the Valley, you backtrack 30 km to Govindghat. Then cross the River Alaknanda and walk on to Ghanghariya (14 km). From Ghanghariya, the Valley is 6 km.

ACCOMMODATION
Ghanghariya has a Forest Rest House run by the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam. There are also Tourist Lodges and Dharamshalas at Govindghat.

TOURS
In season, Tours are operated by the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam from Rishikesh. For information, write to: 74/1 Rajpur Rd., Dehra Dun, Phone: 24408.

SEASON
Best season is mid-July to mid-August, when all the flowers are in bloom. However the full season lasts from June to September.

VALLEY OF FLOWERS
Discover India
Discover yourself

Department of Tourism
Government of India

In India you'll see the world.

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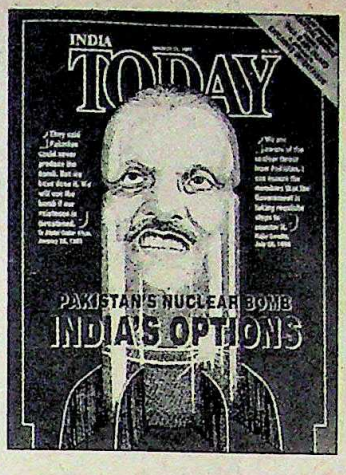

NO REAL THREAT

The cover story ("Pakistan's Nuclear Bombshell", March 31) was thought-provoking. Pakistan's capability to make the bomb is not an actual threat to us, since the superpowers already have sufficient weapons to end all life on earth. By spending money on arming ourselves, we are not going to be any safer. Instead of diverting our resources to defence we should channelise them to developmental purposes.

Ahmedabad VINOD C. DIXIT

■ Kudos to your cover story. We are all desperately concerned about our neighbour's military might. In nuclear rivalry, there are neither victors nor vanquished. We don't want war. But we cannot afford to remain unarmed and face the threat to our peace complacently.

Kottayam V.K. SATHYAVAN NAIR

POLITICAL DOCUMENT

The totally colourless budget ("A Damp Squib", March 31) makes us feel that the prime minister has lost touch with the Indian reality. The salaried class has not received any tax respite.

Bhilwara, Rajasthan PRAKASH NAWAL

■ Rajiv's maiden budget was a disappointment. The budget gives no incentives to industry and agriculture. Nor does it try to tackle the problem of unemployment. Instead of aiding the growth of the country's economy, the budget is going to stunt its growth. It is a political document and not economic.

Bangalore K. CHIDANAND KUMAR

LACK OF PARITY

■ Your story on salaries in Bombay ("The High Wage Island", January 31) was an eye-opener indeed. The wage disparity between private sector employees and state employees is worrying. Can't Datta Samant be called in to help the public sector?

New Delhi A.G. AJWANI

RAJIV'S WIT

It was interesting to read about Rajiv ("Raging Rajiv", March 31) in Parliament. His statements made us laugh.

Bangalore M. WASHINGTON

CROWD PLAY

At last we have an Indian cricketer who plays the game for the crowds. Hats off to Srikkanth ("Explosive Entertainer", March 31), the dashing opener who, even if he gets out after 20 runs, has given you runs for the money spent. May he continue to entertain.

New Delhi K.S. GOPALA KRISHNAN

■ There was a time when opponents used to be happy when they got rid of Gavaskar. But now it is Srikkanth. He is undoubtedly the most entertaining and feared batsman among the current world-class cricketers. Whether it is Marshall & Co or Imran & Co, once Srikkanth gets going there is no stopping him.

Cuttack ARTA MISHRA

■ In an otherwise good article, there is a frequent reference to "records", the obvious target, of course, being the favourite whipping boy of Indian cricket—Sunil Gavaskar. It looks like a case of sour grapes. This could have been avoided. After all, both batsmen are great in their own way. It is like comparing Hindi film songs with Indian classical music.

Pune P.P. PUNTAMBEKAR

THE WASTE LAND

Your article on government waste ("The Dirty Dozen", March 15) is a beautiful analysis of the sorry state of affairs in the country. It is time the Government took a serious view of this absolutely colossal waste of public money. Government departments are indeed quite overstaffed and given proper direction, half of the existing strength can do the same work much better. Also, the state's tendency to appoint commissions and committees which serve no purpose should stop.

Madras S. RETNASWAMY

■ Figures and facts made the cover

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story most interesting. But the instances cited were sometimes too few.
Delhi — Dr VIVEK PAL

■ It should not be forgotten, especially after reading your story, that taxes are actually the biggest fraud played on the people by politicians and the Government. The wastages of the state—officials and politicians living expenses, perks, privileges—are paid out of taxed revenues. They glory in our money while we continue without improving.
Bombay — RICHARD DIAS

■ Your cover story made pleasurable reading. It was well-written and must have involved a lot of research work. But one point seems to have been missed out. The case for privatising the public sector only because it works better would not be in the interest of the common citizen. The private sector rarely works for the benefit of the public: the textile mills are a good example. Profit, whatever the cost in human resources, is its main consideration. We can progress without the aid of the private sector.
New Delhi — Y.R. MEHTA

■ The cartoons illustrating your cover story were brilliant. The details worked into each frame complemented the editorial beautifully.
Bombay — S.N.D. POOJARY

■ Will the Government appoint yet another committee to look into the wastage? Considering the fact that we seem to have a staggering Rs 20,000 crore to waste, we are no longer a poor country but have joined the ranks of the industrialised West.
Agra — RAKESH K. SHARMA

■ The concept of checks and balances does not exist in the present system of government. In the current set-up, the press remains the only pressure group capable of voicing public opinion and exposing the ills of the system.
Dehra Dun — SUNIL KAPUR

■ The Government's expenses are not a waste as you have laboriously stated. If the money was buried in some rich man's bank locker, then one could afford to be critical. But as long as the money stays within the country and is distributed amongst the thousands employed in the government sector, it cannot be seen as a scandalous wastage. The people live off this money.
Wardha — R.K. SURANA

■ The prime minister promises to put a stop to all wastage by the end of this year. He will deserve to be congratulated even if partially successful.
Nasik — SUNIL CHATI

■ Your cover story on government wastage made us gasp. The proportion of waste has never been tabulated—the public should sue the Government for indiscriminate wastage.
Calcutta — B.L. BIYANI

■ One wasteful expenditure has been overlooked. This is the precious foreign exchange we lose in maintaining both an Indian mission and offices of public sector concerns in the same place. We should have one or the other as overlapping of functions is a waste.
Tokyo — A. SAGHAR

■ Your cover story made us think. I fully agree that sick industries should be closed down immediately. They are a big drain on the public exchequer and are run at the cost of the general masses.
Kanpur — R.K. JAYASWAL

■ Your article provided an insight into the mishandling of public money by the Government. It revealed the gravity of the crime and also how the common man was unknowingly a victim. I feel that the unnecessary wastage can be controlled if the Government feels so. Let your article be an eye-opener for the Government.
Ahmedabad — K. SASIDHARAN

BAD CARETAKERS

Your article on the Ajanta paintings ("Monument to Neglect", March 15) was a few years late in its being written. The officials and peons who are entrusted with the job of looking after the monument are themselves corrupt. Hence it is difficult to imagine how they can be expected to help preserve something that is in danger of fading.
Aurangabad — DEEPAK BHINGARDEO

■ The write-up on Ajanta paintings should make millions of art lovers within the country sit up and take action. It is extremely sad to realise that one of India's prized possessions is in such a state of negligence. It is high time that a serious and sincere effort is made to protect and restore the cave paintings before all that is left of them are photographs in art journals.
Surat — PABITRA BARUAH

BITTER-SWEET HOME

The write-up on the Uttar Pradesh Housing and Development Board ("House Grouse", March 15) was only half the story. Not only do they not honour commitments made to aspiring householders and still ask for fresh registrations, even after waiting for years, citizens are forced to occupy houses of substandard construction.
Durgapur — SUDHA KUMAR

NOT SO SAFE

Your article on contraceptives ("Making it Easier", March 15) gives a one-sided view of the new methods. The complexities of the issue have been missed while the establishment's line on population control, whatever the cost, has been highlighted. On no account can the methods described be considered safe. They act by disrupting the finely-tuned hormonal or the immunological mechanisms in the body. The writ petitions filed in the Supreme Court do not just question the unethical manner in which trials with NE-EN are being conducted, but challenge the claims of safety made by the ICMR, WHO and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The contraceptive was not cleared by the ICMR after extensive trials but by two studies on Indian women. Safety cannot be proved on such flimsy evidence.
New Delhi — Dr SATHYAMALA

GIVING A HOME

Thank you for the report on the Chakma refugees in India ("Shattered Lives", March 15) who are fleeing from the brutality of the Bangladesh Army. The sensitive pictures illustrated clearly the seriousness of the situation. This peace-loving tribe has been hounded out from its traditional home for no reason. The Indian Government must ensure that the wrong is righted and the Chakmas have a home again.
Agartala — NILKANTI CHAKMA

NO CLAIMS

Reading your article on Bombay musicals ("Casting a Spell", February 28) I was amused at the misquotes and distortions. I complimented Karla Singh for her choreography in *Evita*, but never claimed to have danced in it.
Bombay — FARIDA PEDDER

The error is regretted. —Editor

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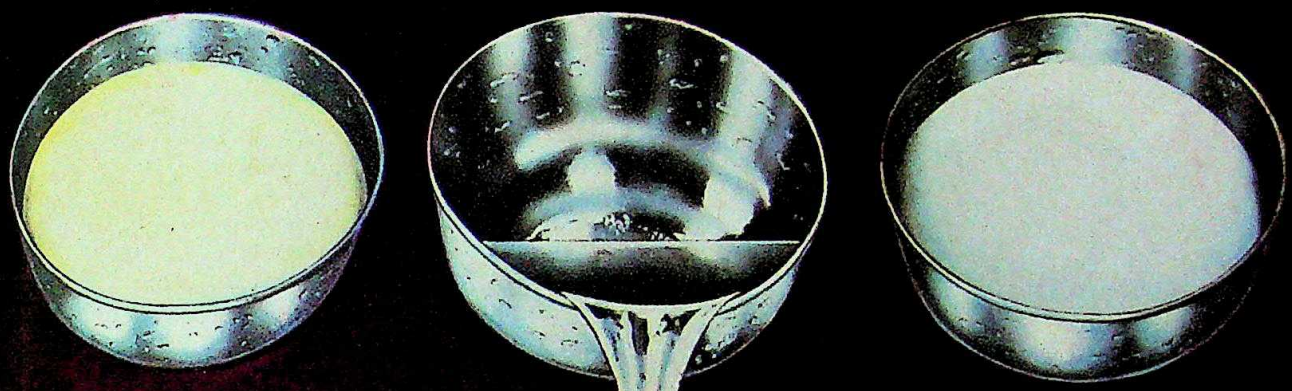
The real facts behind the "zero-cholesterol" story...

We put SAFFOLA, corn oil and refined groundnut oil into a freezer for 4 hours. And this is what we found:



Corn oil froze.

Groundnut oil froze solid.

But SAFFOLA remained liquid. Even after 24 hours!

Why not try this test yourself?

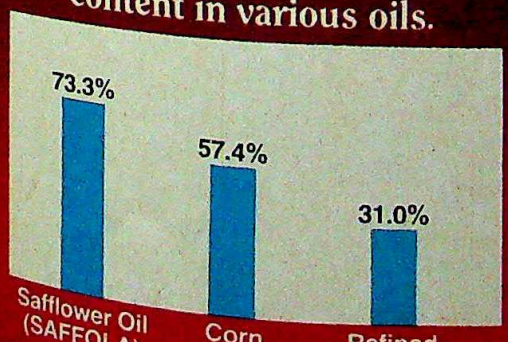
This clearly proves that of the three cooking mediums, SAFFOLA is highest in polyunsaturated fat – a substance that actually helps to lower cholesterol.

Yes, all vegetable oils are "zero-cholesterol". But only SAFFOLA, with the highest content of polyunsaturated fat actually brings down the cholesterol level in the blood. And that's what really counts!

Major research studies confirm that heart disease is directly linked to the level of cholesterol in the blood. "Lowering cholesterol levels markedly reduces the incidence of fatal heart attacks".

So when you cook, fry or bake with SAFFOLA, you're doing what's best for the whole family.

The cholesterol lowering factor (polyunsaturated fat) content in various oils.



Saffola

Good for your heart. Good for your health.

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When fall, feel,
colour and weave spell
matchless elegance...
the fabric has to be

Raymond's
Spring Field

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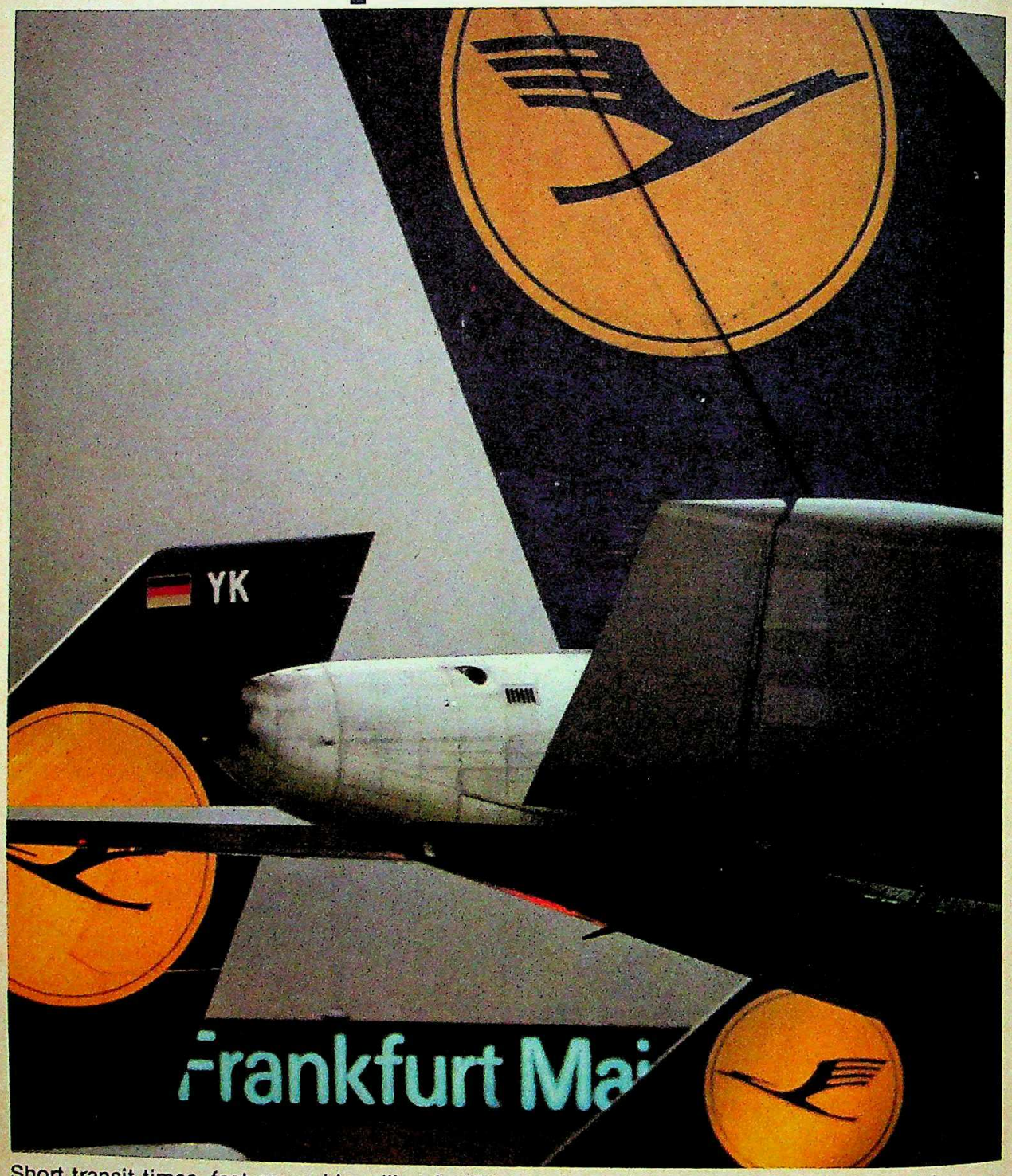
The European Connection.



Short transit times, fast ground handling facilities and excellent onward connections make Lufthansa's Frankfurt the best gateway to Europe and the world.

Lufthansa
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Squeezing the Press

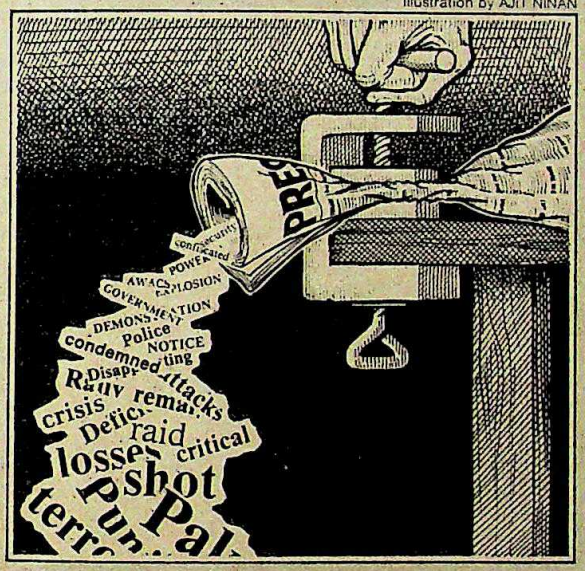
I would rather have a completely free press with all the dangers involved in the wrong use of that freedom than a suppressed or regulated press.

—Jawaharlal Nehru

IF constant attacks on the press and its manner of functioning were regular features of Mrs Gandhi's turbulent years in power, Rajiv Gandhi's advent to office had marked a noticeable easing of tensions on this score. There was a new openness in the air, the prime minister was suddenly accessible to non-sycophantic publications, and journalists breathed more freely. But in all too short a period, as things have soured after the initial heady days, the Government has tended to turn on the press, to display the old hostility, to treat bad news on the front pages as a sign of bad journalistic behaviour instead of as a barometer of things going wrong.

Last fortnight's events drove this point home forcefully, with a part-time contributor to a newspaper under arrest on the charge of violating the Official Secrets Act, raids by the Central Bureau of Investigation on the *Indian Express* guest-house in New Delhi, and ministers as well as parliamentarians declaring in all seriousness that the press has ganged up with opposition forces and foreign elements with the objective of destabilising the country.

Illustration by AJIT NINAN



There have been problems earlier too. The police have taken action even against such respected publications as the *Economic and Political Weekly* for perfectly legitimate writing, journalists have been hauled up on sedition charges, and publications that dare to indulge in fearless reporting are dragged before privileges committees of legislative bodies. There is an intolerance here, as well as a disregard for the importance of letting the truth be known, that speak very poorly of those in authority.

Looking back on a period that had once promised a new beginning, the last 29 months have seen hardly any concrete measures aimed at facilitating the press in its functioning; on the contrary, there has been a series of decisions that have imposed fresh economic burdens which, when looked at in their entirety, suggest a very deliberate government strategy to hinder the growth of a free, healthy and vibrant press.

One primary focus of attack has been on the economic front. Indian newsprint prices are now the highest in the world, and domestically produced newsprint costs about 40 per cent more than the international price. Newsprint allocation policies are arbitrary, and even the officially allotted quotas are not supplied: the current backlog runs into tens of thousands of tonnes. Publications consequently have to buy import licences at a premium in the open market—adding still further to costs. Earlier this year, telecommunication charges (for telex and teleprinter lines) were raised by between 50 and 100 per cent. For some kinds of publications, the effective increase is as much as 500 per cent. And postal charges for newspapers have gone up by between 60 per cent and 200 per cent. There are also new and higher customs duties. The additional economic burden on publications has been heavy—leading to sharp hikes in newspaper prices.

This has inevitably restricted the reach of the print media and limited the size of the reading public at a time when the official media flourish. Television has seen unprecedented growth in the last five years, helped by massive government investment in expanding the transmitter network and by duty concessions on TV sets at a time when the fresh taxes were being imposed on the print media. So when TV focuses most of its cameras on the prime minister with unwinking shamelessness, the message comes across very clearly. The media outside official control will be squeezed, and access to the official message will be dramatically improved.

The focus must inevitably turn on to the 64-year-old Official Secrets Act, especially the catch-all Section 5, which is so sweeping as to make practically no distinction between passing on a defence secret to a foreign enemy and possession of some innocuous file that an official may have marked 'secret' in self-defence. The Second Press Commission had suggested changes in this Act, but the then minister for information and broadcasting rejected this last year, using the extraordinary argument in Parliament that the Act had not come in the way of the freedom of the press. The Official Secrets Act must be used in the strict sense—for protecting national secrets that have strategic value—and the rest of the Government's functioning should be open for public review instead of being cloaked in needless secrecy.

Indian politicians are never tired of holding up the free press in India as an example of the vitality of Indian democracy. Yet their actions at home show a desire to tame or control the press. At a time when the ruling party has a brute majority in Parliament, when the judiciary is sought to be tackled through careful appointments of judges and when the bureaucracy is cowed down by politically motivated transfers, the free functioning of the press becomes all the more important for the country. Despite temptations to take on the press when it gets inconvenient, Rajiv Gandhi should hark back, not to his mother's confrontationist attitude, but to his grandfather's more liberal approach, which was based on recognising the value of encouraging a free and vibrant press.

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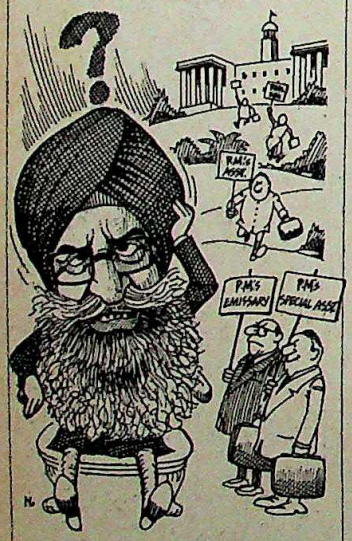
Sounding Board

● Members of the Barnala Government during the past couple of months have been receiving confused signals about who truly represents the prime minister's views in finding a solution to the Punjab crisis. The state's chief minister as well as several cabinet ministers have complained regularly that they are never quite sure about who is really in charge of the Punjab scene in Delhi. They have often wondered aloud at conferences and other formal occasions whether people "designated" to talk to them on behalf of the prime minister accurately reflect the Government's views.

In order to clear some of the prevailing confusion, Rajiv has now decided that his own secretariat will henceforth be wholly responsible for direct liaison with Barnala's office on a day-to-day basis. The Prime Minister's Secretariat would report straight back to him.

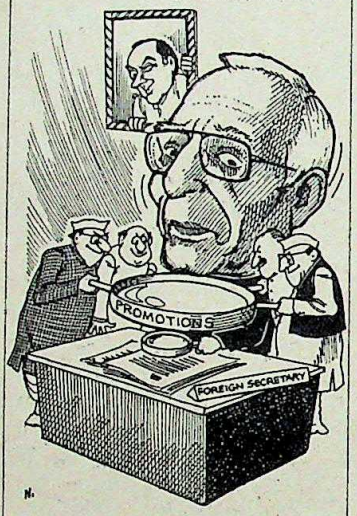
In the past Rajiv's secretary, Sarla Grewal, handled this chore, but only on an ad hoc basis. Now there's an additional hand—that of Gopi Arora, special secretary to the prime minister, who enjoys considerable rapport with seasoned senior IAS officers in Punjab who have long complained that they have had no direct sounding board in New Delhi for the administrative problems faced by the Barnala Government.



Conflicting Circles

● The war of bureaucratic nerves between the Prime Minister's Secretariat and the foreign office is far from over. Just as the External Affairs Ministry was recovering from the aftermath of the Venkateswaran affair in which its traditional independence was shaken, it came in for another institutional jolt. The word is out that the system of promoting and posting IFS officers—now handled by the foreign secretary—is to be scrapped. According to plans now under way, a five-member board appointed by the prime minister under the charge of the cabinet secretary will be responsible for all diplomatic postings as well as overseeing promotions. The Indian Foreign Service Association (IFSA) is strongly opposed to the proposal on the grounds that it could lead to further politicisation of the service. During the Venkateswaran episode, the IFSA demonstrated its solidarity with the outgoing foreign secretary by ignoring warnings from the prime minister's office and launching a strong protest. It looks as if another headlong clash will soon be in the making.

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

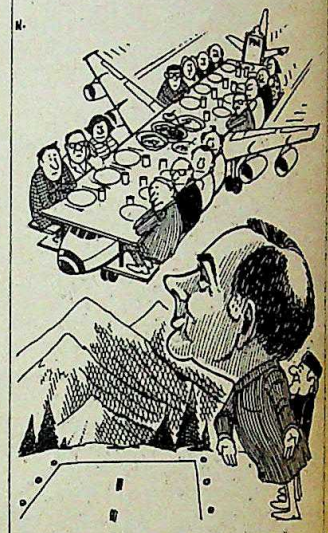


Catching Snoops

● Giani Zail Singh scored again last fortnight. And this time against the Intelligence Bureau. For the past couple of months, the President has expressed his displeasure not only over not being consulted by the prime minister on crucial affairs of state but also over what he considered to be the irritating habit of the bureau's men posted directly outside his office taking down the particulars of every single person who visited him. On the face of it, the President seemed to be getting unduly exercised over what was, after all, a routine security measure. But Rashtrapati Bhawan sources say Zail Singh was justifiably upset. The Intelligence Bureau's checks on his visitors were conducted well after they had been cleared by the President's own security set-up, and even when they were accompanied by a presidential bodyguard. Zail Singh launched his protest by phoning the deputy commissioner of police in charge of Rashtrapati Bhawan and telling him in no uncertain terms that if the additional checking of his visitors was not stopped he, the President, would consider himself under surveillance. Zail Singh's forthrightness yielded swift results. The Bureau's snoops, it is now reported, have been asked to mind their own business when it comes to keeping an eye on the President's guests in Rashtrapati Bhawan.

Thoughtful Host

● For the 15 or so top-level Soviet scientists who came to Delhi last fortnight, it must have been a strange twist in protocol. The delegation, led by the Soviet Union's top scientist, the legendary Gury Marchuk, flew in from Russia to finalise arrangements for the high-level scientific cooperation outlined during Soviet supremo Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to India. One key engagement on their agenda was a New Delhi dinner to be hosted by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. But when they reached Delhi they discovered that Rajiv was not at home. He was over in Jammu & Kashmir, campaigning for the Congress(I)-National Conference(F) coalition. But the prime minister is internationalist in spirit—his hospitality does not recognise state boundaries or distances. In a jiffy, the Soviet scientists were hustled into a specially chartered plane that flew them to Kashmir for the promised meeting. And the promised dinner. The fancy repast was laid out in the regal Raj Bhawan. And Indo-Soviet friendship was catapulted into the age of the jet-setters.



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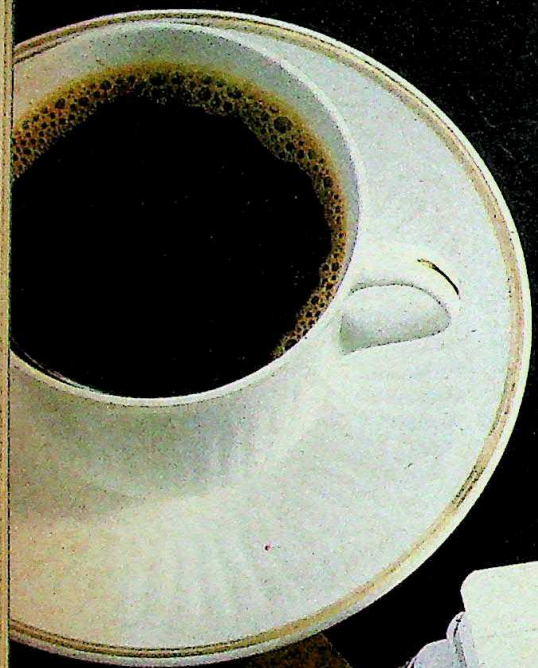

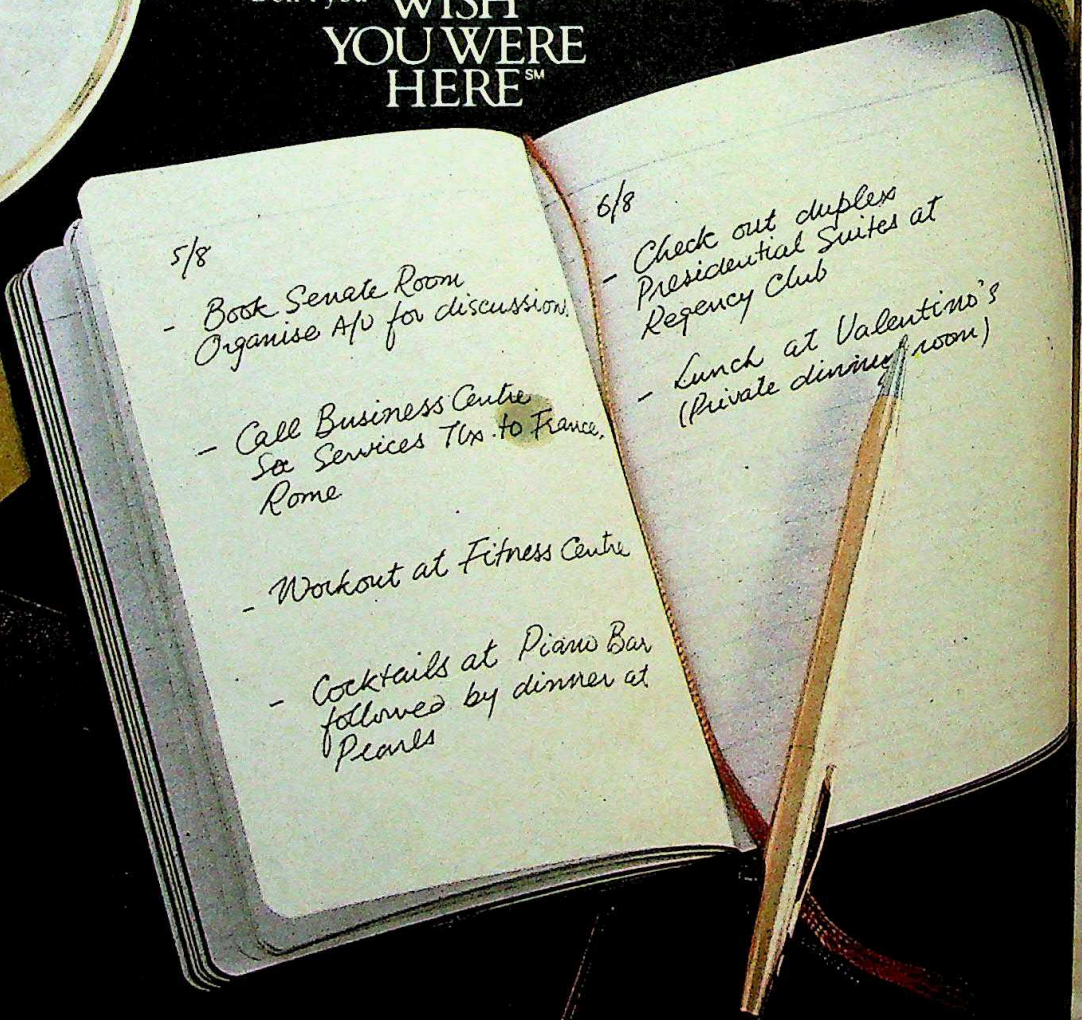

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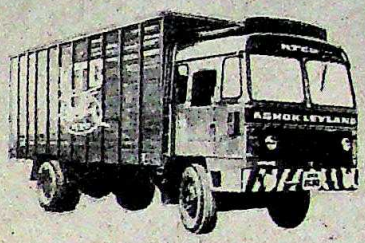
AROUND THE WORLD ONCE IN 3 HOURS



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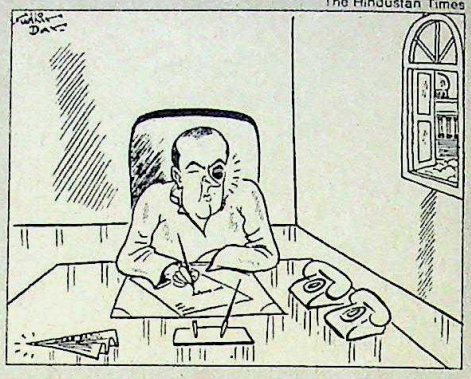

● *I appreciate the spirit behind your observations (that the President has been briefed on important issues)....But as you are aware, the factual position is somewhat at variance with what has been stated by you.*

■ President ZAIL SINGH in a letter to the prime minister

● *I have made my statement (on keeping the President informed) in the House. I stand by what I have said. My correspondence with the President is confidential as it should be.* ■ Prime Minister RAJIV GANDHI talking to newsmen in Calcutta

● *Instead of wasting its energies on taming the press, the Government will be well advised to direct them at answering the charges that the President has levelled.... The longer the Government delays answering him... the deeper will be the suspicion that it has much to hide.* ■ Editorial in the *Indian Express*

● *It is ironic that instead of honouring my client for exposing the corrupt deeds of a private business house with a Vir Chakra or its equivalent, he has been charged under the Official Secrets Act.*

■ RAM JETHMALANI, counsel for S. Gurumurthy, *Indian Express* business columnist and financial advisor

● *I am told that the play (put up by the Left Front) shows a magician conjure up a thousand crore of rupees and then make them vanish into thin air. They are right; we have produced one thousand crores of rupees for West Bengal and it is the Left Front Government which has made the sum disappear.*

■ RAJIV GANDHI electioneering in Asansol

● *It would be utterly mad of anyone in Pakistan to think that they would start hostilities with India without causing grave damage to Pakistan.*

■ HUMAYUN KHAN, Pakistan ambassador to India, quoted in *Probe India*

● *Cricket diplomacy must use cricket balls, not atomic bombs.*

■ N.D. TIWARI, at an Indian community meeting in New York, quoted in *The Hindu*

● *A woman politician in an Islamic society has problems. I can't embrace people or ruffle their hair like my father or brother used to do. Such actions often say more than words, but this camaraderie can exist only man to man.*

■ BENAZIR BHUTTO quoted in *Sunday*

● *The Indian heroine can never change, like the Indian film can never change. We're taking a trip in the same boat. There's the goody-goody girl on the one side, the vamp on the other and that's it.* ■ REKHA in *Sunday Review*

● *An Indo-Pak series is like no other and neutral umpires are a must for the future of such series. It will clear the air and remove the tension.*

■ IMRAN KHAN, captain, Pakistan cricket team

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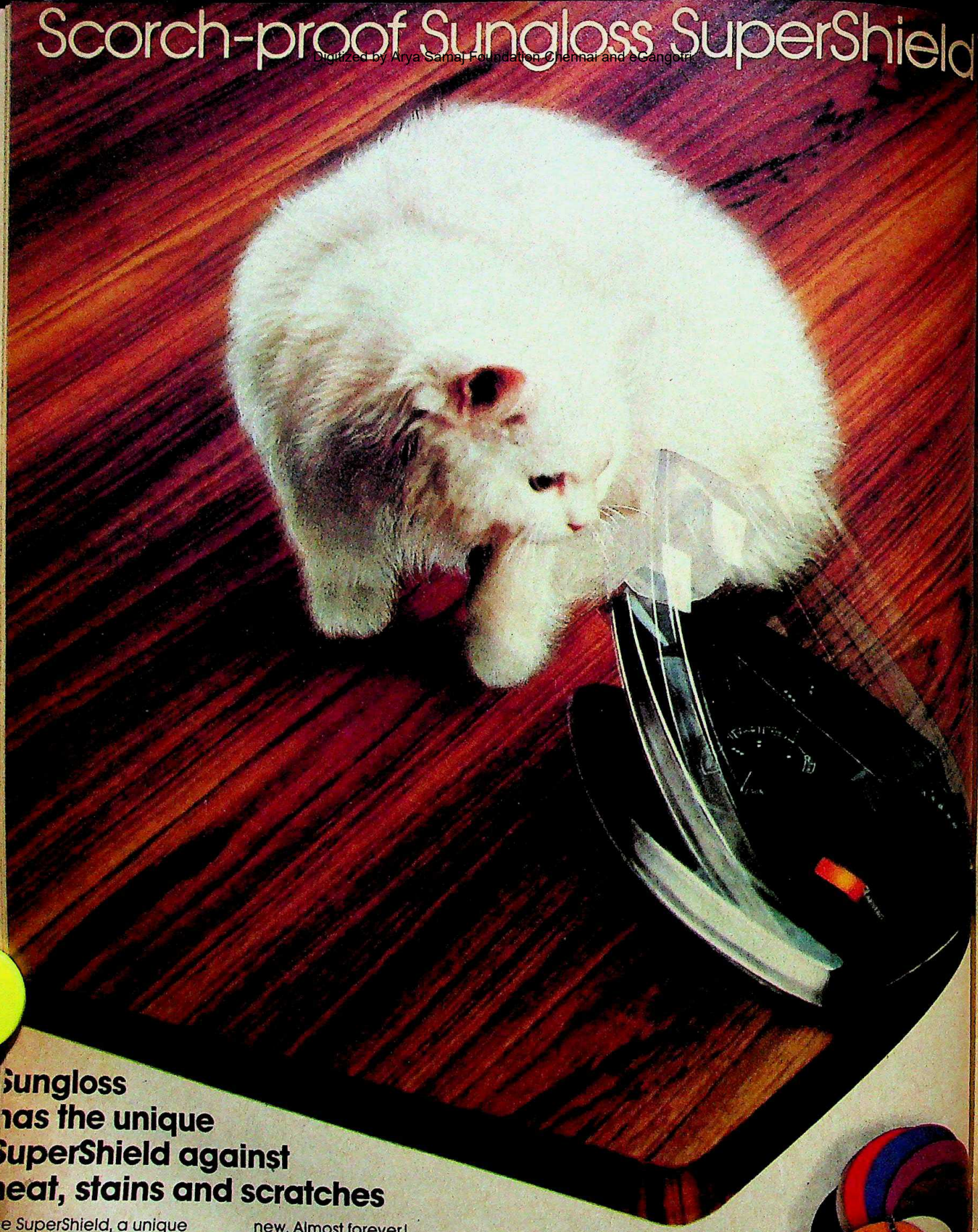

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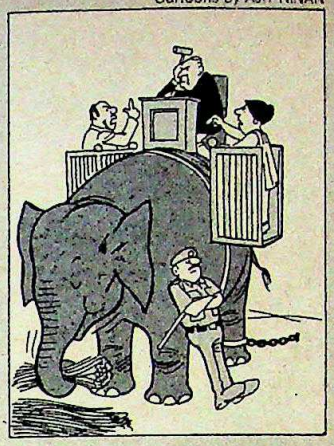
Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

JUMBO PROBLEM

■ 'Own an elephant on a hire-purchase basis,' said the advertisement in a Bombay city daily. Most readers would have just turned the page but the Pathak family succumbed to the tempting offer. Money soon changed hands and the pachyderm came home—on loan, of course, till the entire sum was paid up. This should have been yet another story with a



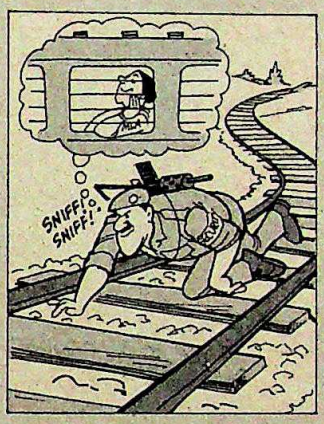
'and-they-all-lived-happily-ever-after' ending but for the untimely demise of Mr Pathak. The wife, poor woman, suddenly found herself left behind with an elephantine problem.

But the dealer had only one thing on his mind. He plagued the family for days, demanding either payment or the elephant. And one morning, tired of pleading, he decided to stealthily retrieve what was his from the Pathaks. The lady saw it as a case of kidnapping and rushed to the police claiming that her pet was "forcibly confined" by the dealer and his accomplices. The police issued a search warrant and the dealer petitioned the Bombay High Court to quash it—every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Now, while the law takes its course, the elephant is spending its time in the sanctuary of the police station.

DOGGED GUARD

■ Most individuals provided with a bodyguard for security reasons would probably heave a sigh of relief. But a lady MLA in Madhya Pradesh found the brawny appendage at her elbow a plain nuisance. Ever since the powers that be thrust a guard on her—she was on the terrorists' hit list—she has been trying to shake off her shadow. She first appealed to the district police stating she did not feel threatened at all. But they said they couldn't call off bodyguards allotted by the state police headquarters.

The legislator was determined not to give up without a fight—and put into effect an elaborate scheme. On the pretext of meeting the officer on duty, she paid a visit to the local police station. She then told her bodyguard to inform

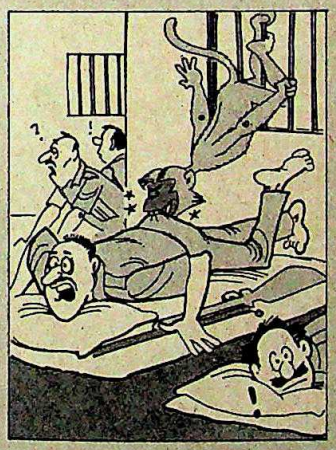


the officer she wished to meet him. As the bodyguard moved off, the lady vanished. She zipped to the railway station, flashed her pass and boarded a waiting train for Bhopal.

But the long arm of the law is not so easily shaken off. The bodyguard reached Bhopal and got back on duty—dogging his lady's footsteps. The lady conceded defeat but is still visiting the police station asking how they knew.

MONKEY MOVES

■ The police in Munger, Bihar, have never been so busy. They are all hell-bent on the elusive trail of a monkey. Sounds funny, but it is reported that the force have never taken its job as seriously as this time. The cause for all this charged activity is a primate that has been indiscriminately harassing and biting policemen. There have been some other victims but



the monkey seems to have an eye on humans in uniform. At the last count, he had set a new record: 35 victims—almost all of them policemen—in three days.

Naturally, the arbitrariness of his choice has upset the police force. At first, they thought it was the colour of their uniform and petitioned for a change. But as time went by, they discovered that even some of their men in civies had proved juicy targets for the monkey.

The monkey, it appeared, was not content with catching men on the move, but was game for a raid even at night. On one well-remembered occasion, the raider entered the barracks while everyone, including the sentry on duty, slept, and bit an unsuspecting cop. The man's anguished shriek woke everyone, but the culprit melted away into the darkness. Out of sight, but definitely not out of mind.

MALE SALE

■ A banner announcing a sale, even if it is only a 5 per cent discount on seconds, is like a pot of honey attracting ants. Last fortnight, in the same spirit of thrift, a 'Grand Bumper Sale—30 per cent off on Bridegrooms' was announced and the crowds rolled in. Over 3,000 girls collected at a local government college to bid and buy at throwaway prices bridegrooms on sale. An added attraction was a free kerosene stove. The event, organised by the Nonsense Club of Chandigarh, was a part of the festivities for International Women's Day on March 8.

'Our prices are controlled and our products guaranteed', a banner proclaimed. Underneath bedecked bridegrooms ranging from civil servants to clerks stood anx-

iously. Each had a price-tag, with the original and discounted prices. Some 'pieces' being auctioned had only an original price.

As bidding began, the girls joined in. But nothing, not even a doctor whose original price was Rs 3.50 lakh, was bid for more than Re 1. The price the public decided on for the hapless doctor was half a rupee. A rough deal indeed for bridegrooms.

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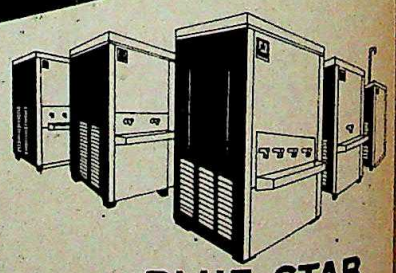

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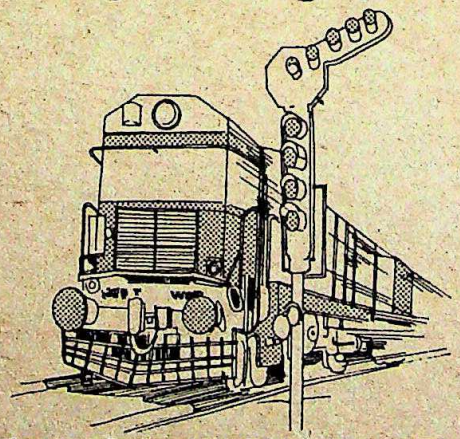

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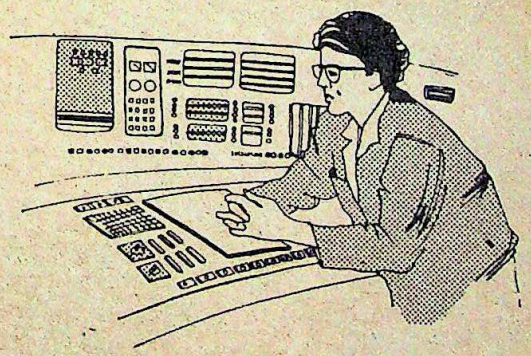

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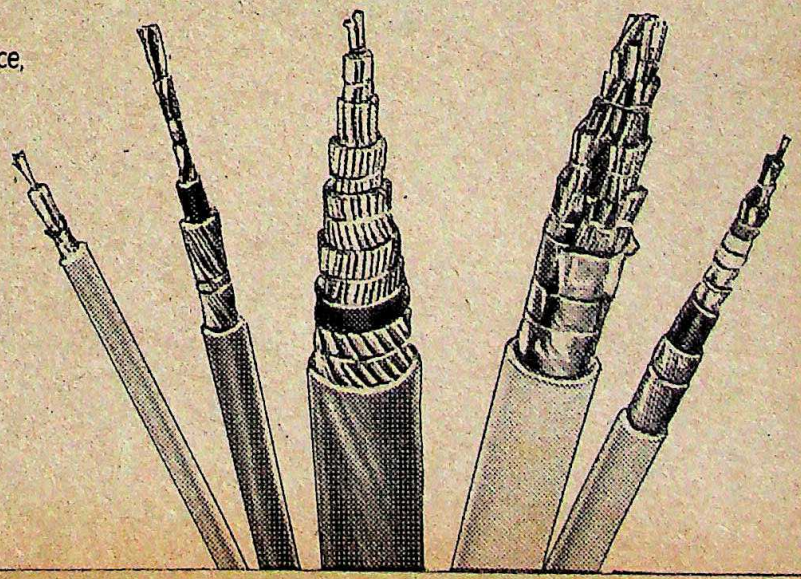

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PM-PRESIDENT MEETING

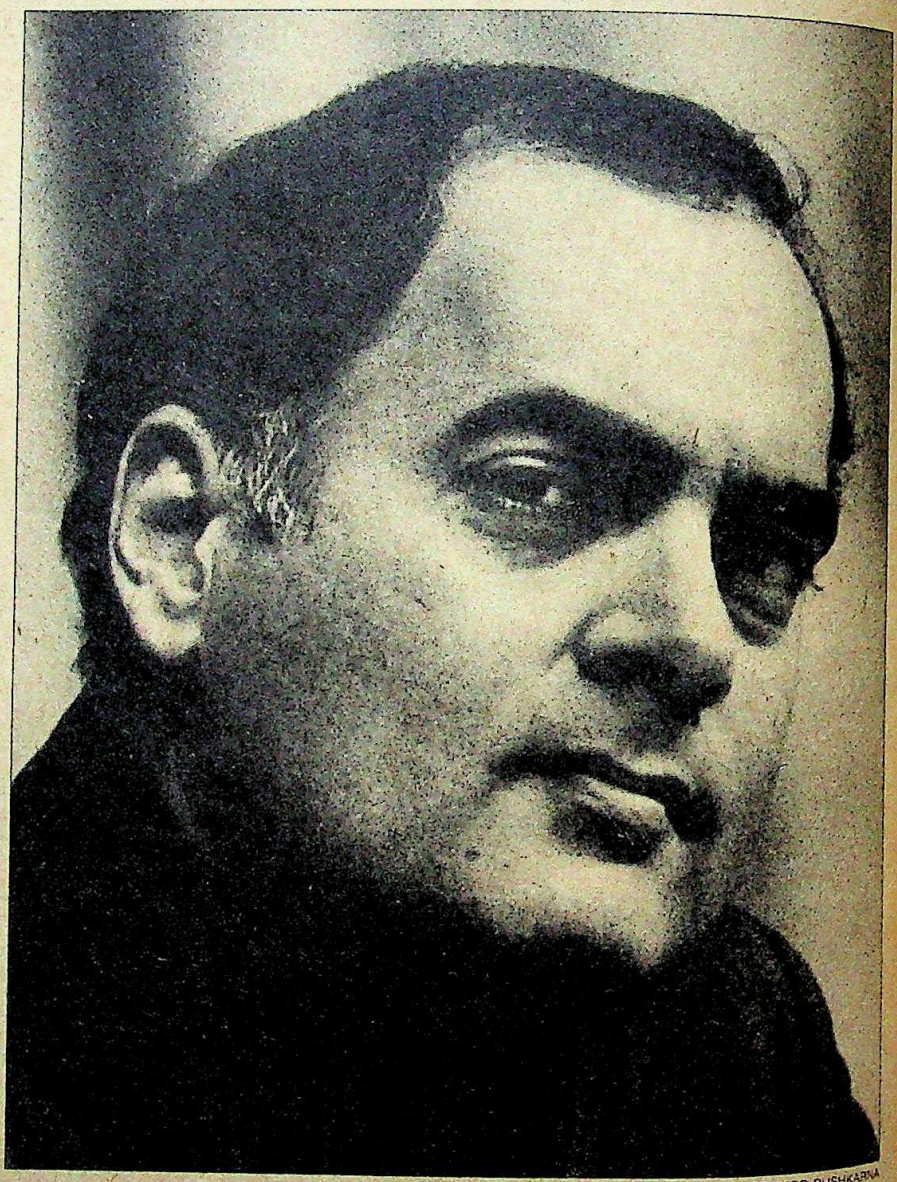
Unresolved

"I will meet the President when it is necessary to do so."
—Rajiv Gandhi on March 27

THE necessity arose less than 20 hours later. Even while the prime minister was making that face-saving statement at a press conference in Bangalore, his aides were sounding out the President for a meeting with the prime minister to call a temporary cease-fire in the escalating cold war between the chief executive and the head of state. The request was immediately granted. And, when Rajiv finally met President Giani Zail Singh at 12.15 p.m. the next day in the President's ground floor study room at Rashtrapati Bhawan, the meeting turned out to be a marathon one—the longest ever between a prime minister and the President since Independence.

The 130-minute meeting marked the first time the country's two top functionaries had ever met for such a long period without aides and covered such a wide range of subjects, from their personal relationship to external threats. The seriousness and the urgency attached to the long overdue meeting was evident in the fact that both of them had to miss lunch. And, when the two emerged smiling with hands clasped, it appeared that a major constitutional crisis had been averted. Said one of the President's aides: "The President, it seems, has accepted the prime minister's assertion that he respects the President." Signals also went out from the prime minister's office that the rift between the prime minister and the President had been amicably settled.

But that was evidently at odds with the truth. The all-important meeting may have succeeded in forging a temporary truce but the crisis is far from over. INDIA TODAY has learnt that during the meeting, the two leaders did manage to smooth over their personal differences but disagreed sharply over the role of the President. Both went into the meeting fully briefed and with the express intention of outscoring one another. Both quoted the



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

RAJIV GANDHI ◆ ZAIL SINGH

"I consider that it is the duty of all right thinking people to keep the Presidency above partisan politics and controversy."

"In fact, the politicisation (of the President's office) was started by a member of the ruling party in April 1985 who was later made a minister."

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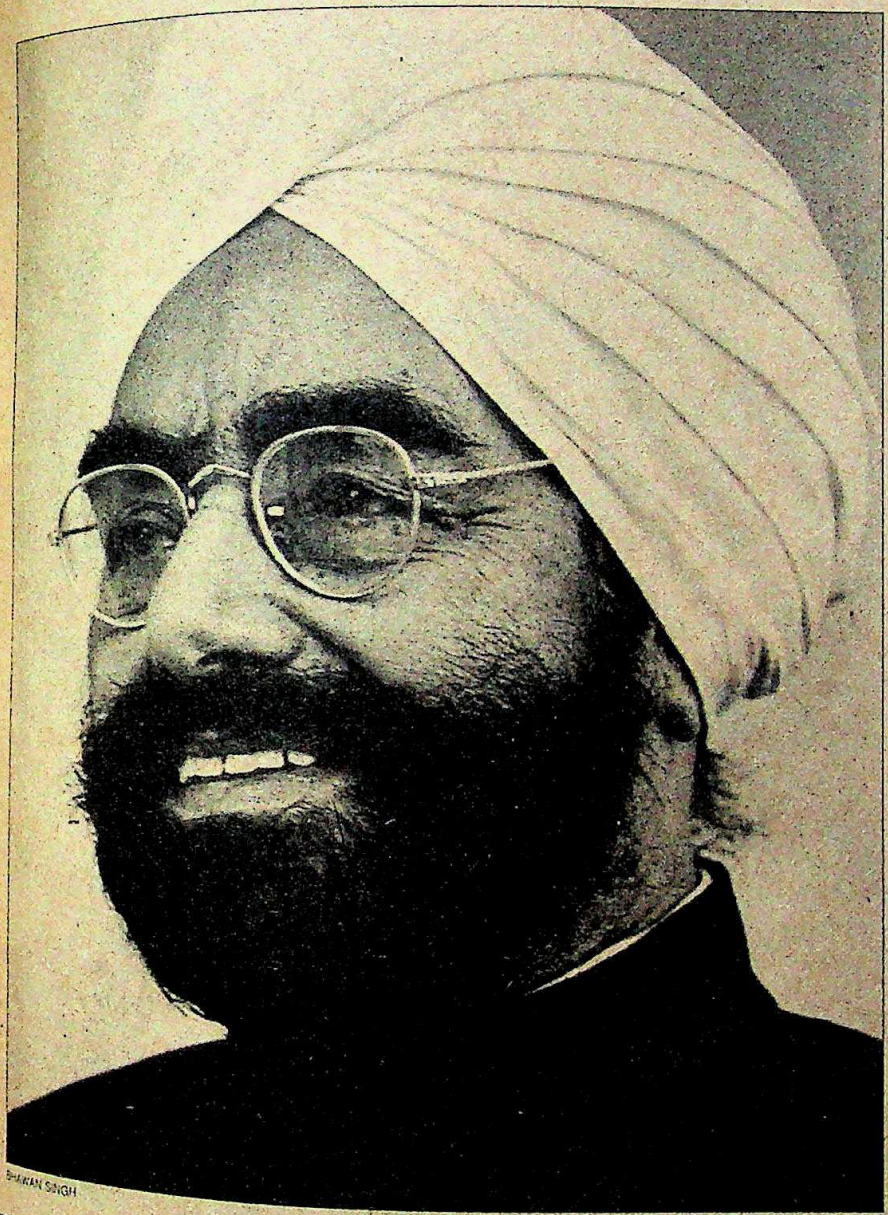
Controversy



BHAWAN SINGH

Constitution extensively to support their respective views which centred around the key question: whether the President has the right to be informed on all issues of national importance? Rajiv insisted that it was for the Government to decide what information was to be made available to the President. Zail Singh asserted that the Government could not deny him information on any subject if he asked for it.

According to unofficial sources, Rajiv assured the President that he respected him but stuck to the position that he was not bound by the Constitution to send information on all matters to him. He repeated his fears that information was being leaked from Rashtrapati Bhawan and also argued against supplying the Thakkar Commission report to the President saying that if leaked out, it would affect the course of court proceedings in the Indira Gandhi murder case. Rajiv is also believed to have complained that the President was meeting too many opposition leaders and Congress dissidents.

The President, on his part, asserted that the Government could not deny him any specific information if he sought it. He also bluntly told the prime minister that it was from the prime minister's office that the espionage ring was exposed in 1985 and that the head of the personal staff was rewarded with the post of a high commissioner later on. The President recalled instances where the prime minister did not turn up for discussions despite promises. The meeting failed to arrive at a consensus on how the problems between them could be resolved.

That Zail Singh was irked and determined to give as good as he got was evident in their meeting earlier the same day—at the investiture ceremony for Padma Shri awardees. At the informal get-together after the ceremony, the prime minister and the President came face-to-face in a gathering of Union ministers and journalists. There was laughter and bonhomie and the President quoted much Urdu poetry. But it was clear that he was using the occasion to make as many

RAJIV GANDHI ◆ ZAIL SINGH

"When we had a confrontation with Pakistan in the middle of January, I myself briefed the President. I asked the Defence Minister to go and brief the President."

"There was no formal briefing by the prime minister. He only had an informal chat in the car at the airport where the prime minister had gone to receive foreign dignitaries."

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digs as he could about the controversy, to the obvious discomfort of the prime minister. When a journalist asked Zail Singh: "In view of this pleasant exchange, will you still need to write letters to the prime minister?", he countered: "We will continue to write letters till we are alive. And you know when our letters will be published? Eighty years hence." Here, the prime minister offered meekly: "After 50 years." The President pleaded: "Kindly spare us. Several letters are written. Somebody got hold of one and published it." The irrepressible President went on: "It does not matter how many years. What is certain is neither he will remain prime minister nor I President. But the office of prime minister and President will still be there."

He then commented on some ministers being returned to Parliament from states other than their home states: pointing to Narasimha Rao, he said he belongs to Andhra Pradesh but got elected from Maharashtra. As Rajiv looked more and more uncomfortable, Singh burst into an Urdu couplet: "If the saaqi (female wine-pourer in a tavern) keeps showering all her blessings only on those she favours, the tavern will soon be empty."

An hour later the two leaders had their decisive meeting. While it seems to have succeeded in lowering the temperature of the crisis temporarily, elsewhere there were indications that the rift was assuming serious proportions. The meeting was preceded by a major parliamentary confrontation between the Opposition and presiding officers of the two houses and hectic mediatory efforts by senior ministers and leading Congressmen following the publication of a letter written by Zail Singh to Rajiv in the media.

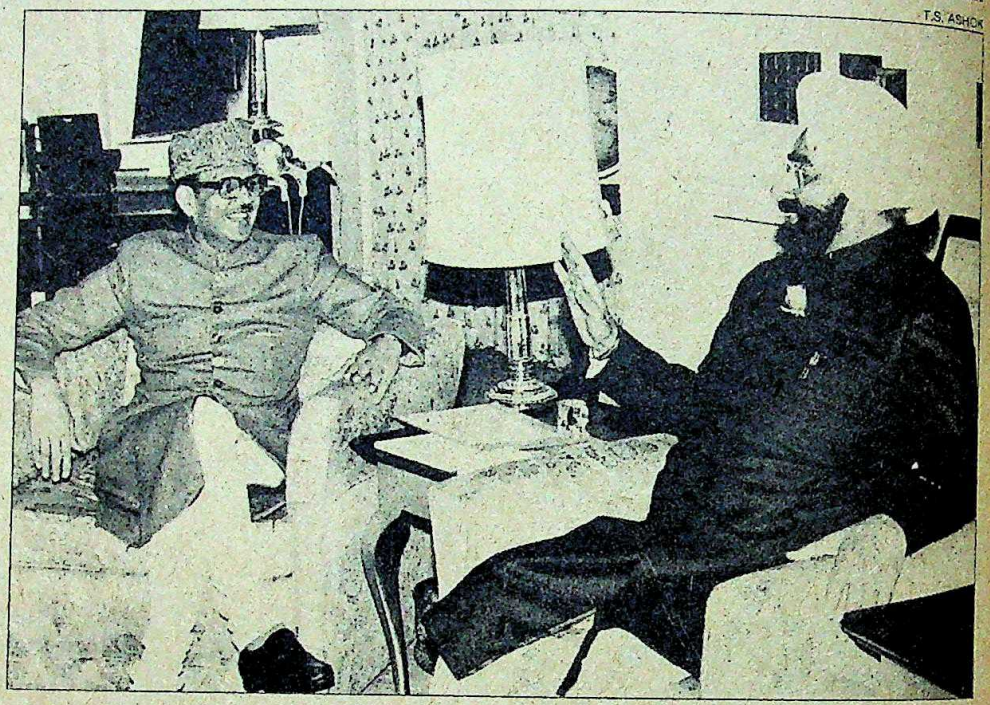
Though the Rajiv-Zail confrontation had been brewing for some months (INDIA TODAY, January 31), it boiled over when the President decided to challenge the prime minister's assertion in Parliament that the President was kept informed on all issues, by writing a detailed letter to Rajiv refuting his statement. The prime minister sat on the letter for over a week. When he finally replied, his letter was more an assertion of his earlier stand in Parliament rather than a point-by-point answer to the questions raised by the President. The prime minister also avoided answering the basic question raised by the President: that he had the right to be informed on each subject.

On the face of it, the question was not insoluble. But the personal mistrust and hostility evident between the two soured the prospects of the issue being settled so easily. More crucial, it has led to a situation where the prime minister's supporters and the President's aides have resorted to publicising their leaders' views in the media. The strategy of the prime minister's advisers was to tackle the presidential challenge in two ways—an anti-Zail publicity blitz in the media and the use of selective mediators to prevent the President from embarrassing the Government before last week's assembly elections.

The messy and sometimes clumsy media war began soon after the President refused to sign the Indian Post Office (Amendment) Bill. As a counter, secret government files were made available to journalists stating that Zail Singh had no moral right to refuse consent to the bill as he himself as home minister had piloted a similar bill. The President waited for his moment, which arrived when the prime minister, in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, repeated his earlier statement that the Government was not ignoring the President. Once the prime minister committed himself on the floor of the House, the President shot off his letter, which was also duly leaked to the press.

The prime minister's advisers immedi-

T.S. ASHOK



V.P. Singh with Zail: go between

RAJIV GANDHI ◆ ZAIL SINGH

"There is no time when issues of national interest are kept away from the President. Let me also say that our ministers have been meeting the President continuously."

"Even on certain domestic issues like accords in Punjab, Mizoram and Assam, the head of the state was not informed."

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ately pounced on the leak to support their stand that it was not safe to send confidential information to the President. An attempt was made to browbeat the President by planting inspired rumours that the Government had, in fact, been lenient to the President whose role had been commented upon by the Thakkar Commission. It was also alleged that the President, by attacking the prime minister, was trying to get himself struck off the hit list of Sikh terrorists.

The propaganda against the President continued. Opposition parties, however, failed to force a discussion on the rift in Parliament. Attempts to do so were successfully stonewalled by the presiding officers and Congress(I) MPs. For over a week, the opposition parties angrily protested and staged walk-outs to try and convince Speaker Balram Jakhar and Chairman R. Venkataraman to allow discussion, but to no avail. Even a privilege motion against the prime minister was turned down. Jakhar and Venkataraman gave identical rulings. Venkataraman insisted that the discussion on the letter was not advisable because, "confidentiality of the communication between the President and the prime minister is maintained in the larger interest of democracy and the nation". And in the Lok Sabha, Jakhar declared: "I am absolutely clear in my mind that any debate on the floor of the House which brings the name of the President into any controversy or which tends to discuss the relationship between the President and his council of ministers must be avoided at all costs in the wider interests of the nation."

BHAWAN SINGH

Tripathi with Rajiv: sound advice

The government determination to stall any discussion on the subject in Parliament is obviously to Rajiv's advantage. Rashtrapati Bhawan records clearly show that the prime minister has met the President only twice before to brief him on various issues. In fact, the prime minister has never briefed the President personally before or after any of his over two dozen trips abroad. Nor did he inform the President about his talks with super-powers' leaders Reagan and Gorbachev. Though the Government may have some justification in not consulting the President on Punjab affairs, he has also not been briefed on the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka.

Opposition leaders quote constitutional provisions stating that the President was within his rights to demand information from the Government. Article 74: "There shall be a council of ministers with the prime minister at the head to aid and advise the President in the exercise of his functions." Article 78(A): "It shall be the duty of the prime minister to communicate to the President all decisions of the Council of Ministers relating to the administration. Article 78(B): "It shall be the duty of the prime minister to furnish such information relating to the administration of the Union and proposals for legislation as the President may call for."

Though Zail Singh held back from doing so, he would have been within his constitutional rights in sending a message to Parliament on the issue, thus forcing the Government's hand. Article 86 states that the President has the right to send messages to the two houses because without the President the Parliament is not complete. The Opposition was clearly hoping he would send the message, in which case, the issue would perforce have to be discussed.

But the battle between the two was clearly not one of constitutional niceties but one of political conveniences—as was evident soon after the assembly election results had come in. The prime minister, who could have seen the President soon after electioneering was over, sent emissaries instead. Minister of State for Surface

RAJIV GANDHI ◆ ZAIL SINGH

"It has been the tradition of the Congress to accord the highest respect to the office of the President."

"The prime minister has not been responding to the requests for formal meetings with the President on certain important issues."

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Transport Rajesh Pilot was pulled out of electioneering to meet the President. During his half-hour meeting he assured Zail Singh that the prime minister would soon call on him. He also pledged that in future, the Government would keep the President's office fully informed.

Four days later, the prime minister sent another emissary, his most respected Cabinet Minister, Vishwanath Pratap Singh. Though the President had earlier summoned Singh himself, the defence minister came to Rashtrapati Bhawan only when the prime minister asked him to intervene on his behalf. Singh pleaded with the President not to precipitate the crisis as the prime minister himself was willing to defuse it. Between these meetings, Kamalapati Tripathi, the ousted working president of the Congress(I), also met the President and wrote to both the leaders requesting them to bury the hatchet, saying: "It is in the interest of both the party and the Government that the dispute is amicably solved."

The President, meanwhile, was dealing his own political cards. He sent individual invitation cards to all the 750-odd MPs for a farewell dinner before he bows out of office in end-July. The idea was to solicit discreetly the opinion of both the ruling and opposition MPs on the issue. He also hinted that he was not satisfied with the prime minister's reply and was considering either writing to him again or sending a message directly to Parliament.

But the electoral reverses for the Congress in West Bengal and Kerala, followed by the resignation of Union law minister Asoke Sen, changed the situation dramatically. Rajiv decided to meet the President but the ensuing conversation gave little hope that the controversy is over.

Though he had accepted Rajiv's assurance that he would henceforth receive full respect from the Government, sources close to the President say he is clearly doubtful of its implementation. His doubts are based on the thin attendance of Congress MPs at his dinner last week. Only 34 of the 70 MPs turned up. Prominent absentees included Union ministers Janardan Poojary, Shankaranand, Ghulam Nabi Azad and AICC General-Secretary Bhagwat Jha Azad. While over 90 per cent of opposition MPs responded to his subsequent invitations, less than 25 per cent of the Congress(I) MPs showed up. Said a pro-Zail Singh MP from Uttar Pradesh: "Respect to the President can't be shown in a private room. It has to be visible. If the prime minister was sincere he could have issued a whip to MPs to attend. Signals should have gone to civil servants and ministers to honour the Presidency. It's just a time-buying technique."

With both sides unwilling to give in, last week's truce is clearly all too temporary. If this meeting is not followed up by further goodwill gestures on either side, it could lead to serious tensions resurfacing. The Government has the option of withdrawing the controversial Post Censorship Bill to avoid confrontation with the President. Rajiv can also show he is serious about resolving the crisis by visiting Rashtrapati Bhawan more frequently. In the mood Zail Singh is, if he continues to feel humiliated he might hit back by sending the bills and all the correspondence exchanged between him and the Government on various subjects directly to Parliament for discussion.

The confrontation has already raised serious and fundamental questions about the working of the Constitution. An active judiciary, a vigilant media and the President are expected to act as checks on the executive. With both the President and the judiciary rendered ineffective and the media under pressure from the Government, the checks are gradually being eroded. With the Opposition in disarray, the potential for mischief is even greater. The ruling party has also shown that it is not prepared to tolerate internal criticism. Those who have dared to do so have been dismissed or sidelined. Further, the Congress Parliamentary Board and the Working Committee hardly ever meet to review the performance of the Government.

Last week's electoral results have injected a new element into the current crisis. With the ruling party weakened and Rajiv's personal image having taken a battering, a confrontation with the President is the last thing the country needs. More so when it clearly seems to be a battle in which there will be no winners, only losers. —PRABHU CHAWLA

"Confidentiality of communication between the President and the PM is in the nation's interest."
R. VENKATARAMAN

"Any debate in the House which brings the President's name into a controversy must be avoided."
BALRAM JHAKAR

RAJIV GANDHI ◆ ZAIL SINGH

"Information on all important matters was given to the President. There is no question of keeping the President outside."

"Home Minister Buta Singh backed out of his own promise of sending reports of various commissions like Mishra and Thakkar."

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ZAIL vs RAJIV

No Winners

NOT since the controversy over the Hindu Code Bill in the 1950s has the country witnessed such a clear difference of opinion between the President and the prime minister. And even the dispute between Rajendra Prasad and Jawaharlal Nehru was not as embarrassingly public as the one now between Zail Singh and Rajiv Gandhi—though there was a leak of a Presidential letter even then.

Inevitably, the dispute, the controversy in Parliament and the resulting national debate have seen sharply polarised opinion on the merits and demerits of the various stands taken by the President, the prime minister and the Speaker of the Lok Sabha.

To assess public opinion on the entire range of issues involved, INDIA TODAY *commissioned* MARG *(Marketing and Research Group Pvt Ltd), the leading independent market research company, to conduct a street-corner poll in the four metropolitan cities of Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras. On March 23 and 24,* MARG *interviewers fanned out over a large number of localities in each city and interviewed a total of 1,116 adults (men and women), each with a monthly income of over Rs 1,000. While a poll in the four metropolitan cities cannot be said to be representative of the rest of the country, it certainly indicates the views of the most politically conscious segment of the electorate.*

NEITHER the President nor the prime minister (nor, for that matter the Speaker of the Lok Sabha) has emerged with great credit from the messy controversy that has followed the publication by the *Indian Express* of the President's letter to the prime minister. Rajiv, however, has got a serious credibility problem.

Despite the barrage of interviews, statements and theories of conspiracy in the press, opinion is evenly divided on whether Rajiv was speaking the truth in Parliament when he said that he had briefed the President adequately on all major issues. Though Rajiv's credibility among men is relatively low, he should be grateful for a greater measure of support among women.

In any case, there is little doubt that the poll respondents wish to know the truth as the balance of opinion is clearly against the speaker's blanket ruling that no debate can or will be permitted on any communication between the President and the prime minister. In fact, the respondents, by a narrow margin, support the Opposition's intention to move a motion of no confidence against the Government on this issue.

It is perhaps a comment on political morality in the largest democracy in the world that an overwhelming majority of respondents feel that even if the prime minister has lied to Parliament, there is no need for him to resign. What would a Profumo or a Nixon have given for such a supportive electorate!

Respondents also voted decisively against impeaching Zail Singh because of his role in the dispute. Yet, in the minds of a clear majority of the respondents, the prestige of the President's office has been lowered by this dispute. Significantly, the electors apportion blame almost equally to the two main characters in the drama—with the balance of opinion among women swinging in favour of the prime minister and the men tilting towards the President.

As for the *Express*, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has maintained that its raid on and arrest of S. Gurumurthy (the man who has run a campaign in the *Express* against Reliance Industries) were in connection with the violation of the Official Secrets Act and the Reliance affair. The *Indian Express*, on the other hand, has attributed the actions of the CBI to the publication of the President's letter. That the CBI's credibility is rather low is evidenced by the fact that the respondents, by a two-to-one majority, plump for the *Express* version of events.

The findings of the INDIA TODAY—MARG poll suggest that the present controversy has caused considerable damage to the institution of the Presidency. But Zail Singh emerges in a better light than Rajiv Gandhi. And the finding that around half the respondents believe that the prime minister lied to Parliament and want the speaker to remove the shackles on the discussion of the letter should give Rajiv and his advisors some points to ponder.

Table by RAJEEV MADAN

POLL RESULTS

		Men	Women	Total
	Sample Size	591	525	1,116
The PM's statement to Parliament about his relations with the President.	True	39	47	43
	False	47	34	41
If the PM has lied to Parliament, should he resign?	Yes	23	16	20
	No	70	75	72
The speaker's ruling forbidding discussion on the controversy.	Agree	44	43	44
	Disagree	50	48	49
Is the Opposition justified in moving a motion of no confidence?	Yes	50	40	45
	No	42	42	42
Should the President be impeached because of his role in the controversy?	Yes	22	25	23
	No	64	56	60
Has the prestige of the President's office been lowered?	Yes	55	53	54
	No	39	39	39
Who is more responsible for lowering the prestige?	President	25	33	29
	PM	36	25	31
	Both	33	35	34
Raid on Goenka/arrest of Gurumurthy: whose version of raid/arrest more credible?	CBI	22	29	25
	Express	53	45	49
	Neither	12	11	12

'Don't knows' excluded

All figures are in Percentages

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EXPRESS CASE

PANDORA'S BOX

THE action was 70mm all the way: front page newspaper campaigns, shadowy roles by prime minister's buddies, rumours of ministerial resignations, bitter business rivalries and dare-devil officials being penalised. In a swiftly developing story, there were also raids, arrests, charges of foreign exchange skullduggery, cloak-and-dagger detective work across continents and secret code names. If even that weren't enough, there were accusations of forgery, court-room drama, calculated leaks to an excited press and—perhaps inevitably—bare-faced lies. Even a writer of potboilers would have had to stretch his imagination to dream up such a plot, such a canvas and such a cast.

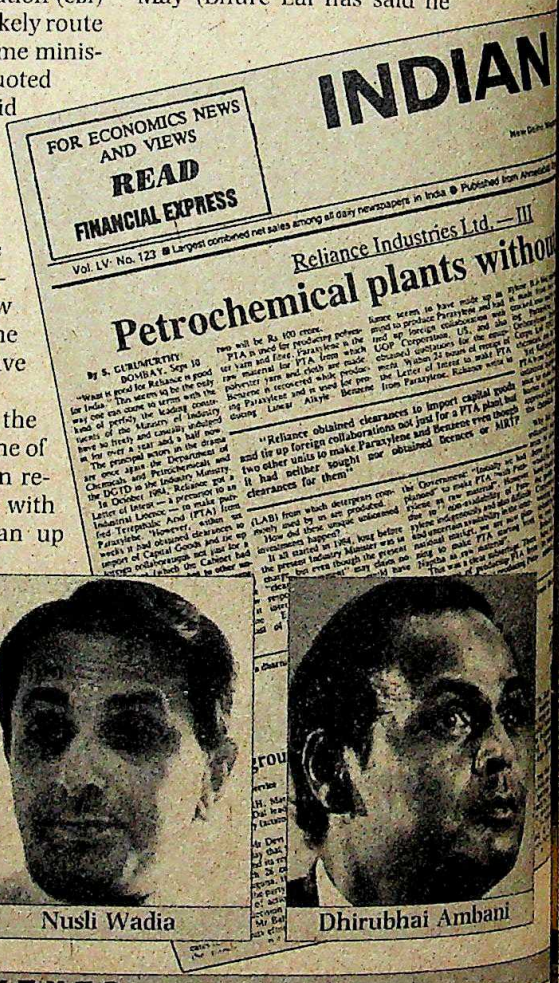
The air has begun to clear a bit, after a concentrated burst of gunfire. But in other ways the plot still thickens. And no one knows as yet how exactly the curtain will finally ring down on a saga that started one mellow March morning last year, when the *Indian Express* began its shrill campaign against the high-flying if controversial Reliance Industries.

What provoked last fortnight's frenzied action was a photocopy of a brief letter that has been denounced as a forgery, and which investigating officials say will now be subjected to a forensic test. Purportedly written by Gordon McKay, vice-president of an American detective outfit called Fairfax Group, the letter was addressed to *Express* columnist S. Gurumurthy and talked of investigating the "Swiss properties of Bachchan". It also talked of *Express* Chairman R.N. Goenka and Bombay Dyeing Chairman Nusli Wadia (a Reliance rival) paying Fairfax half a million dollars abroad, and of a 'Dr Harris' from Fairfax having visited India. All this in completely unguarded fashion—as though the 'letter' was meant to be used in other ways. As McKay told INDIA TODAY in Annandale: "To write such a letter would be a stupid, unprofessional thing to do. Like putting a gun to your own head."

How the 'letter' came into the hands of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) remains a secret, but the most likely route seems to have been via the prime minister's office. A senior official quoted the prime minister as having said matter-of-factly about the letter: "Look into it." If the prime minister did get the letter, who gave it to him? Was it his friend Amitabh Bachchan, whose 'Swiss properties' Fairfax was allegedly investigating? If so, how did Bachchan get it? And if the letter was fake, who could have forged it?

Whether genuine or fake, the letter served to take the lid off one of the most dramatic sequences in recent Indian history, coinciding with V.P. Singh's campaign to clean up Indian business.

Singh's striking arm was the Enforcement Directorate, headed by the dreaded Bhure Lal—who decided (like Gurumurthy) that Reliance needed to be investigated. He and Gurumurthy were soon in touch with each other, and if the CBI is to be believed both went to London last May (Bhure Lal has said he


INDIAN

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Reliance Industries Ltd. — III

Petrochemical plants without

By S. GURUMURTHY

BOMBAY, Sept 18

"Reliance obtained clearances to import capital goods and tie up foreign collaborations not just for a PTA plant but two other units to make Paraxylene and Benzene even though it had neither bought nor obtained licences or MRTP clearances for them."

S. Gurumurthy

Nusli Wadia

Dhirubhai Ambani

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

1986

MARCH

- *Indian Express* and its columnist S. Gurumurthy begin their campaign against Reliance Industries.

MAY

- Enforcement Director Bhure Lal and Gurumurthy visit London, perhaps on different dates, to investigate Reliance.

JULY

- Reliance file vanishes from DGTD office for two weeks.

AUGUST

- Ajitabh Bachchan leaves to

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went alone), looking for evidence that some investment companies in the Isle of Man were actually owned by Reliance Chairman Dhirubhai Ambani.

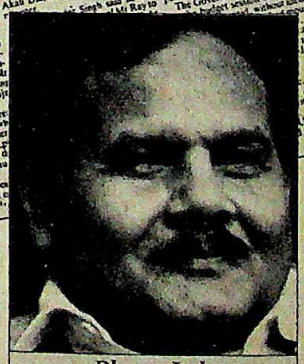
But the companies had been wound up, and new ones had taken their place elsewhere on the globe. Gurumurthy screamed this out on the front page of the *Express* shortly after his return. Bhure Lal then made a second trip abroad, but once again returned empty-handed. A well-informed source said that Bhure Lal did not quite know how to go about making inquiries abroad on financial deals hidden behind clever smokescreens.

Gurumurthy's arrest took the lid off a dramatic case involving US sleuths, Rajiv's friends, a cabinet minister, his trusted officials, and prominent businessmen.

But Bhure Lal was not a man to give up easily, and in September he and the Revenue Department suggested to V.P. Singh that the only way out might be to hire three detective agencies abroad—to look into Reliance, as well as some deals by the Tatas, Goenkas and Chhabrias. But V.P. Singh demurred, apparently because of the likely cost, and asked Bhure Lal to try again.

Meanwhile, the thought of turning to a private detective agency seems to have occurred to Gurumurthy as well. And in October, Gurumurthy was on his way to New York—mainly to look into some problems concerning some machinery that *Indian Express* had ordered, but also to scout around for detective agencies. Several names were suggested to him, including Fairfax, but Gurumurthy says he found they were all too expensive for him, and that he did not even contact Fairfax.

Amitabh Bachchan


Bhure Lal

V.P. Singh

(But in one of the several contradictions that abound in the story, McKay told INDIA TODAY in Virginia: "There could be some truth in that. But the whole thing did not proceed in this manner." For good measure, Gurumurthy also says somewhat contradictorily that he contacted Fairfax on behalf of the Enforcement Directorate.)

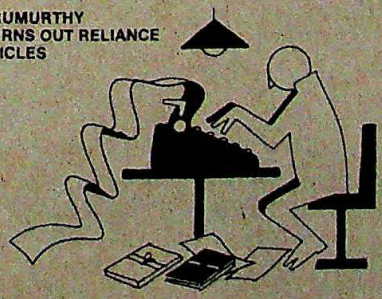
On returning to New Delhi, Gurumurthy suggested that Bhure Lal hire Fairfax for the Government. And in the last week of December, that is precisely what the enforcement director did—after his own inquiries in Washington.

He probably made a good choice. In the four years of its existence, Fairfax Group has already made a name for itself, especially for handling government work. Operating from quiet, obscure Annandale, nestling in the lush green Virginia countryside (with 420 as an office suite number), Fairfax has earned the respect of its competitors. Said one: "Fairfax is new, but it has a great reputation. They have some of the best minds on their staff when it comes to government-related investigations."

But even before Bhure Lal hired Fairfax, the 'Dr Harris' in McKay's letter did indeed visit India. Harris was none other than Fairfax President Michael Hershman. And he stayed from November 14 to 17 in room 130 at the Oberoi in New Delhi—where (though he denies it—*see interview*) he met Gurumurthy, Goenka, Bhure Lal and others.

McKay's letter to Gurumurthy is purportedly written after this visit. McKay's reference in the letter to Nusli Wadia's involvement may be wholly fiction (as Wadia insists it is), but the fact is that it was Bombay Dyeing which booked Hershman's room for him at the Oberoi (which too Wadia denies). If the *Express* wanted to use Hershman to dig into Reliance affairs, and if a business rival like Wadia was involved, it put the newspaper's campaign against Reliance in a somewhat coloured light.

GURUMURTHY CHURNS OUT RELIANCE ARTICLES



take up residence in Switzerland.

SEPTEMBER

- Gurumurthy quotes extensively from government files in further Reliance articles.
- V.P. Singh denies Bhure Lal permission to hire detective agencies.

OCTOBER

- Gurumurthy visits New York, looks for detective agencies.
- Reliance Chairman D.H. Ambani meets Rajiv Gandhi, and road-blocked Reliance proposals start getting cleared.

NOVEMBER

- 'Dr Harris' (Michael Hershman,

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Also, if one of the key questions to be answered on the whole episode is whether a private group had in fact hired Fairfax before Bhure Lal did (and paid money abroad in violation of India's foreign exchange laws), Fairfax is not helping at all in answering it. On the one hand, Fairfax told a newspaper that it had been hired in the fall of 1986, but Bhure Lal hired it only in late December—which is winter, not fall. On the other hand, why should Hershman stop by at India in November—*before* Bhure Lal hired Fairfax—and stay in an expensive hotel for three days unless there was serious business afoot?

Before the enforcement director went hotfooting to Washington, Vinod Pande (his boss and revenue secretary) had verbally cleared the Fairfax arrangement with V.P. Singh, who approved on the condition that no advance payment was to be made and that the Government would only buy information. And after Bhure Lal returned from Washington around New Year, he wrote to Fairfax asking it to investigate Reliance on 15 counts. Fairfax was also asked to investigate other deals on the Bhure Lal agenda—including the Bachchans: Amitabh, and his brother Ajitabh who suddenly took up Swiss residence last August (a move that has led to endless speculation about reason and motive). Once again, Hershman has denied any knowledge of Bachchan.

Rumours of Bachchan being investigated abroad started doing the rounds in the capital by mid-January. V.P. Singh was shifted to the Defence Ministry on January 24. Barely a week later, the prime minister called Singh in for what must have been a key conversation.

Singh was asked whether he had approved the Fairfax arrangement. He said he had, and added that he wouldn't mind saying so in writing. Two weeks later, a formal reference was made to him by the Finance Ministry, and he formally recorded his reasons for seeking Fairfax help. Meanwhile, Finance Secretary S. Venkitaramanan summoned Bhure Lal and asked him about his Fairfax operation. Unexpectedly, Bhure Lal declined a reply—and may have been within his rights to do so, because he was answerable to the revenue secretary. Bhure Lal has also been questioned by G.K. Arora, special secretary to the prime minister.

Through the weeks and months, the situation (and the tension) had clearly been building up. And on March 11, when the CBI got hold of the McKay letter, the pace suddenly quickened.

The CBI moved fast, and some other wings of the Government moved even faster. Bhure Lal was given his transfer orders that same night. Revenue Secretary Vinod Pande was simultaneously divested of the charge of the Enforcement Directorate, which was placed under Finance Secretary Venkitaramanan. Pande himself was briefly questioned by the CBI. The CBI also took 24 hours to check out some details regarding the letter, and then despatched raid and arrest orders by air to Madras for Gurumurthy and to Bombay for his business partner, A. Janakiraman, on March 12.

But by the time the raids were

V.P. SINGH

In Defence

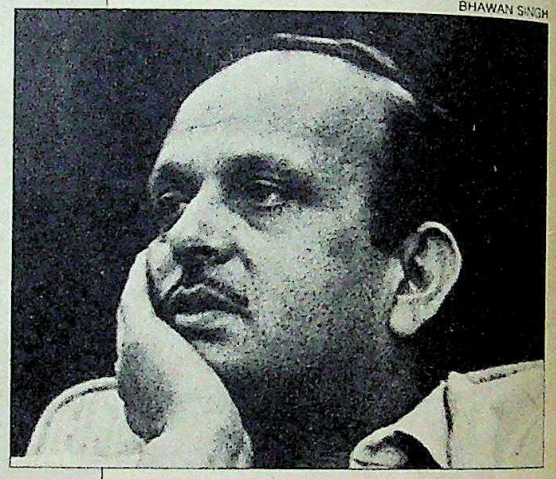
DID the hiring of the Fairfax Group to investigate the affairs of Indian companies and personalities have proper approval? What was the then finance minister V.P. Singh's role in the affair? Was cabinet clearance required, and was this taken? Singh answered these key questions to INDIA TODAY:

► "I had given clear approval to the officials to attack economic offenders. In the process, if they had to buy intelligence from a foreign agency, that had my approval as well. This was the most cost-effective way of collecting information as we have hardly any investigative network or contacts of our own abroad. There couldn't have been a better arrangement than getting exclusive and conclusive evidence without making any advance financial commitment."

► "It was within my powers to approve the hiring of a foreign agency. This did not need the prime minister's or the Cabinet's approval. The Finance Ministry has done this in the past too."

► "I firmly believe I had the full trust and confidence of the prime minister when I took this decision. It was his assignment to me to deal firmly with the parallel economy and black money. Any effort to accomplish this task had the prime minister's full backing."

BHAWAN SINGH



Singh: "I approved Fairfax"

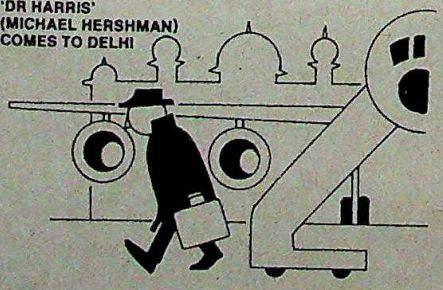
1986

president of detective company called Fairfax Group) visits India and has a room booked for him in Oberoi Hotel, New Delhi, by Bombay Dyeing, a Reliance rival. Hershman meets Gurumurthy, Bhure Lal and Express Chairman R.N. Goenka. Hershman stays in Delhi for three days.

► Bombay Dyeing Chairman Nusli Wadia stays in same hotel on overlapping dates.

► Government says in Parliament that leakage of government files to Gurumurthy being investigated.

'DR HARRIS' (MICHAEL HERSHMAN) COMES TO DELHI



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launched the following morning (March 13), the *Express* had come out with the sensational contents of a letter written by the President to the prime minister, a letter in which Rajiv Gandhi was all but called a liar for having told Parliament that he had kept the President fully briefed on all important issues. And by that evening, the raiding parties had also landed up at the Express guest-house in New Delhi, then occupied by Goenka himself. In fact, Dhirubhai Ambani telephoned Goenka shortly after the raid, offering to help in any way he could. Goenka is believed to have slammed the phone down in fury.

Fairfax President Michael Hershman denied meeting Gurumurthy who, however, said the meeting had taken place. Nusli Wadia too denied any role in the affair, but his company booked Hershman into a Delhi hotel.

Nusli Wadia was at the guest-house when the raid started in New Delhi, and was personally frisked and and his briefcase searched before he was allowed to leave. Among the papers found in the guest-house were blank sheets of paper with the letterhead of the Enforcement Directorate.

Inevitably, the raids were seen in the context of the President's letter being published, but the real provocation of the raids was something else altogether. Ostensibly, the CBI's case number RC 7/86-CIU(II) SPE CBI is about a leakage of official secrets (Gurumurthy quoted extensively from government files in some of his Reliance articles). But the primary objective is to try and get to the bottom of a much more complicated and explosive affair: to find out who was investigating whom in the Fairfax affair, and at whose behest.

Whatever the answer to that question, the drama was now out in the open, and the spotlight was on Gurumurthy and on the *Express*—which has capitalised on the press freedom issue and may well challenge the Official Secrets Act itself in court. The CBI in any case didn't look too good in court when Gurumurthy's bail applications were argued one after another, and it vacillated between pressing the case on official secrets and on a conspiracy theory involving the handing out of government secrets to foreign agencies. A third charge suggested was that the foreign agency was getting government secrets for the *Express*.

For a while the central issue was the genuineness of the McKay letter, or at least the contents of the letter—which (among all the other things) also referred to a gentleman called R.Briner in Switzerland as well as a Swiss address where Goenka is said to have been late last year. The address turned out to be that of Nusli Wadia's father Neville, but Goenka couldn't have gone there because he stopped in Geneva for just three hours, and the address was a seven-hour drive away. Robert Briner turned out to be an aging lawyer who (when contacted at a ski resort) initially denied having any contact with Indians for years, but then admitted to INDIA TODAY that he was a longstanding friend of Goenka and had visited India last year. But he denied knowledge of Bachchan, Wadia and Gurumurthy.

Despite the tell-tale links exposed by the McKay 'letter', middle-level CBI officials admitted to journalists that in their judgement it was a forgery, and that they were under pressure from higher up to persist with the case. In fact, Gurumurthy's lawyer produced in court a telegram from Fairfax denying that it had ever

FAIRFAX

Contradictions

EVERYONE cannot be telling the truth about Fairfax. The accounts of critical events vary radically from person to person. Thus:

- Michael Hershman, Fairfax president, says he has never met S. Gurumurthy of *Indian Express*. Yet Gurumurthy told INDIA TODAY he met Hershman in Delhi's Oberoi Hotel last November.
- CBI sources maintain that the then enforcement director Bhure Lal took Gurumurthy with him to London last May, to investigate Reliance. Bhure Lal denies this.
- Finance Ministry and CBI officials maintain that there is not a shred of paper relating to the hiring of Fairfax in the Enforcement Directorate's files, barring a brief report by Bhure Lal to Revenue Secretary V.C. Pande. Hershman says he has received letters on the Government of India's stationery.
- Nusli Wadia of Bombay Dyeing is sought to be linked to Fairfax. Wadia denies any connection whatsoever. But it was Bombay Dyeing who booked the Oberoi room for Hershman, though Wadia denies this too.
- The raid on and arrest of S. Gurumurthy was claimed by *Indian Express* to be linked to its publication of the President's letter. But the raid and arrest orders were sent out a day before the publication.

DECEMBER 2

- Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) registers case under Official Secrets Act against Gurumurthy.

DECEMBER 23

- Gurumurthy residence in Madras raided, papers seized.

BHURE LAL HIRES FAIRFAX IN WASHINGTON

DECEMBER

- Bhure Lal visits Washington with V.P.Singh's approval, asks Fairfax Group to investigate Reliance on 15 counts, as well as foreign exchange dealings by Amitabh and Ajitabh Bachchan, Tatas, Goenkas and Chhabrias.

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written such a letter.

Finally, after 10 days, Gurumurthy was released on bail—and it turned out that during his first day under arrest the questioning had focused essentially on the Bachchan issue. Was Gurumurthy investigating Bachchan? The *Express* columnist maintained that he was interested only in Reliance.

In court, meanwhile, Gurumurthy's lawyer Ram Jethmalani made a tantalising reference to a Swiss company called Macny Adol Brothers (which sounds suspiciously like 'matinee idol'). If all this pointed to Bachchan being a key figure in the entire story, there was also plenty of talk about Bachchan having helped Dhirubhai Ambani meet the prime minister

Indian Express

Goenka's room after raid: bad timing

last October—something the Ambanis strenuously deny. Nevertheless, the grape-vine line-up pitted Rajiv-Amitabh-Reliance against V.P. Singh-Bhure Lal-*Express*-Bombay Dyeing. Certainly, the action against Gurumurthy seemed out of all proportion to his original 'crime', of quoting some files that were important only to a company and its rivals.

Whatever the truth of the matter, the matinee idol was not available for com-

MICHAEL HERSHMAN

"It hurts me"

IN a Washington metro train it would be hard to tell Michael Hershman, 41, from the other busy executives, businessmen and bureaucrats. But it is his profession that makes him unusual—and a bit of all three. "No. I'd rather not give a picture of mine. In the kind of business I am in the less people know what I look like the better," he says. But at the same time, he asserts that there is no cloak-and-dagger stuff in his business as the owner of one of the more expensive private detective agencies in the US.

But last fortnight Hershman, who made his reputation as a career inquisitor with the US Administration, Congress and the Senate and finally as a senior investigator in the Senate Watergate Commission, was finding it hard to guard his anonymity. His phone rang all day and the telex clacked repeatedly. Many of the calls were from journalists in India. "We do not like this. We consider ourselves a respectable company," he says and points out that in his kind of business publicity is hardly welcome. Yet, now that there was no getting away from media glare, Hershman had rehearsed his role well, anticipating the obvious questions and shrewdly evading the inconvenient ones. At the same time, there was no doubting as to the side he was on, as Special Correspondent SHEKHAR GUPTA *discovered in the course of an interview. Excerpts:*

Q. *Did your deputy Mckay indeed write a letter to Gurumurthy regarding services that your company was performing for him?*

A. It is insane and preposterous to even suggest that we could write such a letter. Would you ever do a thing like that? And we have performed no services for the *Indian Express* or Mr Gurumurthy.

Q. *But weren't you engaged to do investigative work against certain prominent people in India?*

A. It is true that we have been engaged to perform certain services for the Government of India. And as far as we are concerned, we still are doing that.

Q. *Who approached you on behalf of the Government of India?*

A. I am afraid I cannot disclose that. But there is no doubt that we have been engaged by your government. We have correspondence with them on their stationery.

Q. *Were you approached by Mr Bhure Lal or Mr Vinod Pande?*

> "The letter supposedly written by Mr McKay is an absolute forgery... The Government must catch those responsible for this rather than the innocent *Express* reporter."

A. Once again I shall not answer that question. But certainly we know Mr Bhure Lal.

Q. *And do you know Mr Gurumurthy?*

A. I do not know him but I know of him through his writings. And we know the *Indian Express*. We also know its reputation. We find it preposterous that Mr Gurumurthy has been arrested by the Government. In fact, I would go so far as to say that whoever is responsible for that should take his place in the prison.

Q. *Why such strong sympathy if*

1987

JANUARY

- **Speculative reports about detective agency abroad being hired to investigate Reliance and Bachchans.**

JANUARY 24

- **V.P. Singh shifted from Finance Ministry and made defence minister; Amitabh Bachchan seen as partially responsible, though he denies it.**

FEBRUARY

- **Rajiv Gandhi questions V.P.Singh on Fairfax, asks him to ratify on the file that this had his verbal approval.**

PM QUIZZES VP SINGH

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you do not even know him?

A. Because it hurts me very badly that our name has been used to wreak vengeance against an innocent journalist.

Q. Have you been in touch with Mr Gurumurthy or the Indian Express *since the controversy surfaced in India?*

A. Well, we have only received some messages from Mr Gurumurthy's attorneys and we have replied saying that the letter supposed to have been written by Mr Mckay is an absolute forgery. It seems to my mind that someone just cut off the top of our letterhead and used that to forge the letter.

Q. Do you have any suspicions as to who could have done this?

A. Your guess is as good as mine but it could be people who did not want Mr Gurumurthy to go ahead with his writings.

Q. What did the Government of India offer as your fees?

A. That information is privileged between us and our clients, but let me tell you we never got $300,000 (Rs 38.4 lakh). It is not as if I wouldn't like to have that much money but no one gave it to us. We would swear to it under oath.

Q. It has been stated by some officials in Delhi that your company had agreed to work without the payment of any advance and, in fact, under the arrangement that it would be paid on the basis of the value of the information uncovered. Is that true?

A. This is absolutely true. The way we bill is a lot like a law firm. Normally, our billing would be for the services rendered. But sometimes it could even be like the law firms here in the US. For example, you may go to a lawyer and say I have no money. But if we win you would get 25 per cent of the figure.

Q. But isn't it rather unusual for a company like yours to work without even the guaranteed payment of your expenses?

A. No, it is not unusual in our business. We have experience in dealing with governments and they are generally good with the money. Most of our people are former government servants. I myself was with the Government and Mr Mckay was an assistant attorney with the DC district attorney's office. I consider our firm to be a highly respectable one which is why we do some government work. And I am also very familiar with the Government of India for which I have a great deal of respect.

Q. What exactly was your earlier acquaintance with the Government of India?

A. I was once the deputy auditor-general with the US Agency for International Development whose Delhi office was under my jurisdiction.

Q. To return to the letter, were you indeed hired to investigate against the people mentioned in the letter?

A. I haven't seen the letter but I have been told that it mentions the names of three other prominent Indian citizens who we haven't even heard of. I would say no more than that. Whatever that letter says is absolute trash of the mill.

Q. What do you plan to do about the circulation of the letter which you call a forgery? Are you planning to take legal remedies or are you sending one of your executives to India to sort this out?

A. Currently we have no such travel plans. We are looking at various options. But more than anything else we want the Government of India to put the full weight of its investigative machinery to find out who is responsible for the forgery. I assume there are laws against forgery in India. They must catch those responsible for this rather than the innocent reporter of the *Indian Express*.

Q. Don't you sound rather too upset?

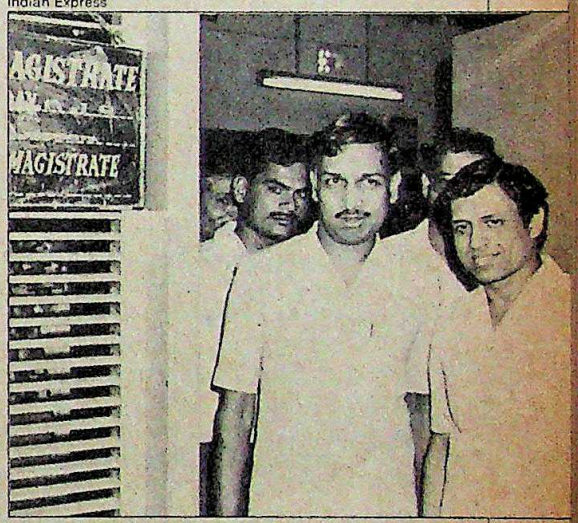
A. Yes indeed. No one likes to have their stationery misused.

ment—despite repeated telephone calls. But it seemed reasonably certain that Fairfax had already investigated the Bachchans to some extent, and perhaps unearthed enough information to begin asking embarrassing questions.

But that has only deepened the mystery in the Enforcement Directorate, with officials saying that there is no evidence of any contract having been signed with Fairfax, no mention of the terms, no exchange of correspondence, no record of Fairfax having provided information. The only reference to Fairfax is in a report that Bhure Lal submitted to Vinod Pande.

The absence of documentation is odd precisely because Bhure Lal has written at least one letter to Fairfax, which admits

Indian Express



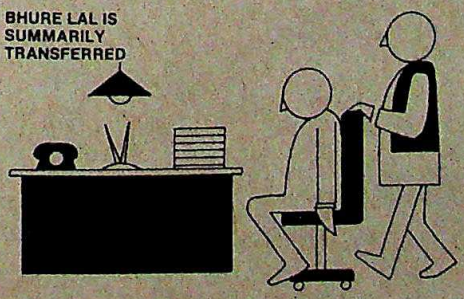
Gurumurthy(right) and Janakiraman

receiving correspondence on government stationery. Also, Bhure Lal has apparently told the CBI that Fairfax had provided him some information. But the CBI maintains that there is no record of this either in the Enforcement Directorate. The CBI has raised one further question: when Fairfax gave Bhure Lal the information, didn't they ask for any payment at that stage? The answer, apparently, is in the negative—though one report talked of a pay-

Finance secretary questions Bhure Lal on Fairfax affair; Bhure Lal declines reply.

MARCH 11

▸ CBI gets allegedly forged letters from Fairfax to Gurumurthy, which refer to 'Dr Harris' meeting Bhure Lal.



▸ Bhure Lal transferred out of Enforcement Directorate.

▸ Enforcement Directorate shifted from Revenue Department to Department of Economic Affairs, under finance secretary.

MARCH 12

▸ CBI raid/arrest orders flown to Madras and Bombay.

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S. GURUMURTHY

Meteoric Rise

BEFORE March 1986, readers of the *Indian Express* would not have recognised his byline. After that date, nobody has been able to forget S. Gurumurthy, 38, the anti-Reliance crusader.

Gurumurthy is a chartered accountant and Express Chairman R.N. Goenka's *consiglieri*. He first met Goenka in 1975, when he was working for Gowri Kantan and Company, auditors of the *Indian Express*, Madras. In 1976, he was appointed adviser to the *Express*. Today he is Goenka's closest confidant, even mediating in disputes within the Goenka clan.

Though he has become a national talking point, Gurumurthy says: "Writers require anonymity, otherwise they become demagogues. I would never have come into the public...but now I have been brought to the streets." But his meek exterior hides a determined toughness. His interrogators kept him awake for 48 hours at a stretch, without success. He refused the bed and mattress offered by the police, preferring the floor.

He is certainly a disciplined man, with a 16-year association with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). He can call up any number of cars, yet he cycles to RSS shakhas.

Born into a poor family in Tamil Nadu's South Arcot district, a scholarship helped him get a Bachelor of Commerce degree, after which he did his chartered accountancy. In 1975, he started his own accountancy practice, and three years ago he started the firm Guru & Varadan in partnership with A.Janakiraman. Among his clients today are Vijay Mallya's McDowells, while the Chhabrias are known to have sought him out when they were in trouble with the Government.

Gurumurthy is also a model of South Indian conservatism. He lives in a middle-class joint family, a vegetarian and teetotaller, and not much of a socialiser. Talking of his children, he says: "I may violate the Official Secrets Act, but in family planning matters I am a nationalist. I have only two children." Appropriately named Durga and Shiva.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Gurumurthy: sticking to his guns

The first piece he wrote was for the *Express* in September 1985. He was appointed its columnist in January 1986—the appointment letter is among the documents that the CBI has seized. Will there be more pieces on Reliance? "I have just come out after 10 days of contemplation. Let us see. The answer lies in the womb of the future," he says.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

ment of $ 33,000.

If that is where matters stand at the moment, the entire affair has exposed the different factions in the Government, the pulls and counter-pressures that have been developing, and the lobbies that have been operating. V.P.Singh's crusade clearly exposed the system to the bone, with several raw nerves showing.

Thus, the view is now surfacing that V.P.Singh's approach to tax and economic issues was not all what it should have been. The argument is put forward that in the zeal to nab tax evaders, Singh held up clearances for large projects, thereby delayed production start-up and added to the import bill. Industries languished without succour, and companies were hauled up for imaginary offences and then forced to apologise by using the coercive power of the Government. The cases referred to in order to bolster these arguments indicate that several large companies and groups with access to the prime minister had managed to drive home this point of view.

A CBI official pointed out for good measure that the initial decision was to investigate both the leakage of documents to Gurumurthy as well as the charges that Gurumurthy had made against Reliance with the help of the documents. "But only Gurumurthy has been proceeded against, not Reliance." Echoing this, *Express* Editor Suman Dubey asked: "Why is the Government going after Gurumurthy and not Reliance?"

Meanwhile, Singh's favourite officials have been sidelined or neutralised while also being repeatedly interrogated despite Singh's protests. Inevitably, this has led to a loss of heart down the line. Nowhere is

1987

MARCH 13

- ***Indian Express*** **publishes text of President's letter to prime minister.**
- **Gurumurthy arrested in Madras, his accountancy partner A. Janakiraman arrested in Bombay.**
- **Papers seen being burnt outside *Indian Express* guest-house in New Delhi.**
- **Guest-house also raided.**

MARCH 14

- ***Indian Express*** **charges that**

GURUMURTHY IS ARRESTED IN MADRAS

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the demoralisation more evident than in the Enforcement Directorate, where one official said it was a shame that their director should be questioned by the CBI and another pointed out that work had come to a virtual standstill. Said an observer: "In V.P. Singh's time, officers had come to believe they could arrest anyone who broke the law, however big he was. Now they are once again afraid to touch the money bags." Although an official justified the shifting of the directorate to the Department of Economic Affairs on the ground that it was this department which handled foreign exchange (and not the Department of Revenue), the timing of the transfer told its own tale. The political message for Singh is clear in all this, and he can be expected to weigh his options carefully.

As for the Fairfax affair itself, some key questions remain to be answered: Did anyone other than the Government hire and pay Fairfax? What was the real reason for the viciousness with which the Government came down on Gurumurthy for a technical offence committed some months earlier in pursuit of what he saw as public interest? Was it because it felt Bachchan was being investigated, as the McKay letter said and as rumours had been suggesting? Did Fairfax indeed file damaging information on the Bachchans? Was the McKay letter genuine or fake? If the latter, who forged it and why?

There are, however, no easy explanations available. But it seems more than likely that in course of time at least some of these questions will find the right answers.

—T.N. NINAN with PRABHU CHAWLA and RAMINDAR SINGH

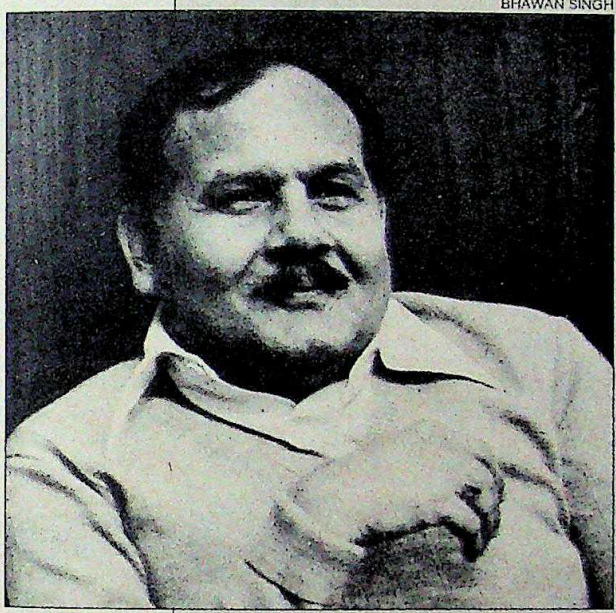
BHURE LAL

Dogged Crusader

FOR Bhure Lal, 48, the change of fortunes has been dramatic. Earlier, he was doing the interrogating. Last fortnight it was his turn to be questioned, by the Central Bureau of Investigation.

During his 20-month tenure as director, enforcement, he had been a dreaded figure, with the reputation of a determined sleuth. And although he was grilled for three days by the CBI—and felt he was being hounded for no fault of his—he defended his actions and got down to his new charge as joint secretary (coins and currency).

BHAWAN SINGH



Bhure Lal: enviable record

Lal has been a fighter and crusader throughout his career. Born into a poor rural family of eastern Uttar Pradesh, Lal started off as a commissioned army officer in 1963 and saw action in the 1965 Indo-Pak war in the Sialkot sector. He rose to the rank of captain before appearing for the IAS examination in 1970.

Ever since, it has been a story of going after the corrupt and guilty—and of being summarily transferred. As subdivisional magistrate of Bahraich (UP), he raided over 100 traders in edible oils. As joint director (industries) at Meerut, he began penalising over 50 industrialists for misusing raw materials meant for small-scale units. And as district magistrate of Varanasi, he went after the local coal mafia. Each time he was served with premature transfer orders—once at midnight. As district magistrate at Allahabad, he used to carry a leather whip during his routine rounds, and earned the name of 'Hunterwala magistrate'.

His next assignment in Uttar Pradesh was as secretary to the then chief minister V.P. Singh. Says Singh: "Bhure Lal is one of the finest, most honest and most dependable officers I have worked with."

Lal's record in the Enforcement Directorate is now part of history, for he went after leading businessmen in a manner that no one else had dared. Influential and biased officials now say Lal's record was unimpressive as he recovered only Rs 25 crore in foreign exchange from 11,000 cases, but the facts show this was a record performance. Others argue that Lal's record should be judged in the context of how much foreign exchange loss he prevented by putting the fear of God in people. A third viewpoint is that Lal's approach would discourage Indians with money abroad from bringing it back. Irrespective of the criticism, he has left behind a legacy which his successor will find almost impossible to match.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

raids and arrests are linked to publication of President's letter.

MARCH 17

- Home Minister Buta Singh alleges that press is involved in a design to destabilise country.

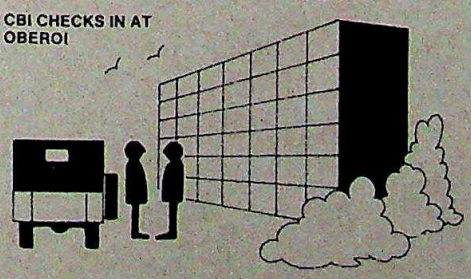
MARCH 23

- Gurumurthy and Janakiraman released on bail.

MARCH 28

- CBI seeks details of Hershman from Oberoi Hotel.
- Prime Minister calls on President.

CBI CHECKS IN AT OBEROI



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GUJARAT

A State of Siege

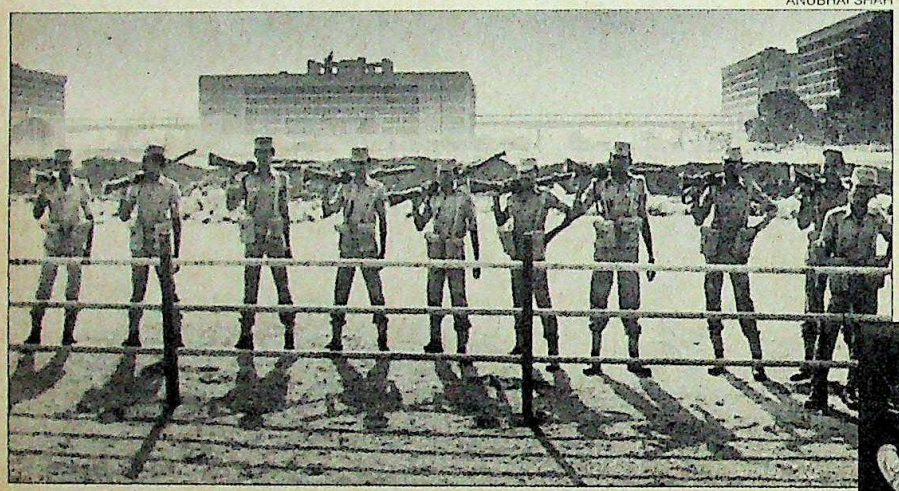
THOUGH Gujarat Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary does not have much clout in his own state, Congress(I) party bosses had drafted him to campaign in West Bengal. But Chaudhary had to put his bags away when the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS), an organisation of farmers, announced that seven lakh of them would march to the state capital Gandhinagar and gherao the state Assembly on March 18. They were to draw attention to their long-standing demands which included remunerative support prices for farm produce, cheaper power and fertilisers, changes in land revenue rules and speeding up of irrigation projects.

Chaudhary, in his typically tactless style, decided that the best strategy would be to ensure that none of them reached the capital. He recruited 5,500 paramilitary personnel to guard Gandhinagar and had a Rs 2.75-lakh barricade built around the Assembly building. He also ordered the police to prevent the agitationists from leaving their districts to join the march. Road transport officials were employed to stop tractors and vehicles from carrying farmers to the state capital.

Events later proved that the Government's show of force had backfired: the agitation snowballed into one of the most violent ever seen. Angry farmers—who had been agitating since October 3—all over Gujarat set 73 government vehicles on fire and destroyed another 40 in a single day. They felled trees to block traffic and damaged railway lines. Though more than 2,000 people were arrested, mob violence and firing had left 10 dead and over 150 seriously injured. Nine of the dead were farmers and the tenth was a policeman lynched by a mob. Among those severely beaten up was former chief minister Madhavsinh Solanki.

Moreover, as the fortnight progressed, farmers began to hit where it hurt most. They retaliated by cutting off the supply of milk and vegetables to urban areas where prices leapt overnight by 50 per cent following serious shortages. Trucks carrying vegetables to towns were set afire and milk was spilled on the road. In Ahmedabad, the Abad dairy's daily supply of 1.5 lakh litres of milk fell to 50,000 litres. And in Sabarkantha district, angry farmers barricaded highways and disrupted traffic.

ANUBHAI SHAH



Armed police outside the Assembly (left); farmers enroute to Gandhinagar; and (inset) Chaudhary: backfiring tactics

ANUBHAI SHAH

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In the Assembly, Chaudhary had a hard time explaining why vehicles loaded with farmers had been stopped when, in the past, similar mass transport of Congress(I) supporters to election meetings had proceeded unhindered. While opposition MLAs charged the Government with adopting undemocratic means, Chaudhary defended himself saying that the action was taken to "safeguard the state's highest democratic institution...when it was busy discussing important affairs." But the otherwise weak-kneed opposition was not persuaded and walked out when the chief minister refused to apologise for the police firing. Said former chief minister Babubhai Patel: "The eagerness to show off sheer force ended in innocents being killed and injured."

The Congress(I) sweep in the district and taluka panchayat elections in late January this year had convinced Chaudhary that the farmers' stir was of no consequence and would die out. Though farmer leaders deny any political involvement, the truth is that they are being directed mainly by the BJP and the RSS. Says Ashok Bhatt, one of the BJP leaders: "This state-wide stir can overthrow the Chaudhary Government."

Chaudhary's poll gifts had comprised a subsidy in power tariffs worth Rs 105.73 crore, crop insurance benefits worth Rs 118 crore and remunerative support prices which made a difference of about Rs 30 crore. Said the chief minister: "We have been fair to farmers. Unreasonable demands cannot be met particularly now as the state is in the grip of a severe drought." But it is also true that, in comparison to his predecessor Solanki, Chaudhary has allocated less money towards agriculture and power. Allocation for agriculture has fallen from Rs 54.19 crore in 1984-85 to Rs 49.31 crore two years later. In power, which farmers desperately need, the fall is even steeper—from Rs 348 crore to Rs 240.51 crore.

Three days after the outburst of violence, BKS President Rambhai Patel announced that the stir had been called off because Chaudhary, in a meeting, had promised to release arrested farmers. But the recent move to cut off vegetables and milk supply to towns indicates that his followers are unwilling to take his orders on this count. The blockade is likely to hurt the poor farmers most because they can ill-afford to lose the small money they earn. But with the BJP urging the farmers on, the agitation may continue to give Chaudhary many sleepless nights.

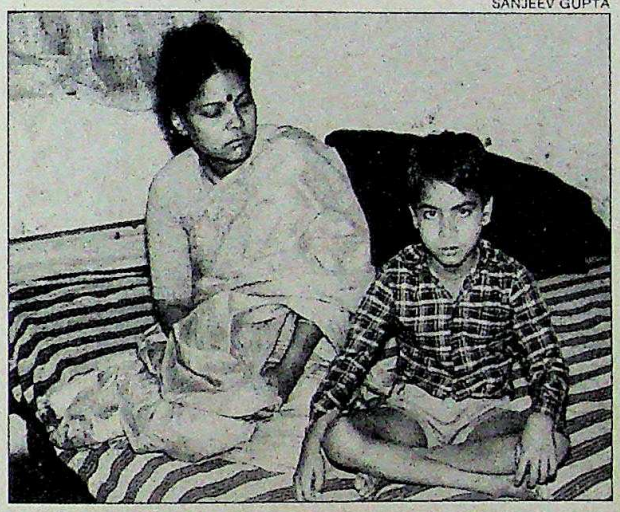
—RAMESH MENON

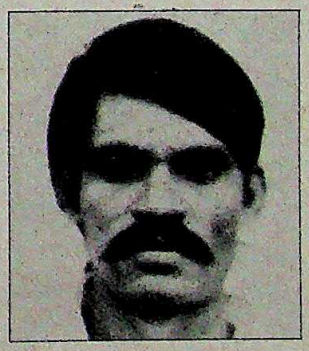
MADHYA PRADESH

The Rape Scandal

THE sensational news of the gangrape of a 25-year-old woman last fortnight in Bhopal by Ganpat Singh Dhurve, 31, a Congress(I) MLA and his two accomplices, threatens to snowball into a major political scandal in the state. The ruling party, realising the serious implications of the case, quickly moved to suspend the legislator from primary membership of the party, and expel him from the Congress Legislature Party.

SANJEEV GUPTA





Dhurve (right); and Shrivastava, the victim with son: shock waves

Dhurve, who has represented the Jamai constituency in Chhindwara district since 1980, has been charged under Sections 376 (rape) and 342 (wrongful confinement) of the Indian Penal Code. His co-accused are an unidentified office-bearer of the Chhindwara Improvement Trust and Naveen Sood, a local liquor contractor and member of the newly-constituted district 20-point programme implementation committee.

The three associates have been charged for forcibly detaining Malati Shrivastava, an employee of the state's Health Department working in Babai, Hoshangabad district, in room number 40 of Bhopal's MLAs' rest-house number one, and gangraping her.

Shrivastava had come to Bhopal along with her eight-year-old son, Vinay, to seek a recommendation for transfer to Gwalior where her husband is a lower division clerk in a government hospital. In her complaint to the police, the victim said that on March 9 she met Dhurve accidently at the rest-house and he had offered to help her with the transfer as well as a promotion. He then called her to his room at 7.30 p.m. on the pretext that the health minister would be visiting him at that time in the evening.

When Shrivastava, accompanied by her son and an acquaintance, Asharam, who is a key eyewitness to the alleged crime, reached the room in the evening, the minister was nowhere in sight. A little later, Asharam was sent off to the market "for making some purchases". The three accused present in the room began drinking, and bolted the door from inside. They gagged the woman and then criminally assaulted her.

The boy, Vinay, was slapped and locked in the bathroom when he tried to help his mother fend off the men. "They are bad persons. They beat up my mother," a still traumatised Vinay told the police later. During the next two hours Shrivastava was repeatedly gangraped. Eventually she was allowed to go the bathroom and managed to escape through the window.

"I did not report the matter immediately to the police because my son was in their custody," said Shrivastava. Vinay returned late that night with Asharam. The report was eventually lodged with the police on March 14, when local newspapers had already broken the story. Shrivastava was medically examined, her statement recorded by a magistrate and the room where the rape allegedly took place was sealed by the police.

Dhurve, who had left town, was ar-

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MOTILAL VORA

New Offensive

MADHYA Pradesh Chief Minister Motilal Vora has so far carefully husbanded his political ammunition. But last fortnight he finally let fly—and killed two birds with the same stone. His first shot was the nomination of Arun Vora, 24, his younger son, as one of the members of the Durg district 20-point programme implementation committee, a move that was interpreted as blatant nepotism.

Arun Vora is a district Youth Congress president, a post he acquired after Vora came into power. But there are 62 district Youth Congress presidents in the state and none of them have been fortunate enough to find a place in the Government's programme implementation committees. Asked whether it was proper, Vora brusquely snapped: "I nominated him because I wanted to."

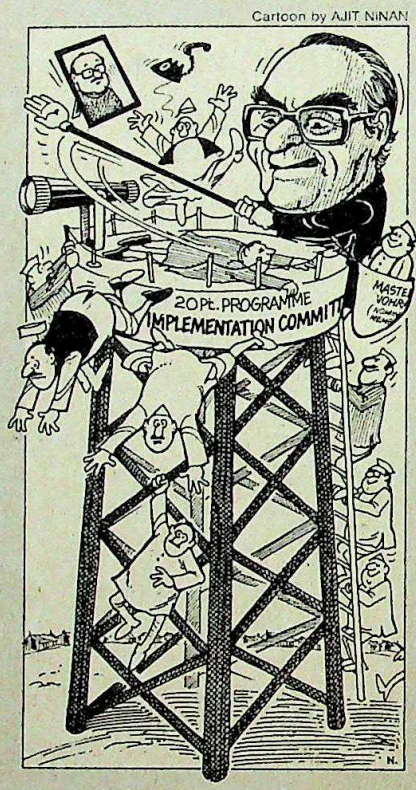
The nomination was in keeping with Vora's new mood: defiant and aggressive. But it clearly had a more significant motive—notice that Vora was finally ready to take on arch-rival Arjun Singh. Till late last year, the programme implementation committees set up by Arjun Singh five years ago were still intact. Their term had expired in March 1985 but a politically shaky Vora kept extending it. Now, with the rift between the two leaders growing and sensing that Singh's political fortunes were on the wane, Vora finally launched his offensive. While reconstituting the committees, he systematically removed members of the Arjun Singh group. Most of the 1,300 nominees are new faces and Vora's men.

The sudden coup increased Congress(I) infighting. Jagatpal Singh, MP, state Congress(I) Committee general secretary and an Arjun Singh supporter, wrote off to Vora that the state committee for coordination between the party organisation and the Government wasn't consulted before the reconstitution, which, he allegedly pointed out, was necessary under AICC(I) directives.

Vora replied that he too was not consulted by the party organisation, controlled by Arjun loyalists, in making several important appointments. Incidentally, meeting the coordination committee could have been suicidal for Vora: of its six members, three each from the Government and the party, four are Arjun's men.

Still, Vora took care to ensure that the new nominees were not going to cause him embarrassment. They were nominated only after the police verified their character. In fact, several names suggested by senior party leaders had to be axed because of adverse reports. "This was done in view of the past experience," said state Industries Corporation Chairman Manak Agarwal, said to be Vora's left-hand man. The implication was obvious. The committees formed by Arjun Singh had members classified as "criminal elements" and caused the Government's discomfiture on several occasions.

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



Still, the selection was not without its controversies. One of the new nominees was charged in the sensational rape case that rocked the state last fortnight and there were also charges of nepotism. In Raigarh, Jagatpal Singh, MP, his brother Prithvipal Singh and son Sanjay Singh were all nominated. Obviously, they seem to have taken their cue from the top.

—N.K. SINGH

rested at Bhopal railway station when he returned on March 23. Claimed the accused legislator: "I don't know what is happening. From March 5 to March 13, eight people had stayed with me in this room." Earlier, in a statement issued from his hometown, he described the complaint against him as an attempt of "character assassination" by his political opponents.

The police, however, claim that they recovered a piece of Shrivastava's garment and broken bangles when they opened the sealed room in the MLA's presence. He was also identified by the victim and her son, when presented before the magistrate who remanded him to judicial custody for 15 days.

Meanwhile, a new twist has been added to the investigations with the report that Ram, a servant of Dhurve and a key witness in the case, has been "missing" since March 18. The case took yet another intriguing turn when Shalabh Bhadoria, resident editor of *Satpura Vani*, a local daily which relentlessly exposed the crime, was assaulted by some hoodlums on March 22. "They asked me to stop writing against the MLA," says Bhadoria. In fact, even the police stalled before finally acting. Initially, they refused to register the victim's First Information Report and moved the case only when local newspapers made it too hot for them to ignore. Dhurve's arrest—10 days after the complaint had been lodged—came significantly, on the day the Vidhan Sabha resumed its session after the Holi recess.

The case, meanwhile, has also focussed attention on the unsavoury reputation the MLAs' rest-house has acquired. The speaker of the state Assembly, Rajendra Shukla, made a surprise inspection of the complex last week after several MLAs complained that the place had become "a den of debauchery, prostitution and antisocial activities". Only last year a prostitute and a teacher were arrested from the rest-house. The teacher told the police that he had brought the prostitute as he had been asked by an MLA "to supply a girl", if he wanted to get his transfer done.

Even in the present case, it is intriguing that although all the adjacent rooms were occupied at the time, no one heard Shrivastava's cries for help or came to her rescue. Shrivastava will now have to relive her nightmare when the hearings start in court where, at least, she has some assurance of justice.

—N.K. SINGH

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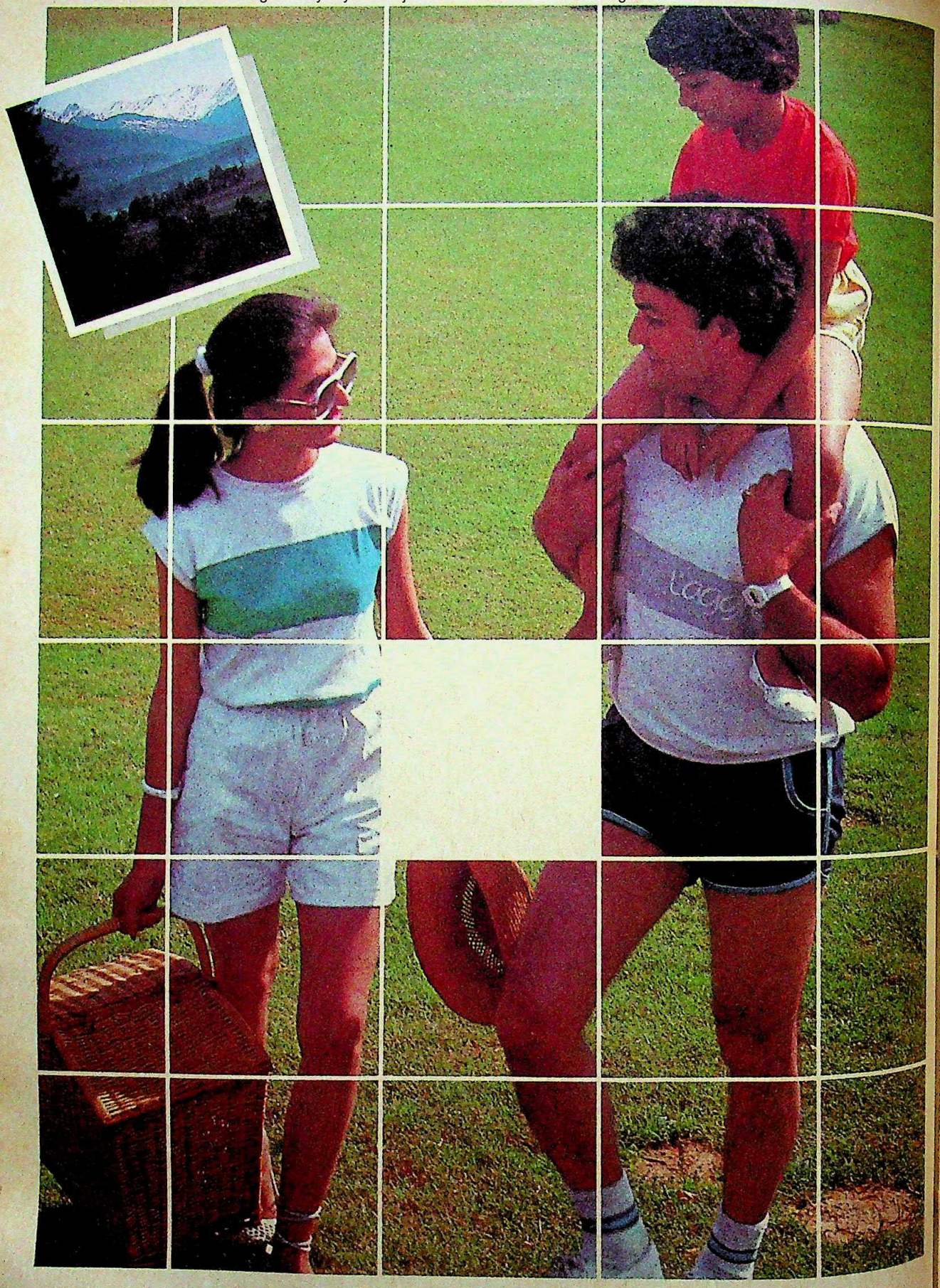

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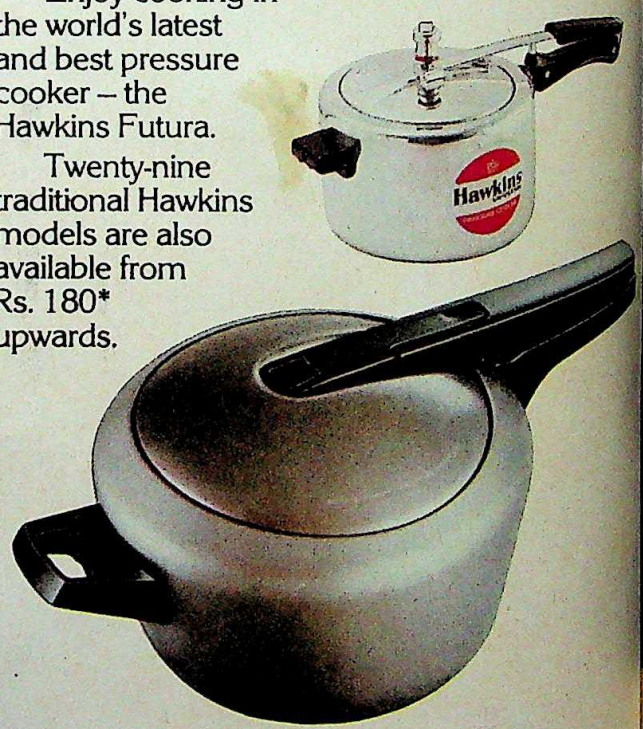

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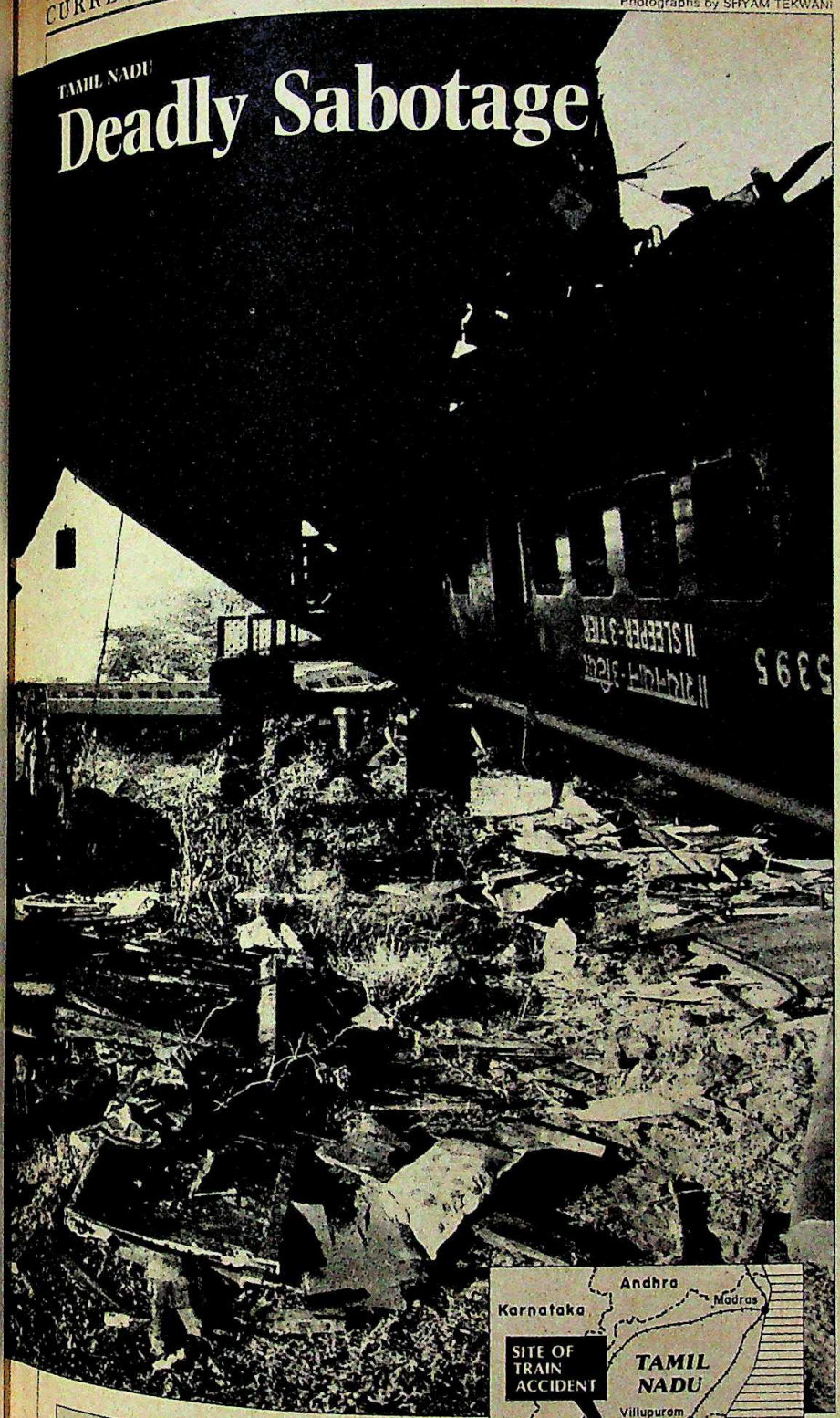
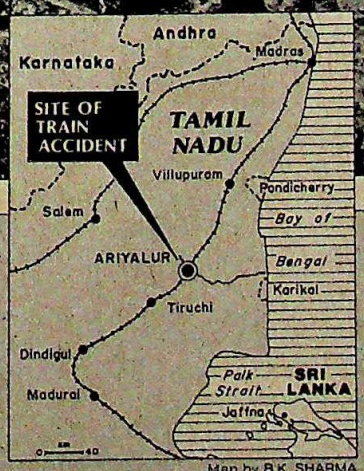
TAMIL NADU

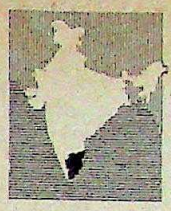
Deadly Sabotage



The sabotage was clearly a sophisticated operation. Investigations have focussed on the Tamil Nadu Viduthalai Padai which has links with several other separatist movements.



Map by B.K. SHARMA



IT wasn't the worst-ever train accident in Tamil Nadu, let alone in the country. But if the tally of 25 dead and 139 seriously injured nevertheless seemed horrendous, it was because the story this time wasn't the standard one of human error—the bomb that caused the tragedy spoke clearly of human design.

The saboteurs had picked the site—and the time—with grim purpose. The Rockfort Express travels 334-km between Madras and Tiruchi. It steamed into Ariyalur, 62 km from Tiruchi, at 4.30 a.m when the tired driver, K. Vellaiyan was given a disturbing message from Sillakkudi, the next station. The message, sent 15 minutes earlier by the Sillakkudi station-master stated that he had heard a sound like that of an explosion, though he wasn't sure of its direction. But railway officials decided that this did not spell any danger for the Rockfort Express. The train was allowed to proceed after Vellaiyan was formally handed a note of caution.

Vellaiyan was, however, taking no chances. He approached the 540-ft long Marudayar bridge at a slow 25 km an hour. As the powerful engine lights picked out the length of the bridge, he didn't notice anything amiss. But the saboteurs had done their work with deadly precision. As the engine reached the eighth of the nine piers supporting the track, the rails began to sink under its weight. Vellaiyan jammed the emergency brakes, but it was too late.

The engine, after derailing, hit the stone embankment at the end of the bridge and recoiled. Vellaiyan was killed on the spot. In the powerful impact of the recoil, the compartment just behind the engine—a jam-packed second class one—telescoped into it, swerved to the left in a violent jolt, and hung precariously from the bridge. In all, eight out of 17 bogies were derailed.

The sabotaging of the bridge was a sophisticated operation. Observed C.S. Kannan, Tiruchi divisional railway manager: "The bomb was exploded at precisely a point where the consequent derailment of the engine would cause it to hit the stone embankment. If it hadn't been for the impact of the engine's recoil, so many bogies—and therefore people—might not have been affected."

Though press reports said that the bomb exploded as the train passed over the bridge, it was actually detonated at 4.15 a.m., exactly half an hour before the

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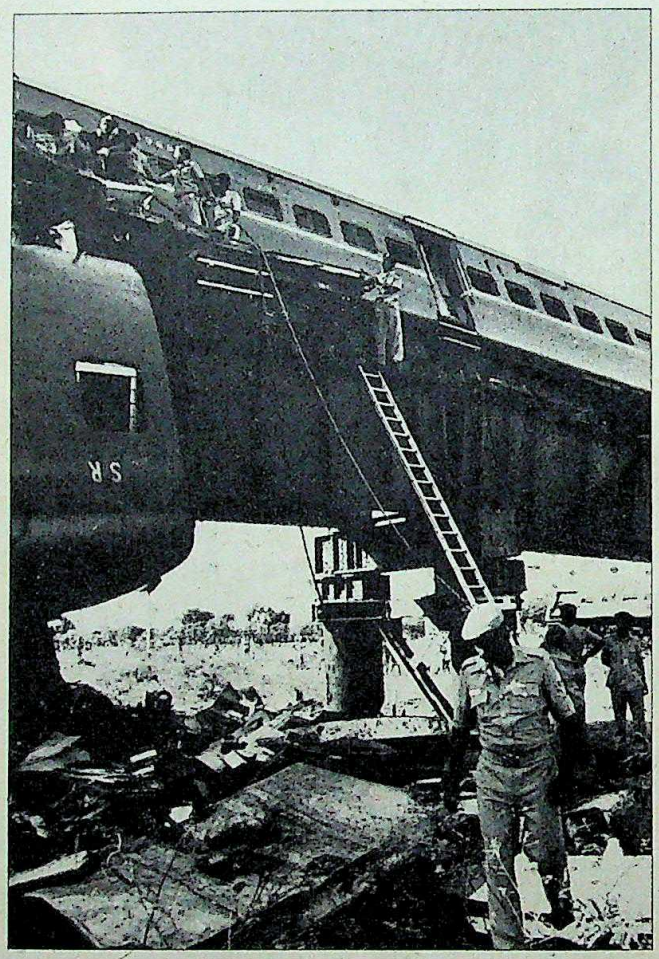
train was due, making a gaping hole in one of the cast-iron pillars supporting the bridge. The sound was heard by villagers in nearby Ramlingapuram and Laslapuram. Besides the pillar, the capping beam it supported had also given way. But the driver couldn't see this as the track was kept up by heavy girders and sank only as the train came on.

What gave cause for concern was that despite it being a major accident, neither the rescue operations nor police investigations were prompt or professional. The number of agencies involved—the railways, state police, CID's crime branch, forensic scientists, an explosives expert and the fire services—added to the confusion and delay.

Rajesh Zaveri, 22, came to the accident site looking for his father Ashok Gopaldas Zaveri, 45, a famous Tiruchi jeweller. When, aided by railway officials, he finally found his father's body trapped under the footboard of a crushed compartment, the police and explosives expert said that the body couldn't be removed as cutting away the footboard would tamper with the evidence. Besides, a long fire ladder needed to reach the coach from the riverbed, had been wound up for the day by the fire services. Said a disgusted Rajesh, who retrieved the body 29 long-hours after the accident: "The harassment and red tape in getting my father's body have been greater than even my personal grief."

Ironically, however, the same eagerness to protect evidence was not reflected where it really mattered. There was a crucial trail of footsteps and a 100-metre-long wire—with fingerprints—along the dry riverbed from where the pillar had been ripped open. The significance of this was underlined by the conclusions of the forensic experts: a sophisticated plunger-type push button bomb had been operated mechanically by someone at the end of the wire, and a 50-kg explosive mixture of nitro-glycerine and nitro-cellulose had been used. But the footprints' area was not cordoned off. Nor did police officials think of employing sniffer dogs to track the saboteurs.

Initially, suspicion fell on the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) and the Peoples' Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE). TELO had been earlier accused of the series of bomb blasts in the state and PLOTE was also guilty of several law and order violations. The day after the incident, 188 armed policemen surrounded a major PLOTE camp, 60 km from the blast site. Three PLOTE members were picked up for interrogation. But K. Ravindran, director-general of police, later admitted that they had yet to find any evidence of their involvement. Last week, Tamil Nadu police investigators categorically ruled out the involvement of Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups in the Rockfort Express sabotage.



Rescue work in progress: heavy toll

Suspicion is now focussed on a shadowy organisation, the Tamil Nadu Viduthalai Padai (Tamil Nadu Liberation Troop). Its posters, which were found on the bridge and in Ariyalur, questioned the Government's failure to officially recognise Tamil Eelam, protested the imposition of Hindi and pleaded for the return of the militants' arms who, the posters said, should not be arrested. Police officials claim that the organisation, which is committed to violence, has links with the CPI(ML) and has been linked with several other separatist movements.

Little is so far known about the organisation which is said to be headed by a man called Thamizharasan who was arrested in 1985 in one case, came out on parole, and is since absconding. He is one of the accused in the Thiruvaiyaru bridge blast in Thanjavur district on the eve of Rajiv Gandhi's visit to inaugurate the South Zone Cultural Centre early last year. The modus operandi then was the same. Thamizharasan, who had studied chemical engineering, is said to have some expertise in explosives. Says Ravindran: "The Viduthalai Padai seems to always time its bomb blasts to coincide with VIP visits."

The Tamil Nadu police subsequently arrested Pichai Pillai, 28, an unemployed man from Vallam village, 20 km from the blast site. Police officials say he belongs to the Viduthalai Padai. They have recovered a substantial quantity of gelatine sticks, evidently used for the bomb, from him. Says Inspector General of Police K.K. Rajasekaran Nair: "We believe we have made a major breakthrough with his arrest. But we are also on the look-out for four or five other suspects." Police are convinced that the sabotage was planned and executed by a small group of local extremists owing allegiance to the Viduthalai Padai.

Meanwhile, the state Government has introduced 24-hour armed security by Railway Protection Force personnel at all important bridges and embankments and frequent inspection of tracks by the use of motorised trollies between the running of trains in sensitive areas, specially after dark. But regardless of the added precautions, the Ariyalur bomb blast, coming at the end of a series of such incidents, seems to have permanently destroyed the calm and security of this once peaceful state.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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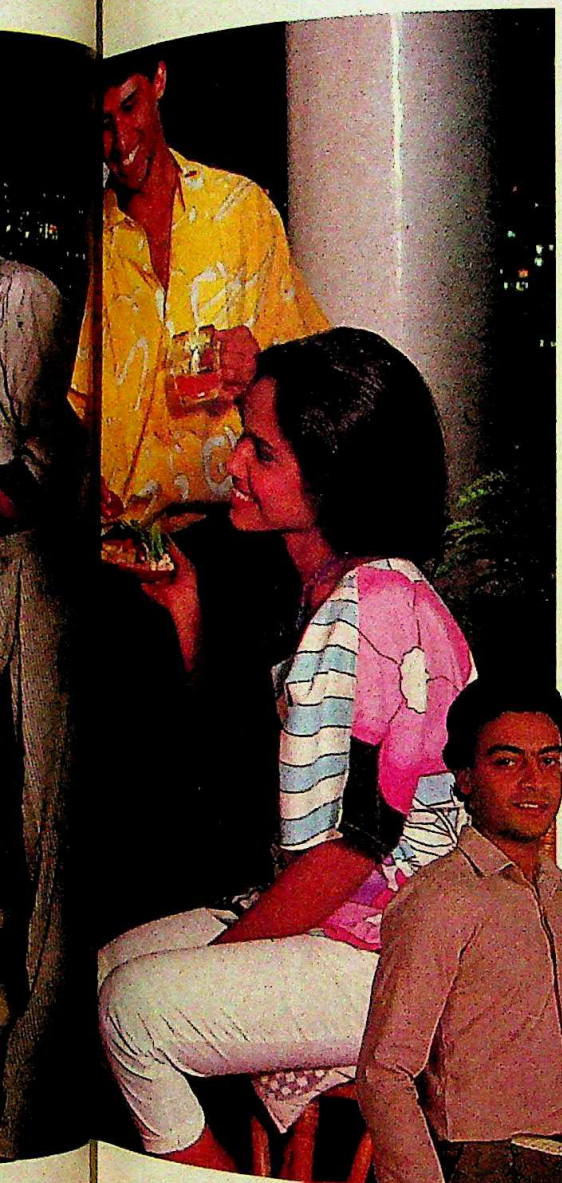

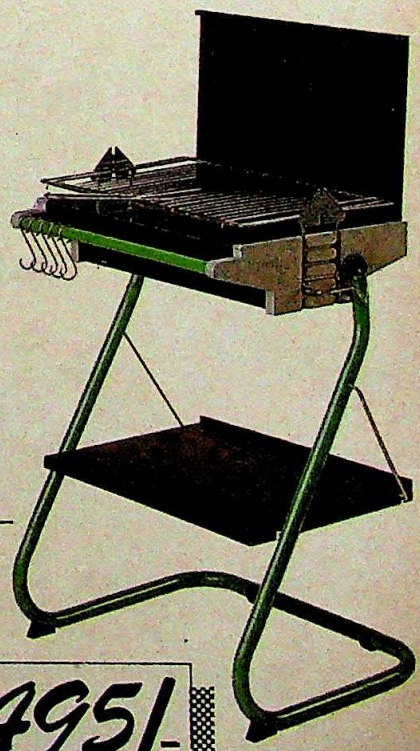

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TAMIL NADU

Rule by Whim

WHEN, last fortnight, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran relieved two ministers from their posts, he was merely acting true to form. For, the subtle distinction between professional relationships and personal likes and dislikes, is entirely alien to him. At the receiving end of MGR's ire were K.A. Krishnaswamy, local administration minister and Anoor Jagadeesan, rural industries minister, who were dropped from the 16-member Cabinet. Confided an AIADMK MP: "The chief minister seems to be sacking and taking in ministers according to his whims and fancies. Nobody knows where he ultimately stands in the Government or in the party."

While the facts of the case can never be established, strong circumstantial evidence suggests that this weird story began with MGR's wife, V.N. Janaki's active interest in effecting a matrimonial alliance between Krishnaswamy's daughter, Mankani, and Iniyan Sampath, a Tamil Nadu Youth Congress(I) secretary and son of E.V.K. Sulochana Sampath, chairperson of the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation, who is known to be close to MGR.

But Krishnaswamy did not share Janaki's keenness and arranged another match for his daughter. According to sources close to MGR, what invited the chief minister's wrath was Krishnaswamy's "audacity" in calling him to conduct the wedding after rejecting Janaki's choice. Krishnaswamy made things worse for himself by inviting DMK President M. Karunanidhi to the wedding as well (INDIA TODAY March 31, 1987). Anticipating the embarrassment that his presence would cause, Karunanidhi politely excused himself.

Krishnaswamy, in the meantime, spared no expense to receive the chief minister. Lavish preparations were made and an expensive hall hired for the occasion. But then, instead of *Puratchi Thalaivar* (Revolutionary Leader) MGR's portrait, the picture adorning the podium was of Krishnaswamy's late brother. Such are the details that change the course of Tamil Nadu politics.

MGR boycotted both the wedding and the reception that followed. And as word of his absence got around, all the ministers present slipped out, barring Jagadeesan and his family, who not only sat through the ceremony, but also attended the reception that evening.

The ministers' fate was sealed. In a deliberate move to cut the two offenders down to size, MGR sent Krishnaswamy on a four-day tour of the districts to organise drought-relief work. But even as he was supervising work at Tirunelveli, he got the message that he had been dismissed. Said a crestfallen Krishnaswamy: "I am going to keep a low profile. Don't drag me into any controversy."

Jagadeesan suffered an equally dismal end. MGR asked Jagadeesan to come to the secretariat and show him some footwear samples for a new Rs 20-crore footwear scheme for schoolchildren. But, on the afternoon of March 16, Jagadeesan—with his samples—waited in vain for MGR. In fact, MGR does not normally go to the secretariat in the afternoon. It was finally the rural industries secretary who broke the news of his dismissal to the patiently waiting Jagadeesan. Confessed a bewildered Jagadeesan: "I was upset, but I respect the wishes of my beloved leader."

In sacking Krishnaswamy and Jagadeesan, MGR has also hit out once again at the party faction of R.M. Veerappan, former information minister. Jagadeesan has always been a staunch Veerappan loyalist and Krishnaswamy, who had earlier been a fence-sitter between the Jayalalitha and Veerappan factions, had recently begun to identify himself with the former minister's clique.

The re-allocation of portfolios held by the sacked ministers is also a pointer to the direction in which the wind is blowing. Krishnaswamy's portfolio has been given to Food Minister S. Ramachandran, and Jagadeesan's to Transport Minister S. Muthuswamy, both of whom have cast their lot with the party Propaganda Secretary Jayalalitha. And though no one is willing to go on record, the Jayalalitha camp is evidently content.

Irrespective of the course of AIADMK's factional politics, the entire episode is a sad reflection on the nature of politics in this southern state.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

"I am going to keep a low profile. Don't drag me into any controversy."

K.A. KRISHNASWAMY

BHAWAN SINGH

MGR and wife: playing cupid

"I was upset, but I respect the wishes of my beloved leader."

ANOOR JAGADEESAN

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ANDHRA PRADESH

A Close Affair

AT first sight, it seemed a straight victory for Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao and his Telugu Desam. After all, the party had bagged 18 of 21 Zilla Praja Parishads (ZPPs) and 632 out of 1,058 Mandal Praja Parishads (MPPs) in the mid-March elections. Moreover, its ally, the CPI(M), had won another 41 MPPs. But a few days later, after results of the March 18 municipal elections had come in, the Congress(I) too had something to smile about. In 49 out of 95 municipalities its chairpersons were installed plus it had won the mayor's seat in Vijayawada. The urban-rural divide couldn't have been clearer.

The ZPP and MPP elections were part of Rama Rao's design to decentralise administration and marked the replacement of the panchayat samithi system where non-party elections were fought. The public had to directly elect the MPP president—who represents 35,000 to 50,000 people—as also the chairman of the ZPP, whose constituency is twice as large as an MP's.

But even in the rural areas, the Congress(I) pulled off a significant victory in the south coastal districts. It captured the ZPP in the chief minister's home district, Krishna, and in the adjacent Guntur district. The Congress(I) bagged 42 of the 57 mandals in this district, 29 of the 48 in Krishna and half the 56 seats in the contiguous Prakasam district. Said party General Secretary Chandrababu Naidu: "We did not do well here because of anti-party activities. We will punish defiant workers."

The dominant upper caste in these districts is the Kamma, Rama Rao's own clan, which is divided on his decision to raise reservations for elected posts to 50 per cent. While 15 per cent is reserved for Harijans and 6 per cent for Girijans, Rama Rao reserved another 20 per cent for backward classes and 9 per cent for women. This incensed the Kammas as well as the Harijans—a large chunk of the electorate in the south coastal districts—who thought they would lose out on political posts and jobs.

Interestingly, both the parties have improved their position in terms of voting percentages as compared to earlier elections. If all the votes in villages and towns are considered together, then 48.4 per cent of the voters stamped the Telugu Desam's cycle symbol, as against 46.21 per cent in the 1985 assembly elections and 46.83 per cent in the January 1983 Assembly elections.

Though Rama Rao's Telugu Desam has done well in villages, its performance in towns has given it cause for concern.

For the first time since 1983, the Congress(I) under Vengala Rao has seriously challenged the ruling party.

The squabble-ridden Congress(I) first believed it had done badly due to the invectives hurled by Union Industry Minister and state Congress(I) chief Jalagam Vengala Rao at the chief minister. Though his own son Prasad Rao lost the race for ZPP presidentship in their home district of Khammam, Vengala Rao recovered sufficiently to demand Rama Rao's resignation when the detailed tally became known. The Congress(I) improved its position impressively, securing a 42.38 per cent of the votes, about 5 per cent more than the 1985 score and nearly 9 per cent more than at the time of the 1983 election debacle. If the urban-rural results are used to assess what it means in terms of assembly voting—in most cases, four mandals cover an assembly constituency—the Congress(I) was in the lead in about 140 of the 294 assembly constituencies. It clearly indicates that the next state election is bound to be a keen one.

For the Telugu Desam the victory did not come easily. Rama Rao toured all the districts over a month but his campaign was devoid of serious issues: he was mostly engaged in a slanging match with Vengala Rao. Rama Rao made a major faux pas when, in the tiny town of Madanapalle, he described his actor-son Balakrishna as a crowd puller and a worthy successor. The announcement was intended to neutralise his son-in-law Chandrababu Naidu—another aspirant for party leadership—but later, Rama Rao denied that he had announced his intention to crown Balakrishna. All the same, the chief minister had to face scathing criticism.

The elections have been so reassuring for the Congress(I) that Vengala Rao says his party will certainly triumph in the next assembly elections, "The myths about Rama Rao have yet to be fully shattered. The voters are still coming to grips with the maladministration. His abilities will become better known when he runs out of cash for his populist gimmicks."

As for Rama Rao, following the analysis of results, he is reportedly going slow on his plan to reshuffle the ministry and pull up errant district party leaders for the Telugu Desam's defeat in some areas. Said a senior minister: "The chief minister was keen on making dramatic changes soon after the elections. But the voting pattern and the failure of the party in towns have made him put off the plan indefinitely."

Meanwhile, the emergence of the ZPP with chairpersons of enormous clout deserves watching since they will hold the purse strings for district developmental programmes. What will also be carefully watched is the struggle for succession within the Telugu Desam whose chief will have to find a way of ensuring that the Congress(I) does not get any closer in popularity terms.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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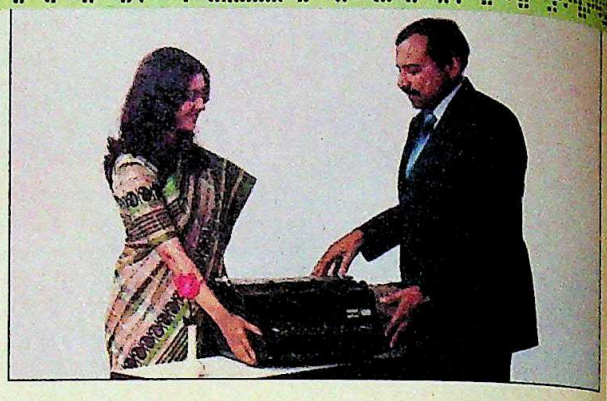

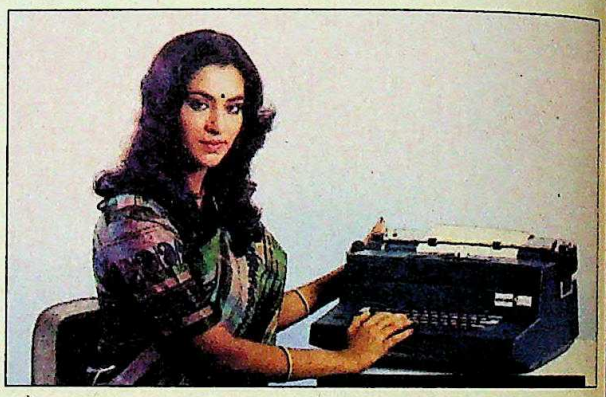

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BIHAR

Farm Fraud

WAS there an agricultural decline in Bihar during the sixth plan? If yes, who were the dramatis personae involved? These are difficult questions but last fortnight the state Vigilance Department started the search for some answers into an otherwise forbidden area. It began probing the affairs of the Agriculture Directorate and the Bihar State Cooperative Marketing Union, an apex cooperative institution.

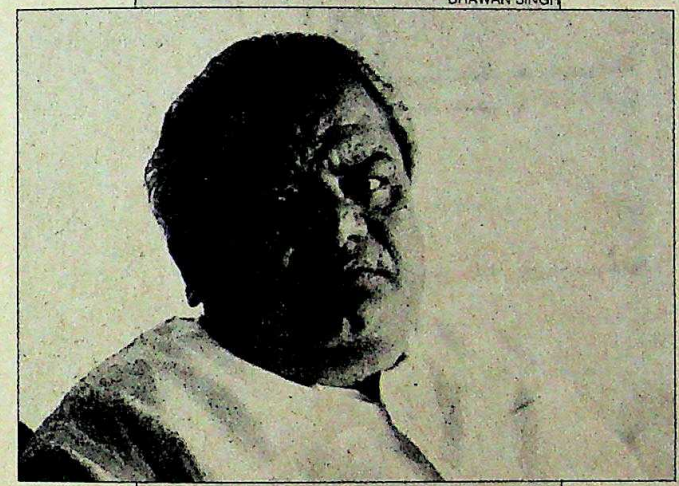
The inquiry was a personal triumph for Bihar Khetihar Manch (BKM) Convenor Saryu Roy, who had been petitioning Rajiv Gandhi for a year that public money had been plundered during the sixth plan in the name of farm inputs, thus turning what was meant to be Bihar's green revolution into a farmers' nightmare. On the basis of Roy's well-documented petitions, Rajiv directed Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey to have the charges investigated. And the Vigilance Department was brought in.

But it is going to be an uphill task. The investigation is sure to upset powerful people including MP and "cooperative king" Tapeshwar Singh, the Marketing Union's chairman; Agriculture Minister Lahtan Choudhary; Advocate-General Ram Balak Mahto and Agriculture Director D.N. Ram. Says an official: "Roy's petition is based on hard evidence but we have to tread carefully." The allegations are stunning:

► In 1983, the rabi crop in over 50,000 hectares in 31 blocks of Rohtas and Bhojpur districts withered away. In the face of a BKM threat to launch an agitation, the administration tested samples of Hara Bahar, the union's best fertiliser, which was used. The nutrient content was found to be far below what it ought to have been. Inquiries revealed that local traders had supplied the fertiliser—in the name of a non-existent Surat firm—which was sold in the union's bags to farmers. Though Tapeshwar Singh announced that farmers would be compensated, only Rs 2 lakh for two blocks has been paid.

► In December 1983, the then Patna collector Rajkumar Singh seized 4,500 tonnes of single superphosphate fertiliser from a private businessman who did not possess a licence. But before action could be taken, Ram issued an antedated licence and renewed it for the next year. Rajkumar Singh retaliated by raiding the directorate: he seized forged documents and recommended action against Ram. The then chief minister, Chandrashekhar Singh, sought an explanation from Ram, and there matters rested until Choudhary referred the matter to Mahto, who exonerated Ram. Says Ram: "I did nothing illegal, otherwise I would have been removed long back."

BHAWAN SINGH



The inquiry, on Rajiv Gandhi's directions, may implicate a number of powerful people, including Congress(I) MP and "cooperative king" Tapeshwar Singh.

► On the Agriculture Department's request, in 1984, the union asked two Patna traders to supply 75,000 quintals of gram seeds. A raid by Rajkumar Singh found that ordinary gram instead of gram seeds was being supplied to the farmers. The price difference: Rs 500 per quintal. Further, the suppliers had no licence and the meeting of the committee which selected the suppliers was attended by Tapeshwar Singh and Ram. Rajkumar Singh recommended strong action against the officials, confiscated the remaining stock and ordered the filing of an FIR. The police sought the Government's permission to arrest Ram, but Choudhary intervened and with Mahto's help, bailed Ram out.

► Two years ago, the union bought pesticides worth Rs 2 crore just one month before their date of expiry, which could not be disposed of. Last year, the Agriculture Department purchased pesticides worth Rs 65 lakh for the rabi crop when the crop was ready for harvesting. Tapeshwar Singh justified this as an "important social obligation".

► In March 1985, the union sold 70,000 tonnes of seeds to retail stores. Patna Collector Mukhtiyar Singh received complaints that pesticide-treated poisonous grain was being sold for human consumption and samples were tested, confirming the reports. His recommendation for a state-level inquiry into the extent of the damage to humans was ignored.

► Last year, the union distributed zinc sulphate and chilated zinc under a short-term credit scheme. Samples of the zinc sulphate when tested showed no zinc at all. Inquiries by Mukhtiyar Singh and Nalanda Collector Sushil Kumar Choudhary showed that magnesium sulphate (price: Rs 400 a tonne) had been passed off as zinc sulphate (Rs 5,100 a tonne). An inquiry into the Marketing Union's role is going on. Though the Bombay manufacturers of chilated zinc had said clearly that it was not a fertiliser, it was sold as such.

Signs of panic are already visible in Lahtan Choudhary's request to Agriculture Production Commissioner Nishikant Sinha to get back all the files he had given to the Vigilance Department. But the investigators agreed only to return some files, and after making photostats.

But because of the possible political repercussions, it seems doubtful if the investigators will be able to sustain the tempo, although the two officials in charge, Inspector General of Police N.N. Singh and Deputy Inspector General D.P. Ojha are not the kind of people who will be cowed down. But *The Indian Nation*, a local daily usually supportive of the Dubey administration, summed up the public mood: "The people of Bihar have been pleasantly surprised that the investigation into charges against such formidably influential persons has been ordered at all." Any inquiry is obviously better than none. —FARZAND AHMED

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ORISSA

Sorry State

THE wear and tear of one year's incessant infighting within the ruling Congress(I) is finally beginning to make itself felt to Orissa's 2.63 crore people. A series of events that took place last fortnight indicated the serious extent to which the grasp of the state administration has weakened as a consequence of this constant political turmoil.

There was a deep sense of despair at the near collapse of authority. While the poverty-stricken tribals of Kalahandi and Koraput districts continued to die of hunger and disease, waves of communalism swept across the south-western districts of this otherwise peaceful state, and several cases of rape involving police as well as other government employees were reported. One of these incidents, which occurred in Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik's chamber in the secretariat, gave rise to the greatest public outcry. Angry students took to the streets in Bhubaneswar, chanting: "Orissa is unsafe in Patnaik's hands."

In the state Assembly, even Congress(I) dissidents joined hands with the Opposition to attack the state Government.

But Patnaik appeared to have lost the very will to reassert his authority. Former finance minister and dissident leader Gangadhar Mahapatra summarised the situation: "There may be a government technically but there is no government now. There is a complete psychological breakdown." It was a telling comment on an administration that, in the early '80s, was rated as one of the better run in the country.

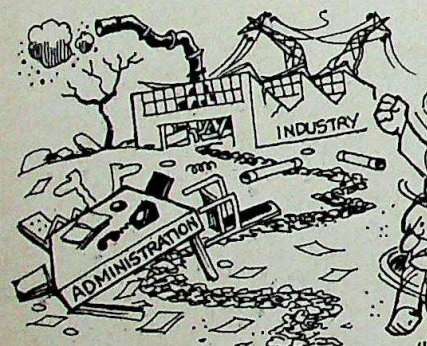
The result is an administration unable to function. The administrative palsy was best illustrated by a startling report of the Planning and Coordination Department on the eve of the state's budget session. It said that of the Rs 605-crore plan outlay for 1986-87, only Rs 305 crore—or 50.52 per cent—had been utilised by end-December. The Irrigation and Power Department, allotted the maximum of Rs 291.50 crore, used up only 47.68 per cent of the money in the first nine months of 1986-87. In the Agriculture and Cooperation Department, the figure was 49.88 per cent; in Education 45.44 per cent; in General Administration and Police less than 25 per cent. And in the Law Department, only 4 per cent of the funds had been used up. The utilisation in Central and centrally-sponsored schemes was also a low 50.90 per cent. Warned the report: "Unless the plan allocation is utilised in full, there will be proportionate cuts in the Central assistance." But Patnaik made light of this failure, arguing that "this happens everywhere and every year", and that real work gets done only between November and March.

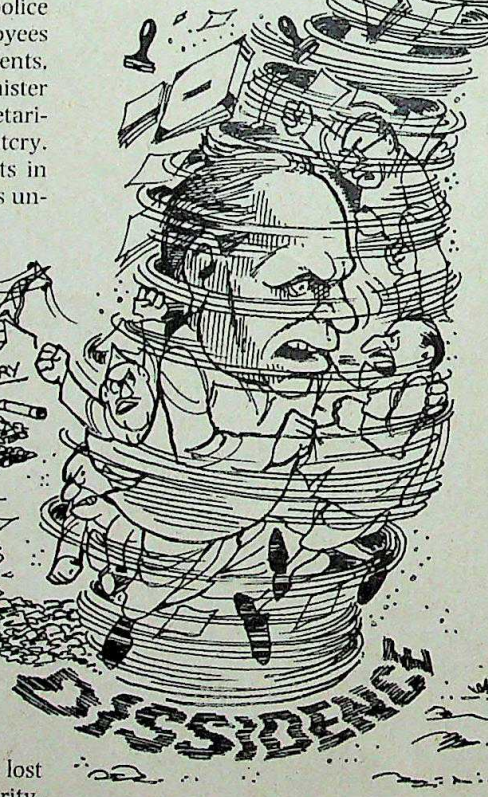
The listlessness was evident in both the presentation of the annual budget for 1987-88 by state Finance Minister Jugal Kishore Patnaik as also Governor B.N. Pande's address to the Assembly. The budget, showing a deficit of Rs 12.10 crore, and presented within just six minutes, spoke of neither new taxes nor new schemes. Pande, on his part, had little to highlight in terms of the Government's specific achievements and blamed "natural calamities" and "historical reasons" instead for the plight of the poor. All the same, he claimed that Orissa's destitutes had received much greater priority than in other states.

But opposition leader and former chief minister Biju Patnaik, recently back from an extensive tour of 43 constituencies, said these claims were untrue. While the leader of the Opposition and the chief minister argued back and forth about real achievements in alleviating poverty, a micro-level study of the Integrated Rural Development Programme in Kalahandi proved an additional embarrassment for the Government. Conducted by the economic appraisal cell of the Orissa University of Agriculture and Technology, it said that the programme had lifted only 0.60 per cent of the beneficiaries over the poverty line. It put to doubt the chief minister's claim that 23 per cent of the people covered by schemes for the poor had been raised above the poverty line.

So evident is the administrative paralysis that it attracted the attention of even Uma Shankar Dixit, Rajiv Gandhi's special emissary, who had visited the state for four days in February to assess the intra-party situation. Before return-

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN





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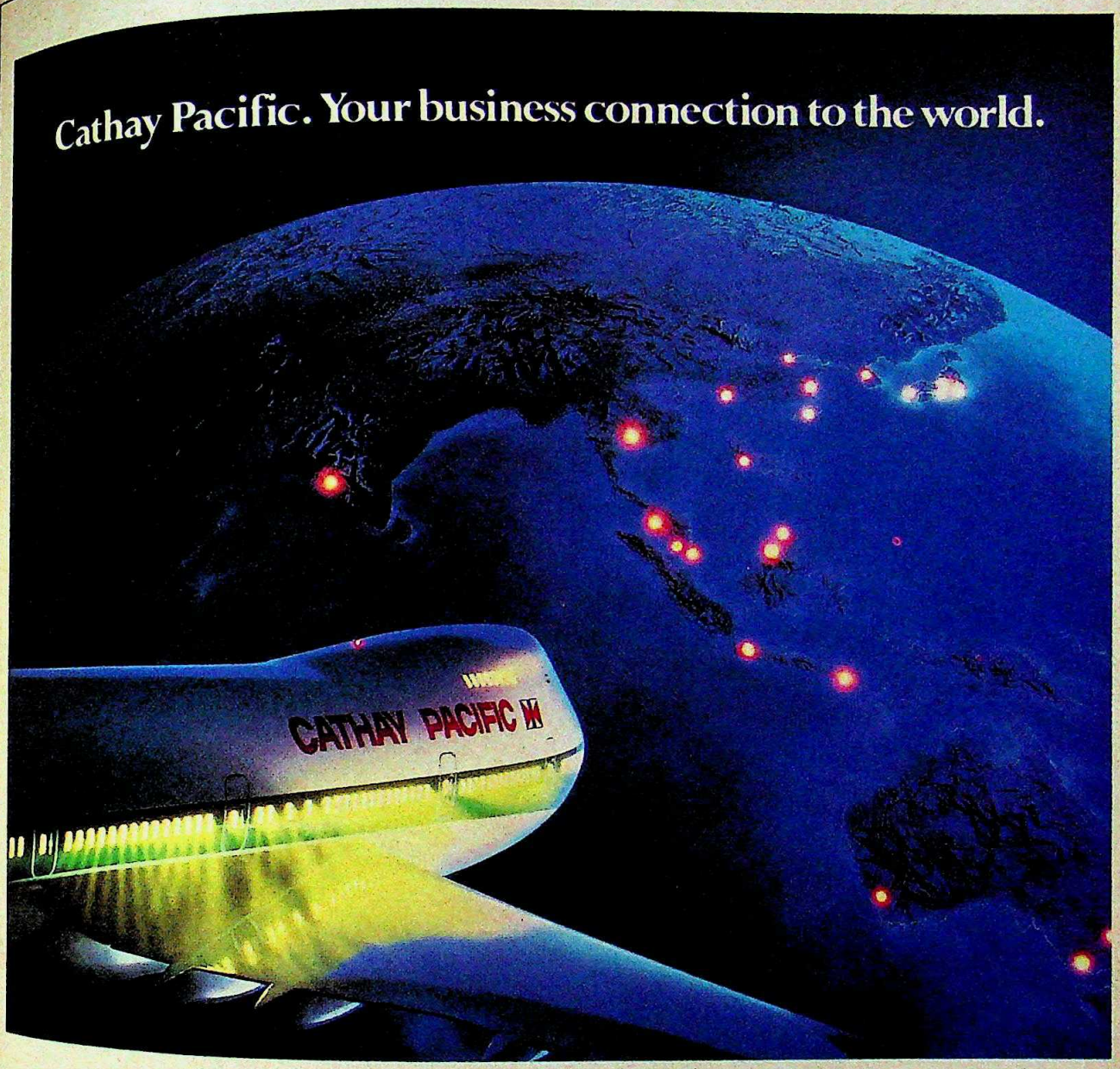

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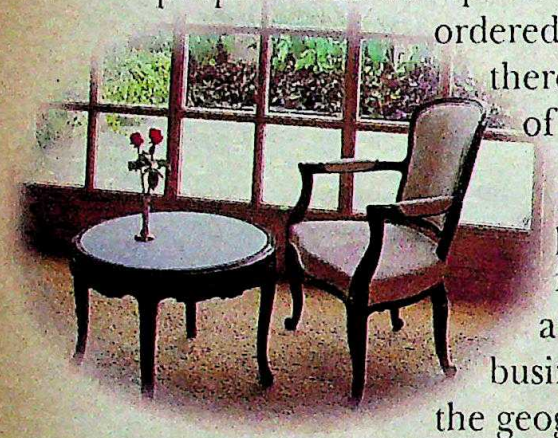
The Concept of The Three-Da

For a 'perk' as attractive as the sabbatical, there are far too many resistances to making it a reality—not the least among these being the manager's own corporate stoicism and, of course, the genuine problems of continuity.

The need of course, is for creating among the more brilliant of one's people the mental spaces for creativity and personal innovation. Within the ordered routine of maintenance and day-to-day fire-fighting there is usually no mental room for the free movement of intuition and breakthrough thinking.



However, by a process of business evolution perhaps, senior executives worldwide seem to have fashioned as it were a clever, convenient, legitimate and effective substitute for the real thing—the quick, business-dictated trip outside the work city. Be it the geographical stimulus of another place or the mere distancing from the sources of expediency, managers have confessed to a perceptible shift in patterns of thinking during these trips.

A study of this phenomenon of contemporary business metaphysics inspired the hospitality designers of Welcomgroup to innovate a totally new genre of hotel services. "Can we", they asked themselves, "create an environment for the encouragement of this 'mental space' for executives?" They realised that it called for more than the obvious provision of commercial facilities like secretarial services and equipment. It meant carving out a whole new quality of properties and services. It involved programmes of executive life-style study and, very important, intensive training programmes for a new breed of hotel managers and personnel.

Maurya Sheraton Towers

Thus was born the idea of the Maurya Sheraton Towers.

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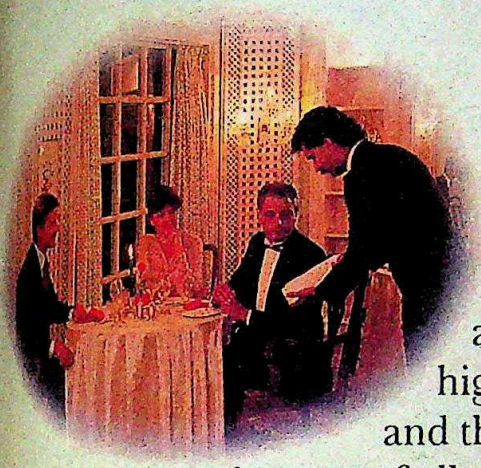
-Day Working Sabbatical.



When we in the advertising agency were briefed about this unique concept and were 'shown the product', it was indeed difficult to contain the hyperbole of traditional advertese. The glossy photographs of the highlights of the Maurya Towers property and the services looked impressive; but we saw too the inadequacy of all these to convey the real discriminator between the Maurya Towers and other five-star deluxe hotels.

The exclusivity of each floor, the elegant design of the rooms; the Business Centre and conference rooms; the intellectual stimulation of the Tower Club with its library and bar, the dining room and the health club; the exquisite taste with which every corner is designed...all these were incomparable, but in a way not the real discriminators.

What makes the Maurya Towers another genre in the art of executive hospitality is the intangibles which the sensitive and mature intellect will perceive—in the finesse, the unobtrusiveness of the service, the incredible efficiency, the charm and the flair with which the personnel allow you that 'mental space' which in fact is possible during your stay.

Admittedly not for everybody, the Maurya Towers should be seen as an imaginative investment in creativity for you and your nucleus of brilliant people. Perhaps the next time you are in Delhi on business, it may be a good idea to try this attractive new idea of the micro-mini working sabbatical.

The Maurya Sheraton Towers at Welcomgroup Maurya Sheraton, Diplomatic Enclave, New Delhi-110 021

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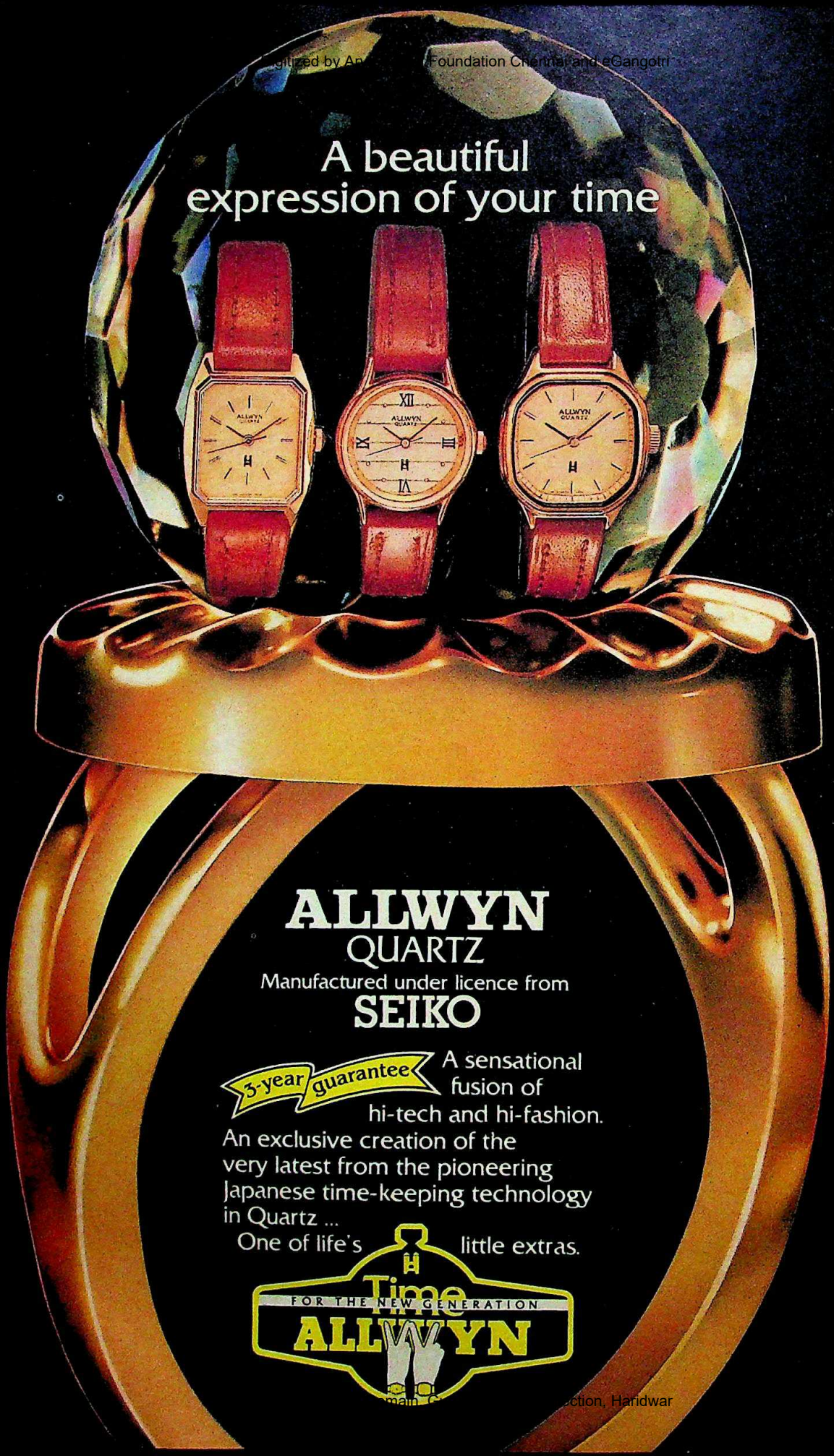

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the intra-party situation. Before returning, he issued an extraordinary appeal to the bureaucracy not to be influenced by Congress(I) infighting.

Even Patnaik doesn't deny the effect of the political scene on administration. Says he: "Naturally, it will affect functioning when one is bogged down by attacks. The others may have a one-point programme (to oust me) but I have a 20-point programme to implement." Over the year, Patnaik has been compelled to rush to New Delhi regularly to counter the moves of dissidents there. In addition to this constant junketing, each of the five by-elections—the Congress(I) has lost them all—have taken several weeks of Patnaik's time so that he has had precious little left for the tasks of administration.

The results of Patnaik's preoccupation with his political survival are evident all over. The state Public Service Commission has been without a chairman and a member for over a year. Utkal University has neither a controller of examinations nor a deputy controller. Secretariat sources point out that Patnaik disposes of files only irregularly and often in the manner of a man with other things on his mind. In the past year, about a hundred doctors have been transferred and the orders cancelled following the use of political clout. Last month, possibly in an attempt to show he was still in control, Patnaik shuffled 22 secretary-level officials. Said dissident leader B.P. Mohanty: "Never in the state's history have there been such drastic changes at the top level during the off-season. And at the lower level, changes are made frequently either to please the loyalists or punish the dissidents." Biju Patnaik adds that the officers, unsure of whether the chief minister would continue, are essentially whiling time. He says: "The chief minister has lost hold over them and the officers only carry out his orders mechanically."

Meanwhile, the dissident pressure, far from declining, may actually scale new highs in the coming weeks. This situation is reflected in a memorandum 46 MLAs sent to Rajiv Gandhi seeking permission to resign their assembly seats, because they "don't want to be party to the speedy erosion of the party's image in the state under the chief minister ship of J.B. Patnaik". As long as Patnaik's political fate remains unresolved, it is the state administration and the people of Orissa who will continue to suffer.

—FARZAND AHMED in Bhubaneswar

LAST WORD/RAJINDER PURI

The Acting Advisor

WE all know that Rajiv Gandhi is a wonderful prime minister but he gets rotten advisors. That's why things go wrong. When things go wrong people say: "If only Rajiv would get good advice there wouldn't be such a mess!"

I ask: "Who is his advisor?"

They say: "Who knows?"

So I asked an insider. He said: "Rajiv keeps changing his advisors. These days his closest advisor is Amitabh Bachchan!"

"Amitabh?" I exclaimed. "How did Rajiv select him?"

The insider told me how. It seems that Rajiv was fed up. He had tried the old war-horses as well as the young whizz-kids. Nothing worked. Kamalapati, Arun Nehru, they were all in the dumps. "These people do nothing but talk," Rajiv complained. "I need someone who can act! Isn't there a single person in our party who can act, for God's sake?"

"Indeed there is, sir," a party minion said earnestly.

"Who?" asked Rajiv.

"Amitabh, sir," the minion replied. "They say he has acted hundreds of times! He has been to countless different locations!"

"Very well," Rajiv said. "Bring him to me!" That is how Amitabh became Rajiv's chief advisor.

The prime minister and his new advisor got on wonderfully and Rajiv was very pleased with the way things started moving.

"I am worried about my children's security," Rajiv said. "We have to guard against terrorists!"

"Don't worry," Amitabh said. "I will make arrangements for your kids to study in Switzerland where they will be safe. Of course, money will have to be arranged!"

"But do you have any experience with terrorists?" Rajiv asked.

"Are you kidding?" Amitabh said. "I have had lots of experience with terrorists of all kinds. I know how they think and plan!"

"Where did you get such experience?" Rajiv asked.

"I thought everyone knew." Amitabh said with surprise. "In *Sholay*, of course!"

"Ah yes, of course," Rajiv said hastily. "But what about V.P. Singh, you know how he bristles at the mention of Switzerland, he can get inconvenient!"

"That's easy," Amitabh said. "Create a war scare and shift him to defence!"

"War scare?" Rajiv said with alarm. "War can be a nasty business!"

"Don't worry about violence," Amitabh said confidently. "I have lots of experience of dealing with violence!"

"How?" Rajiv asked curiously.

"By working in *Kalia*," Amitabh reminded him.

"That's right," Rajiv said with relief. "But what about the press? The papers may kick up dirt!"

"Relax," Amitabh said. "Conduct a police raid against a press baron and the papers will behave! I know all about police work!"

"Where did you learn that?" Rajiv asked with surprise.

"Don't you remember?" Amitabh said. "In *Aakhree Rasta*!"

"Yes I remember," Rajiv said, biting his lip. "But if the police bungle it will be terrible! A big scandal could break out, I may even have to resign! I would be without a job!"

"So what?" Amitabh said. "Being jobless can be fun!"

"What!" Rajiv gasped. "How can you say that?"

"That's easy," Amitabh said, patting Rajiv on the back. "Don't forget, I've faced unemployment in *Andha Kanoon*..."

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BOMBAY

King Con

FOR years the motto of Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri has been "where trust is a tradition". Last fortnight, however, Bombay's leading jewellers carried their trusting much further than expected.

Early in the afternoon of March 19, a posse of men flashing Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) identity cards descended on their posh showroom in south Bombay and took up stations. The leader, dressed immaculately in a three-piece suit, ordered the closed circuit TV to be switched off, "confiscated' the petty cash of Rs 3.75 lakh and choice samples worth about Rs 20 lakh, stepped out—and then suddenly disappeared.

The plot seemed straight out of a James Hadley Chase whodunit. Just a day earlier an advertisement had appeared in *The Times of India* asking for "50 dynamic graduates for intelligence officers posts". The aspirants were asked to report at none other than the famous five-star Taj Hotel. They went through a full-length interview with a man called Mohan Singh, who asked them a variety of questions as to why they had applied for the job, and how they would handle given situations in apprehending smugglers. The 28 candidates who were selected were then informed that they would have to prove their worth in 'practicals' by participating in a mock raid.

Accordingly, the excited aspirants landed up the next day as asked. Singh, who was staying at the Taj, had hired a bus and everyone trooped in eager to prove their mettle. Claiming to be from the Research and Analysis Wing, he then gave them CBI identity cards complete with their photographs—which they had submitted earlier—carefully affixed. With a brief break for a cold drink in the middle they then proceeded to their target. Things then went as per plan, Singh's plan.

After Singh did his vanishing act on the pretext of going to investigate the next shop, nobody smelt a rat at all for the best part of an hour. Then someone suspecting that something was wrong went looking for the bus. But it had disappeared. Some of the others went to the Taj to look for Singh. But he had already checked out. It was then that finally, the police were called in.

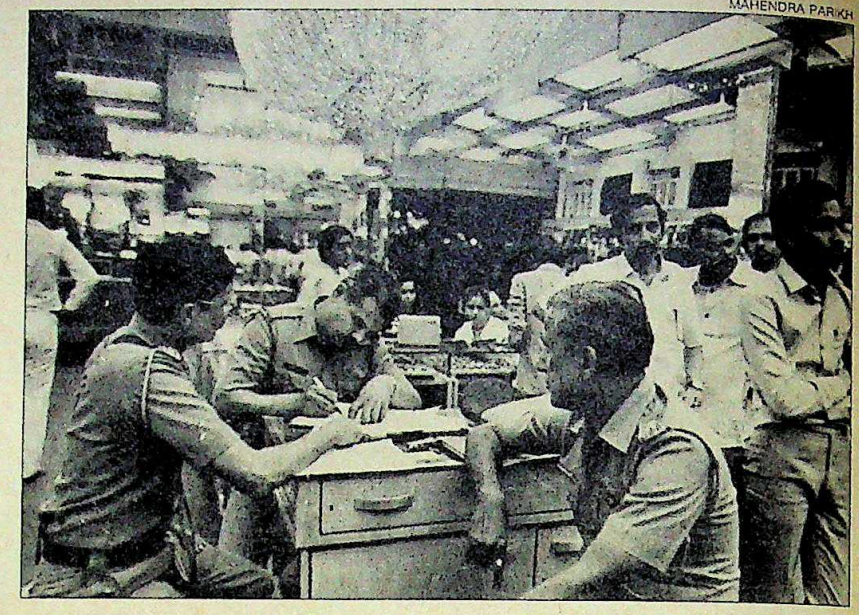
"It was a very smart operation," admits Deputy Commissioner of Police S.M. Mushriff who is in charge of the case. "We have very little to work on." Singh, who speaks with a distinct south Indian accent, left a Trivandrum address at the Taj but that naturally proved a blind—nobody stays there. According to the police, Singh drove the bus back to the Taj. He then caught a taxi and was spotted in an auto-rickshaw in the suburbs carrying a briefcase, an attache case and a gunny bag. But it was here that the trail ended.

The whole operation was evidently very well-planned. There was even a dress rehearsal of sorts. In October last year a similar advertisement had appeared in *The Times of India*. And even then about 150 candidates landed up at the Taj. But unfortunately, however, the CBI had been tipped off and Singh (if he indeed was behind it) failed to show up.

Apart from his evident knowledge of CBI technique, this has added credence to the view that Singh is either an old CBI hand or has an inside channel of information. "He knew exactly how to go about it," says owner Pratap Zaveri, who has been through several raids before. "There was nothing to make us suspicious this time. All the documents were there and he said all the normal stuff about search and seizure and asked for our cooperation. It is the custom in all raids that you hand over the firearms in your possession, so I handed over my revolver to him, which he put into his briefcase." Zaveri says that they did protest when the man was leaving the shop since he had not given them a receipt, as is normal procedure. But the man completely ignored them.

All the police know is that the conman is 5 ft 6 inches tall, black-haired, dark-complexioned, and bespectacled. As the conned "recruits" testify, he is a glib talker. There is also one more clue to his character—they know he is exceedingly smart. —PARTHASARATHI SWAMI

MAHENDRA PARIKH



Policemen at Zaveri's jewellery shop: after the act

sumables. Contact Reliable Media, 20, Shivai Estate, Near Parke Davis, Sakl Naka, Andheri. AA22445X

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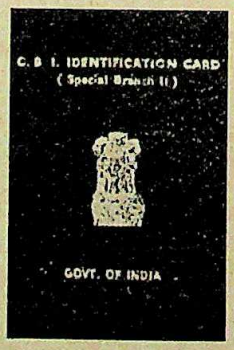

Newspaper ad (top) and fake ID card: clever ploy

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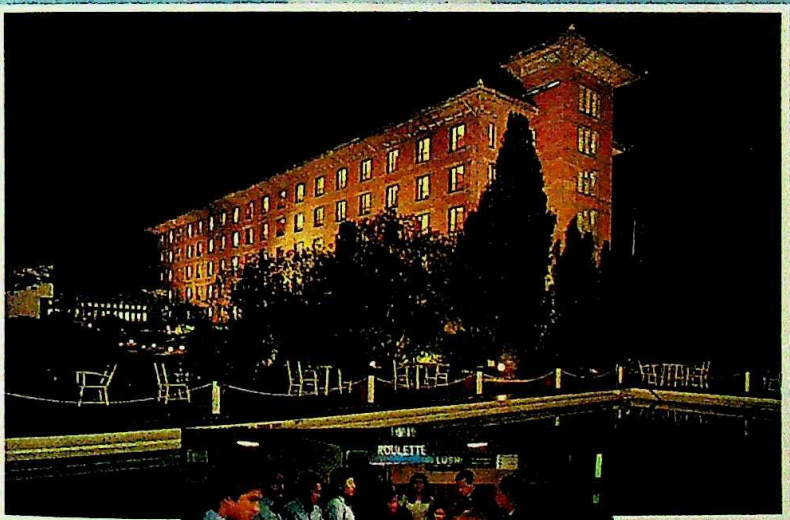
SITA, MERCURY & OBEROI HOTELS PRESENT

Soaltee Surprise

OBEROI TURNS A VISIT INTO A VACATION.



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Soaltee Oberoi

For further details contact SITA, Mercury, Oberoi Hotels or a bonafide travel agent.

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CONGRESS(I)

CRUMBLING

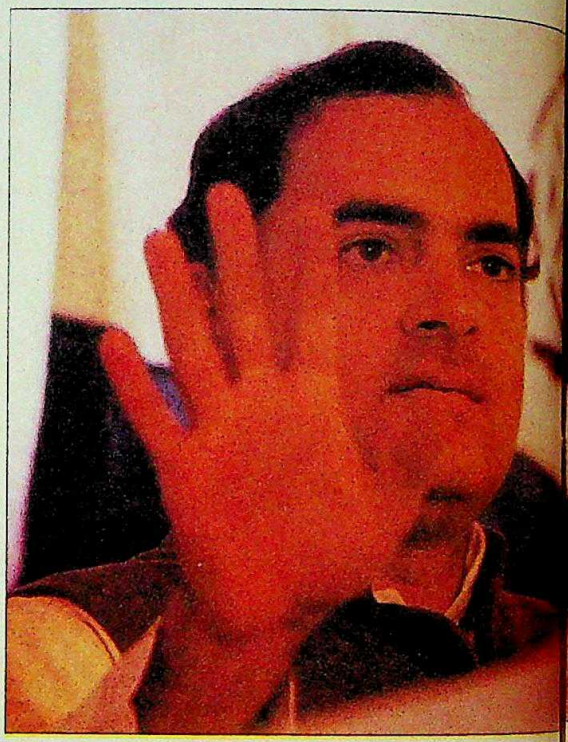
The Congress(I), a national party, ruling in 18 states when Rajiv became prime minister, now rules in only a dozen.

THE jokes, the jibes, the jabs and the quips which Rajiv Gandhi is known to aim with startling dexterity at opposing parliamentarians seemed to fail him last fortnight when the prime minister faced the Lok Sabha for the first time after his party's debacle in the assembly polls in West Bengal and Kerala. When Rajiv, looking obviously dejected, walked into the chamber, an opposition member arose and asked the prime minister whether he could use this opportunity to condole him. Rajiv remained silent but the members burst into raucous laughter and even the Treasury benches could scarce forbear to join in.

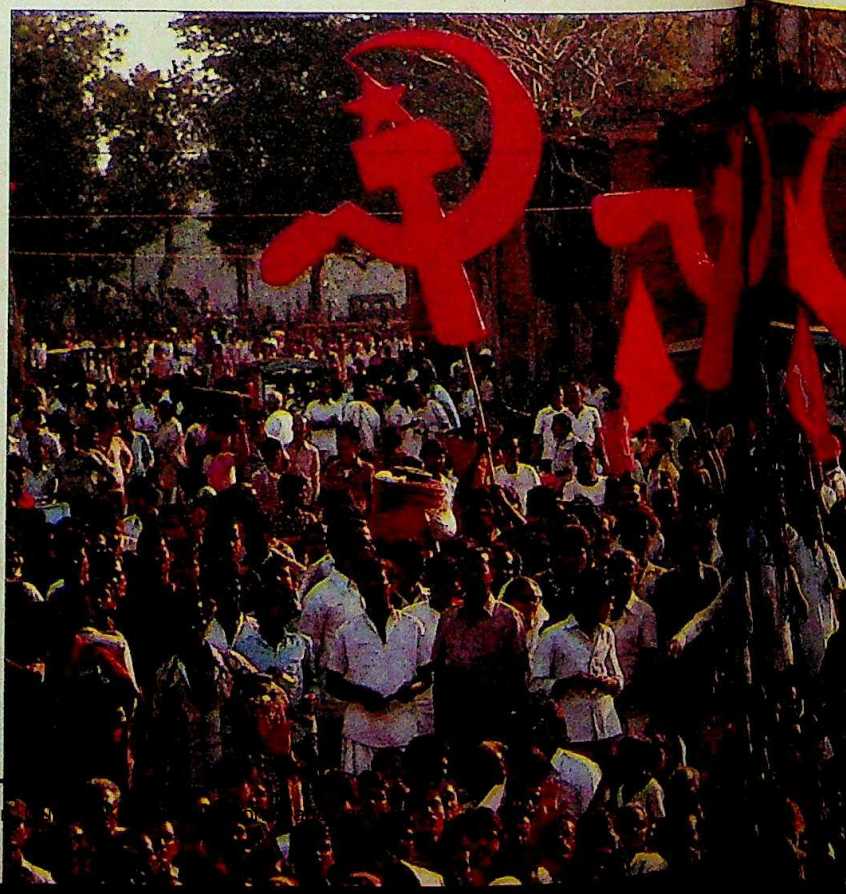
That Rajiv's fighting spirit had evaporated, if even temporarily, was evident from his speech delivered earlier to the Congress(I) Parliamentary Party. Even during this meeting, billed as a post-mortem of the party's electoral misfortunes, Rajiv was not the man he was a year ago when he had addressed his party at its centenary celebrations and promised to usher in a new era of reform and rejuvenation, even if it meant throwing out its most formidable power brokers. His mood was sullen, and eager for compromise. And in order to rally his party around him he resorted to a time-worn tactic his mother had used whenever she felt her base threatened. The words could have been Mrs Gandhi's but her son now found refuge in them. In a statement bordering on paranoia, Rajiv blamed his party's reverses on a "foreign conspiracy" aimed at destabilising India. The enemies of Congress(I), which stood for the stability of the nation, he said, were the "friends of the multinationals...whose allegiance is to their masters abroad".

The rhetoric apart, it was obvious that Rajiv had come face to face with a fundamental truth at home: Congress(I), a national party, ruling in 18 states when he became prime minister now rules in only a dozen. And the south was lost entirely. For the first time since India became independent there is not a single Congress chief minister in any of the four southern states. And large chunks of the east are already out of Congress control. This shrinking base of influence threatens to reduce the once unchallenged grandeur and reach of the Indian National Congress to a satrapy over the Hindi heartland.

For the first time since independence there is no Congress chief minister in any of the four southern states. Large chunks of the east are already out of Congress control.



BHAWAN SINGH



(Top) Rajiv got a poor hand; new prominence for hammer and sickle

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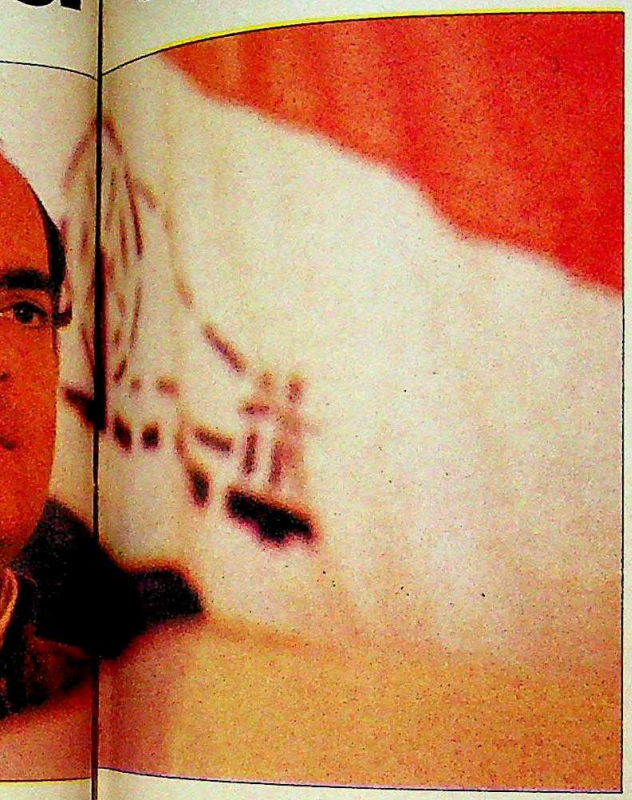
G CITADEL

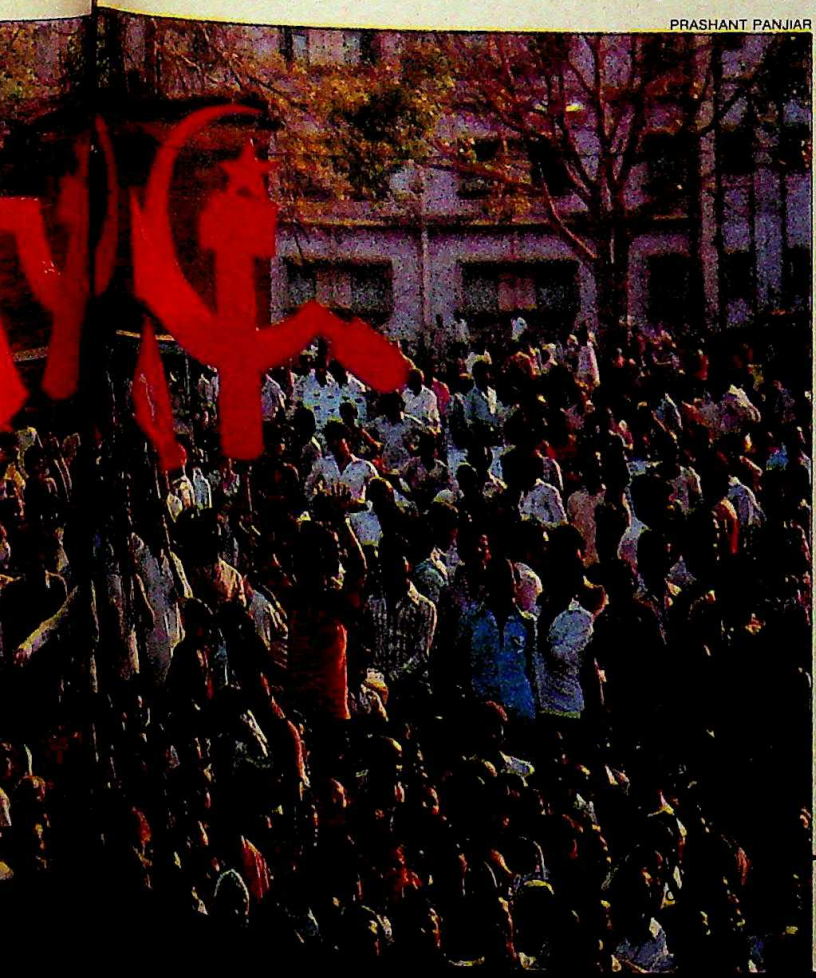


But there was little to take heart in even the by-election victories in the Uttar Pradesh cowbelt. The two Congress(I) victories in Hardwar and Rath were by narrow margins. Congress(I)'s victory margin in Hardwar was reduced from 1.4 lakh votes to 23,000. What was most disturbing to Congress(I) was the emergence of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in all the Uttar Pradesh constituencies. This militant Harijan organisation has been eating into the traditional Scheduled Caste vote banks of the Congress(I) and was partially responsible also, for the defeat of the ruling party stalwart, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Ammar Rizvi by opposition candidate Akbar 'Dumpy' Ahmed in Kashipur where the vote of the Harijans went to a BSP candidate instead of Congress(I). The Kashipur defeat was symbolically among the worst that Congress(I) suffered. This was the prestige seat vacated by N.D. Tiwari, minister for external affairs, when he was inducted into the Union Cabinet—a seat which he had won by more than 40,000 votes and was virtually considered a Congress(I) pocket borough. Ahmed won despite strong campaigning by Congress(I) ministers including Tiwari himself.

Opposition leaders, smelling blood, were quick to pounce on the wounded ruling party and its leader. Janata Party leader George Fernandes, stating that Rajiv Gandhi had converted the elections into an appeal for a personal mandate, demanded that the prime minister should quit because the electorate had rejected him. L.K. Advani, president of the Bharatiya Janata Party, said that the prime minister "by his lack of perspective and because of his inexperience had personally contributed to the Congress(I) defeats". The Lok Dal General Secretary, Satya Prakash Malaviya, said that the poll results showed a massive disillusionment with Rajiv's policies. H.N. Bahuguna, leader of another Lok Dal faction, said that the poll results were critical because they came "when our polity is facing a wilful subversion of its democratic institutions by no less a person than the prime minister".

P. Upendra, Telugu Desam MP, pointed out that Congress(I)'s stature had been reduced to that of a regional party, while Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde saw in the election results a new

PRASHANT PANJIAR



There was little doubt that Rajiv's credibility, clout and charisma had been dealt a megavolt jolt.

Rajiv had gambled by putting his personal image and popularity on the firing line. More than Congress(I), Rajiv's personal ability as a vote-catcher was on trial.

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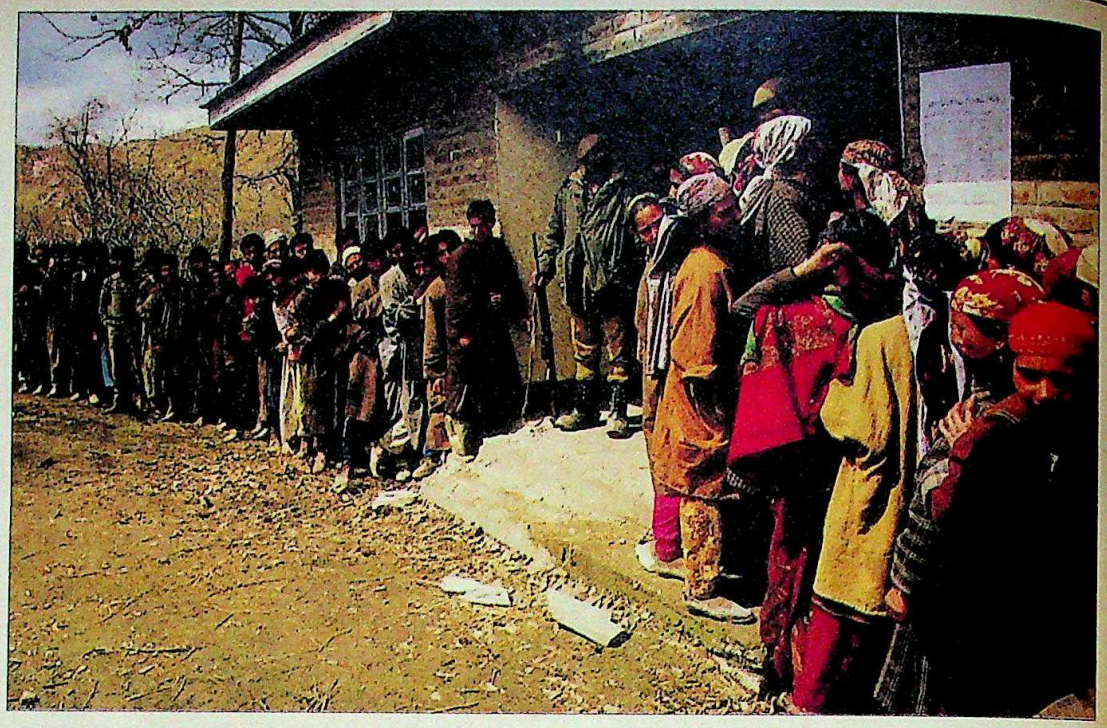
In Jammu & Kashmir the picture for Congress(I) is not as bright as the party's leaders, including Rajiv Gandhi, are making it out to be. Every Congress(I) candidate was nominated under Farooq's veto and a grassroots Congress(I) organisation, is virtually non-existent.

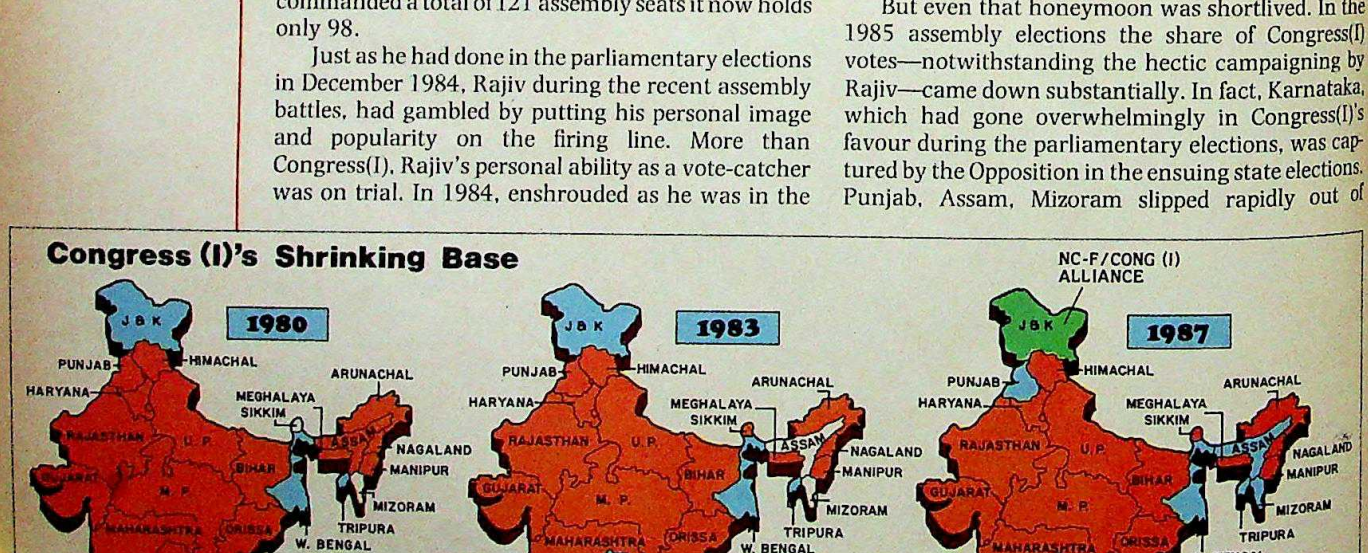


Polling in Kashmir: charges of rigging

pattern of popular support for opposition leaders and parties. While some of this opposition rhetoric may be as wildly overblown as was Rajiv's in his speech to his party's parliamentarians—because both Rajiv and Congress(I) still remain formidable national forces to reckon with—there was little doubt that Rajiv's credibility, clout and charisma had been dealt a megavolt jolt. The electoral numbers tell their own stark story: in the three states where Congress(I) had commanded a total of 121 assembly seats it now holds only 98.

Just as he had done in the parliamentary elections in December 1984, Rajiv during the recent assembly battles, had gambled by putting his personal image and popularity on the firing line. More than Congress(I), Rajiv's personal ability as a vote-catcher was on trial. In 1984, enshrouded as he was in the image of a new and dynamic leader and in the atmosphere of the sympathy that erupted after Mrs Gandhi's assassination, Rajiv had carried the day for his party. The people had responded to him because of his freshness of approach and because he represented stability at a time when most feared disintegration and chaos.

But even that honeymoon was shortlived. In the 1985 assembly elections the share of Congress(I) votes—notwithstanding the hectic campaigning by Rajiv—came down substantially. In fact, Karnataka, which had gone overwhelmingly in Congress(I)'s favour during the parliamentary elections, was captured by the Opposition in the ensuing state elections. Punjab, Assam, Mizoram slipped rapidly out of



Maps by B.K. SHARMA

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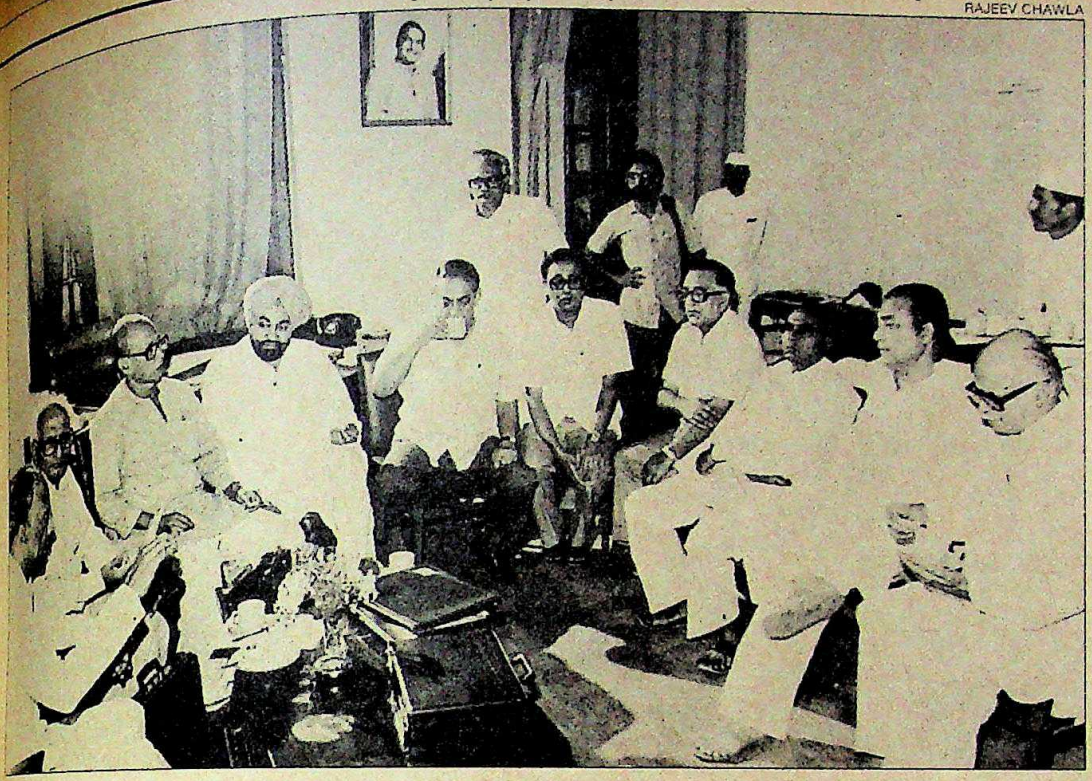
RAJEEV CHAWLA



Opposition leaders discussing poll results: new hope

Congress(I)'s grip. And now Kerala has slipped into the determined grip of the Marxist-led Left Democratic Front while West Bengal has witnessed the virtual destruction of the Congress(I) not only as a political force but also as a political organisation.

In Jammu and Kashmir the picture for Congress(I) is not as bright as the party's leaders, including Rajiv Gandhi, are making it out to be. Here Congress(I), the main opposition party, teamed up with the mass-based ruling National Conference (NC) to take on what should have been a rag-tag bunch of opposition candidates loosely united under the fundamentalist banner of the Muslim United Front (MUF). But the MUF posed a strong challenge and even though only a handful of its candidates were elected, it made major inroads—including in Srinagar district—into the traditional strongholds of the established parties while maintaining its grip in key districts. The electoral gain was for all intents and purposes NC's victory engineered by Farooq Abdullah who treats Congress(I) as a junior partner. In fact, every Congress(I) candidate was nominated under the veto power of Farooq and a grassroots Congress(I) organisation, except for a few areas in Jammu, is virtually non-existent.

If the Congress(I) piggy-backed on the coat-tails of Farooq in Kashmir because it lacked a viable organisation of its own to fight an equal battle as part of the coalition, it had, as is now evident, even less of an organisation in West Bengal where the party had been reduced to a shambles because of internecine squabbling. Because of the absence of any state-level leaders capable of standing up to the colossal stature of Jyoti Basu, Rajiv decided that he would play the role of the giant killer himself. The fight there ultimately became one between Rajiv and the state's leadership. It was the same story in Kerala. In both states the campaigns were personalised. They were Rajiv's campaigns.

And Rajiv campaigned hard. He travelled for about 20 days in both the states, and in about 100 hours of barnstorming addressed as many as 200 meetings. But the campaigns were desultory and disorganised as was the campaign rhetoric. He attracted huge crowds at places but he failed to define and discuss concrete issues. One day in West Bengal he would quibble with Basu about the expenditure of a Rs 1,000-crore grant to the state, and on another day he would talk about the building of a "nutan" (new) Bengal, which to many voters appeared to be a subliminal message that the Centre would redefine the state's boundaries by excluding areas which would go to "Gorkhaland". In Kerala, during his campaign, he quipped about renaming the Communist Party of India as the "Communal Party of India", a statement that, to the voters, reeked of hypocrisy because his own ruling party in the state was pandering to communal elements like the Muslim League and the Nair and Ezhwa communities.

What was most astonishing was the optimistic naivete with which Rajiv and his advisers approached the West Bengal and Kerala elections. Even four days before the polling started Rajiv confided to a top aide that, according to accurate reports he was getting, Congress(I) would dislodge Jyoti Basu in West Bengal and sweep the polls in Kerala. The misinformation he received is a serious indication that Rajiv's political apparatus has suffered grave damage.

And the crisis is partly of Rajiv's own making. For the last two years Rajiv made no serious attempt to strengthen his party organisation, even with the polls looming ahead. In Kerala and West Bengal he was unable to check Congress(I) infighting, which snowballed disastrously until the elections were at hand. He

Several opposition leaders, stating that Rajiv Gandhi had converted the elections into an appeal for a personal mandate, demanded that the prime minister should quit because the electorate had rejected him.

The electoral numbers tell their own stark story. Opposition leaders see a new pattern of support for opposition parties.

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The assembly elections have become a grim testament to Rajiv's diminished ability to convert the crowds he can attract at rallies into votes for the Congress(I).

seemed strangely oblivious to repeated reports about corruption and the sliding popularity of the then Kerala chief minister Karunakaran's government. In West Bengal he not only alienated party stalwarts, Law Minister Asoke Sen and Programme Implementation Minister A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chaudhury by denying them commanding roles in organisational matters but also imposed over their heads the leadership of Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, a factional party boss. And, in an astonishing display of political puerility Das Munshi, a lightweight by any standard, was projected as an alternative to Basu in West Bengal. The old guard reacted by campaigning less than enthusiastically during the election.

The election campaign, if it could be called that, was run by a central committee from Delhi. And Rajiv's Indian Air Force plane became the control room. This curious set-up was hardly conducive to a free flow of good, hard grassroots information from the various states. Civil servants and selected journalists, who were hand-picked to accompany the star campaigner as he criss-crossed the country from Calcutta to Trivandrum, painted rosy pictures with the help of sample surveys and spot reportage. In fact, the prime minister's travelling troupe ridiculed as nonsense a report from a senior Congress(I) leader from Kerala, several days before the election, that the Congress(I)-led UDF would not win more than 60 seats.

Rajiv and his party have paid dearly for these lapses and the prime minister has made it clear that it is now time for introspection. As expected, he has appointed a committee to study ways of limiting further damage. Even though Congress(I)'s Hindi belt is still secure with the return of two MLAs and a Lok Sabha MP from Uttar Pradesh, there has been a sharp decline in the number of popular votes cast for Congress(I). The other factor in Rajiv's favour so far is the dismal performance of the other national parties like the BJP and Lok Dal, which have failed to materialise as real threats in north India. In Haryana, the potentially dangerous Lok Dal has lost some of its bite because of the vertical split in its ranks. How elections in that state, due within six weeks, will turn out is still anybody's guess because it will be a battle between two thoroughly demoralised parties.

But the most devastating blow to Rajiv from the political drama that unfolded in the states last fortnight is that large numbers of his partymen, including senior ministers, have begun to doubt whether he can ensure their return to the legislatures. The assembly elections have become a grim testament to Rajiv's diminished ability to convert the crowds he can attract at rallies into votes for the Congress(I). Rajiv's major task now is to restore his own credibility not only as prime minister but as a party boss as well. Opposition hawks are already talking about forging a national front against Congress(I) as they did on a limited scale—and with thumping success—in Kashipur. The scales will tilt in the direction of whoever can seize the momentum. For Rajiv this entails more than just the soft option of introspection. It requires, midway in his career as a national leader, a harsh, and brutally frank reappraisal of his political journey.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR and PRABHU CHAWLA

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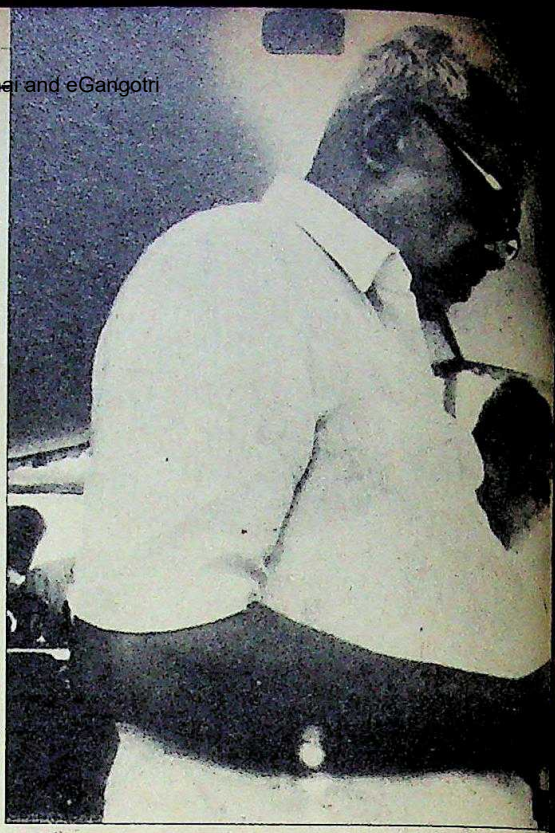

KERALA

Left March

IT was literally celebrated as a red letter day in Trivandrum. As the fifteenth state Government—and the fourth Communist-led one—headed by E.K. Nayanar was sworn in on the spacious Raj Bhawan grounds in the heart of the city, hundreds of crackers were exploded outside to mark the victory of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the eclipse of the only Congress(I) government in the south.

The huge green iron gates of the Raj Bhawan were thrown open and nearly 20,000 cheering party workers rushed in, shouting "Nayanar *zindabad*, EMS *zindabad*". Sworn in along with Nayanar were four ministers from other major constituents of the LDF: Baby John of the Revolutionary Socialist Party, K. Chandrasekharan of the Janata Party, A.C. Shanmughadas of the Congress (S) and P.S. Sreenivasan of the CPI. The coming of vanquished chief minister Karunakaran and other UDF leaders was greeted with hooting which was firmly put down by LDF leaders. Nayanar went up to Karunakaran and warmly embraced him. It was, in every sense, a people's function. LDF workers trampled all over the neatly manicured lawns and in the chandeliered hall where tea was served, many red flags were on view. And after the ceremony, while Nayanar drove to the secretariat to take charge, Karunakaran walked alone towards his personal car to drive home.

That solitary walk marked the final ringing down of the curtain on Karunakaran's political play which had run for a full 65 months. Securing only 61 seats—including one independent—as against the LDF's 75 in

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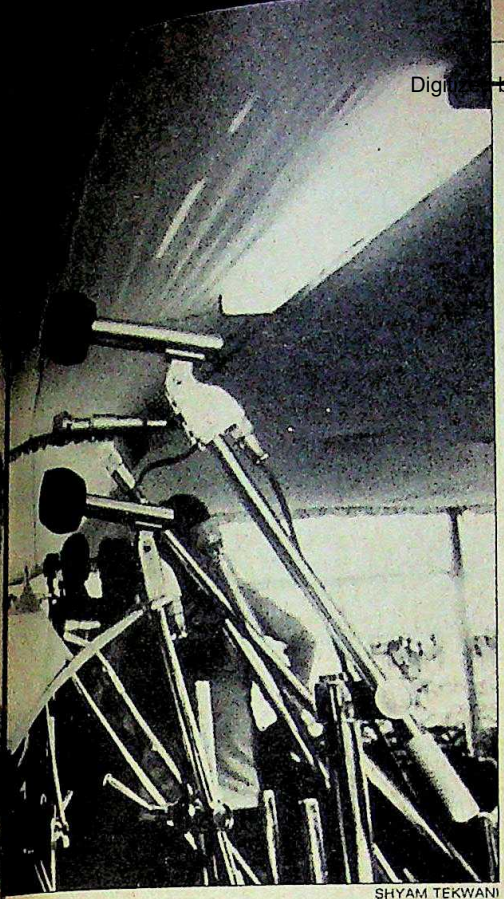


SHYAM TEKWANI

Nayanar being sworn-in: triumphant return

the 140-member Assembly, the Congress(I)-led UDF was voted out of power for its failings that had accumulated over the years. Said P.K.Vasudevan Nair, a former chief minister and leader of the state CPI: "The verdict is clearly against Congress(I) misrule and its alliance with communal forces." According to Baby John: "The Karunakaran government failed on all fronts. And, it was, above all, the most communal government in Kerala's history."

The shift in vote towards the LDF, though, was breathtakingly small: a mere 1 per cent swing, but it was enough to fell a government. The LDF polled only 65,285 votes more than the UDF. The victors were helped in no small measure by the arrogance of the ruling Kerala Congress, the National Democratic Party (NDP) and the Socialist Republican Party (SRP). The empty rhetoric of the Congress (I) during the campaign, led single-handedly by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi himself, also went to LDF's advantage.

Never before in Kerala had a prime minister addressed as many as 54 meetings, covering almost half the assembly seats. He spent a total of 64 hours and 35 minutes in the state, travelling 3,450 km by road and air. In all, he spoke for 24 hours and 25 minutes. But the result? Most of the constituencies he visited went the LDF way.

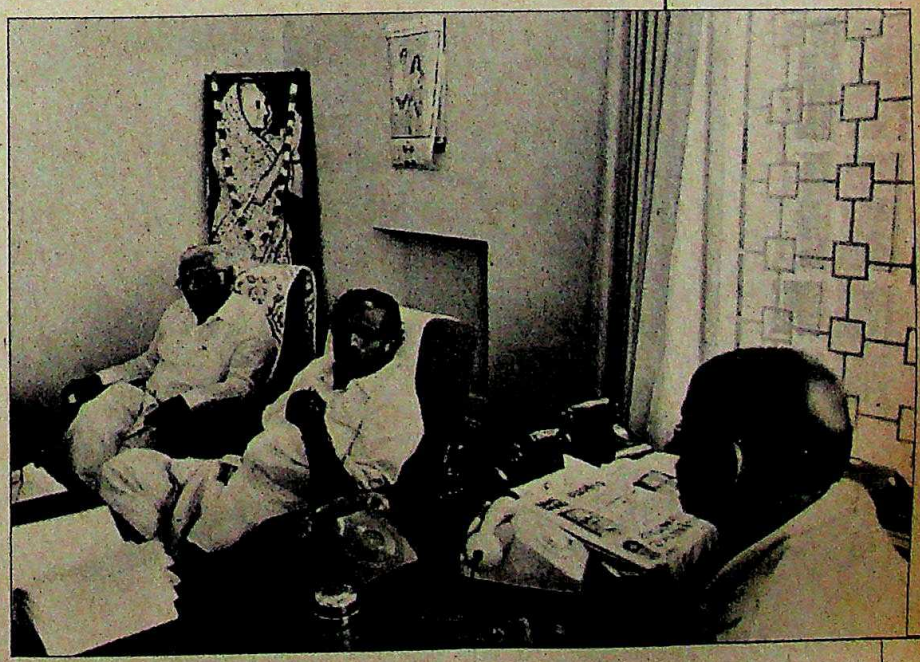
It was the first time in 25 years that all the communal and regional parties had been voted out. Since 1962, the Muslim League and the Christian-dominated Kerala Congress have shared power—and they ensured that job reservations for their communities rose. All the same, these parties were the worst-hit in the latest electoral round: while the Muslim League's tally fell from 18 to 15 seats, the Kerala Congress' share was cut sharply from 14 seats to nine.

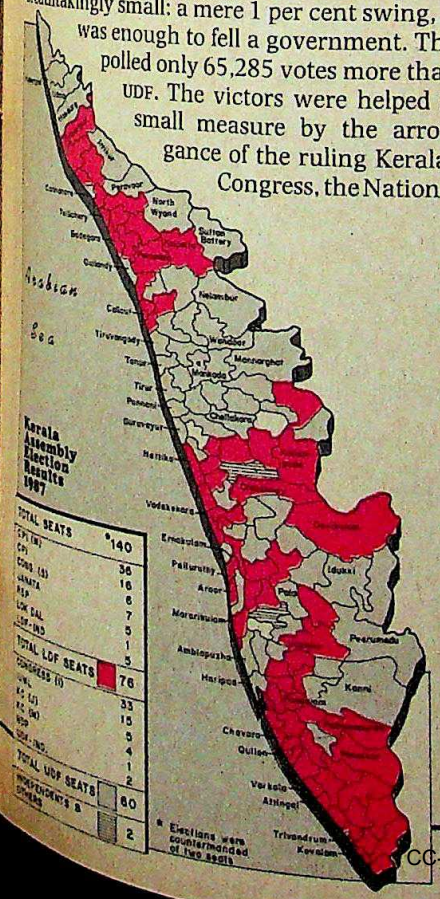
Congressmen now concede that many of the UDF's losses were due to the large number of seats that Karunakaran had doled out to regional and communal parties. For instance, although the Kerala Congress groups led by K.M. Mani and P.J. Joseph were locked in a bitter struggle, Karunakaran let them have 23 seats. To win over the Nair community which was annoyed over his shelving of the controversial economic reservation policy, he gave its political wing, the NDP, nine seats. The Ezhavas' political party, the SRP, similarly was given four seats.

The outcome was disastrous. Out of the 36 seats given to the Kerala Congress, NDP and SRP mainly in their strongholds, they could win only 10. Apart from the Kerala Congress' total of nine, the NDP registered a

The shift in vote towards the LDF was breathtakingly small: a mere 1 per cent swing, but it was enough to fell a government. The LDF polled only 65,285 votes more than the UDF.

Congress(I) state chief Padmarajan (centre) with colleagues: a divided front





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Congressmen now concede that the UDF's failure had much to do with the large number of seats doled out to regional and communal parties. All these groups fared poorly at the hustings.

solitary victory while the SRP did not have even that limited satisfaction and was wiped out. Said V.M. Sudheeran, the soft-spoken former speaker: "The Kerala Congress feud and the seats allotted to the NDP and SRP cost us the election." The two Kerala Congress groups sabotaged each other's chances in almost all the constituencies in central Travancore area, their stronghold. Admitted K.M. Mani: "It was very unfortunate that there was some cross voting." Infighting cost the factions at least seven seats.

The Congress(I) did not do well either. It won only 34 seats as against its tally of 41 MLAs in the dissolved house. If anything, it should have done better with the merger of the Antony faction in 1982 and the P.C. Chacko faction last year. During the 1982 elections, even a part of the Muslim League was not with the UDF. But these mergers don't seem to have helped.

The other major reason for the Congress(I) defeat was the selection of wrong candidates and the denial of seats to Youth Congress(I) workers. Initially, there were plans to drop over half the sitting MLAs but Karunakaran prevailed on the prime minister to renominate 35 of them: 16 of these MLAs lost their seats. Interestingly, of the 34 winners, 15 were not just new—nine of them wrested seats from the LDF.

Instead, it was left to the LDF to field new and young faces. Said Cheriyan Philip, one of the Youth

Karunakaran after defeat: failed policies

Congress(I) state secretaries: "The LDF, especially the CPI(M), had fielded almost 30 young candidates, some of them straight out of college. We, on the other hand, were given only five seats, which included two sitting Youth Congress MLAs." In Mararikulam, T.J. Anjalose, a 25-year-old CPI(M) student leader from a poor fisherman's family trounced SRP's S.R. Prakashan, old enough to be his grandfather, by over 12,000 votes. Some Youth Congress(I) leaders feel that the party did

E.K. NAYANAR

Back in Power

FOR Erambala Krishnan Nayanar, 68, Kerala's new chief minister, the wheel has come full circle. It is indeed, a remarkable comeback for a man who, just last year, had seemed to be sliding into political oblivion.

Sworn in as chief minister last in January 1980, his government was pulled down just 21 months later by Kerala Congress (Mani) and A.K. Antony's Congress group. Ever since then, his career graph had been moving steadily downwards. Such was his status recently that although a member of the CPI(M)'s Central Committee, that body had even reprimanded him. And, last year, party bosses had suspected him of sympathising with M.V. Raghavan, the Marxist rebel who had sparked off tremors in the party.

Not surprisingly, then, almost everyone was taken aback by Nayanar's return. His selection of senior leader K.R. Gowri, is aimed at silencing critics who say that the party's state leadership has been continuously neglecting the Malabar region, the cradle of Kerala's communist movement. Nayanar himself was a part of the movement which had swept the state in the early '40s.

At 7.30 a.m. on the day following his swearing in, Nayanar had just finished reading the newspapers in his cubicle at the state party headquarters, the A.K. Gopalan Centre in Trivandrum. Senior Correspondent SREEDHAR PILLAI *met the simple, beedi-smoking chief minister in a room that contained a bed, and had heaps of newspapers, party campaign posters and clothes strewn all over the place. Excerpts:*

Q. What does it feel like to be chief minister once again?

A. Well, the people have voted us back to power and the party has decided that I should be the chief minister. Whatever work the party had asked me to do all these years, I have done it.

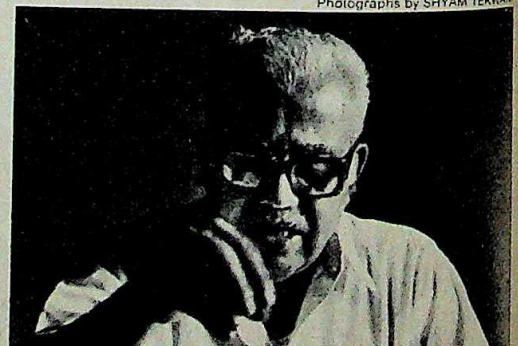
Q. How do you analyse the Left Democratic Front's (LDF) victory?

A. It was a vote for secularism, democracy and progress. During the last five years, Kerala had become a communal cauldron with hatred all around. The people had had enough of the communal government of Karunakaran, which was also very corrupt. I feel this was what tilted the balance in our favour. The LDF has a secular and clean image.

Q. But Karunakaran and the United Democratic Front (UDF) claim that you cashed in on the sentiments of Hindu communal forces?

A. We are opposed to Hindu majority and Muslim and Christian minority

Photographs by SHYAM TEKWANI



Nayanar: determined to succeed

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not poll a majority of the 28 lakh new voters registered after the last elections.

Not only were the new voters hostile to the ruling UDF, the caste and religion arithmetic also worked against it. Even the Ezhava community, one of its major supporters, turned against it due to Karunakaran's reservation policies and C.V. Padmarajan, a prominent Congress(I) Ezhava leader, lost his seat. Said Chacko: "The Ezhava community was being wooed back by the Marxists when they projected K.R. Gowri as their chief minister designate. The Ezhavas were also put off by the reservation issue."

The UDF also lost among upper class Hindus, the Nairs and the Brahmins, many of whom chose to support the BJP-Hindu Munnani Front. In at least 90 constituencies, this third alliance's candidates polled more than 5,000 votes. In Trivandrum east, the Hindu Munnani candidate polled more than the official UDF candidate although he lost in the triangular fight to the Congress(S) nominee. In Calicut-1, Kamalam, the former Congress(I) minister, lost by 7,708 votes to M. Dasan, a CPI(M) youth leader, while the BJP-Hindu Munnani candidate C. Prabhakaran polled 12,234 votes. Said G. Karthikeyan, the former Youth Congress president who lost to M. Vijayakumar, the CPI(M) youth leader who is likely to find a berth in the new ministry: "The Hindu Munnani-BJP Front certainly hurt us, especially in urban areas." When Karthikeyan had won in 1982, the BJP had managed only 959 votes, but this time it polled 13,398 votes. Said BJP state President K.G. Marar: "Today we are definitely a force to reckon with."

With the Congress(I) out of power, all eyes are set on the manner in which the LDF will go about with the business of governance. Since none of the LDF governments have been able to complete their full term due to defections and internal dissensions, Congress(I) leaders are confident that the new Government will go the same way. Moreover, the LDF is likely to face trouble from the Marxists' militant labour wing, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions. The LDF has still to draw out a precise programme but its immediate target seems to be the revival of traditional industries like coir, cashew nuts, fishing and handicrafts, which suffered during the Congress (I) regime. Moreover, it has to reverse the process of communalisation in the administration as also in educational institutions. Says Vasudevan Nair: "We will never compromise with communal parties. We will discipline our trade union leaders. I don't think there will be any problems." Still, the LDF is likely to face major opposition from the Congress(I) with its aggressive MLAs like former speaker, Sudheeran, former ministers Vayalar Ravi and Ramesh Chennithala. As KPCC (I) chief Padmarajan, who himself failed to win, put it: "We have accepted the verdict gracefully but that doesn't mean that we will sit quietly." But with divisions within UDF ranks, the LDF has enough breathing space to consolidate its position before the Opposition recovers from the shock of defeat.

—PRABHU CHAWLA with SREEDHAR PILLAI in Trivandrum

Many Youth Congress(I) leaders also attribute the defeat to the party's failure to field young and new candidates. The LDF on the other hand did, and it yielded rich dividends.

communalism. We fought the election along with secular forces and won in spite of the Congress(I), which pandered to minority communalism, and the BJP and Hindu Munnani which represented majority communalism.

Q. The UDF feels that law and order will deteriorate with the LDF's coming to power.

A. This is a canard spread by the Congress(I) for years. In fact, you wait and see. The atmosphere will be more peaceful than during Karunakaran's regime. I can assure you that there won't be any incident like Thankamani (where the police mass-raped village women).

Q. But even your admirers admit that you cannot control your trade union CITU, which had played a role in bringing down your ministry.

A. We will correct mistakes we have made in the past. But the bourgeoisie press here tries to exaggerate and make mountains out of molehills.

Q. What about your economic policies?

A. I can give you a list of Congress(I) states where industrialisation has never taken place. First and foremost, we will reopen closed factories. Traditional industries like cashew and coir will be revived in a big way.

"The people had had enough of the communal government of Karunakaran which was also very corrupt. This tilted the balance in our favour."

Q. How are you going to solve the tricky reservation issue?

A. Status quo will be maintained till these things are thrashed out.

Q. You say that corruption was institutionalised by the UDF regime. Are you planning to inquire into it?

A. We have to discuss this with other front partners. I don't rule out the possibility of appointing a commission of inquiry into the corruption and other misdeeds of the UDF government.

Q. What about the education policy you will follow?

A. We know there was much resentment against the UDF's educational policies. We are planning to overhaul the education system without creating problems for students and teachers.

Q. Already there are rumours that there are differences between the CPI(M) and the CPI, which are likely to increase.

A. It is wishful thinking of the Opposition. There are some differences of opinion, but no bickering since we have the same commitment.

Q. The media had projected K.R. Gowri as a Marxist chief minister.

A. The party never projected anybody as a chief minister during the election campaign. The bourgeoisie papers were playing their guessing game to confuse the electorate. The decision of the party is final. Nobody will ever question it.

Q. Will your government survive the full term?

A. With the help of the people it will.

Q. What will be your attitude towards the Centre?

A. We would like to have a healthy relationship without sacrificing our prestige and honour. In fact, last evening Rajiv telephoned me to congratulate us. As long as they don't run us down, we will cooperate with them in all national endeavours.

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JAMMU & KASHMIR

A Tarnished Triumph

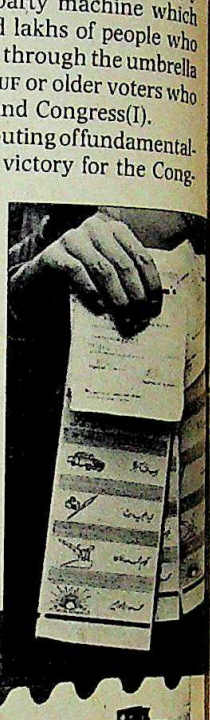
The fact that details of the election results remained unannounced almost a week after the polling had ended gave credence to opposition charges that there was rigging and electoral bungling.

BY all logic a landslide victory for an electoral alliance led by the scion of the Sheikh Abdullah family in the Jammu & Kashmir Assembly poll should have been the cause for exuberant rejoicing in the state. It was not. But for scattered fireworks displays in some strongholds of Farooq's National Conference (NC) in Srinagar district, even this bastion of NC's power kept an eerie silence well after it was known that the NC-Congress(I) alliance had swept to a massive win. As the results came in, the victorious new government was busy arresting top Muslim United Front (MUF) leaders—Professor Abdul Gani, Gulam Qadir Wani, Ghulam Mohammed Butt—on charges of anti-national activities. Chunks of the valley—Anantnag, Sopore, Handwara, Baramulla—were under virtual curfew even as votes were being tabulated at some counting stations five days after they had been cast.

That it was the only state where details of the poll results remained unannounced almost a week after polling ended, gave credence to widespread opposition charges that there was rigging and electoral bungling. The reason for curfew in key areas was a growing belief among people that the election was manipulated in several areas in favour of the alliance, and people were ready to take to the streets. A call for a protest bandh issued by MUF met with considerable success.

Contrary to the euphoria generated by the victory in which the alliance captured 60 seats as against 70 in the dissolved house (36 for NC and 24 for Congress-I) the stark reality is sobering. The valley is now sharply divided between the old-line party machine which brings out the vote for NC, and lakhs of people who entered politics for the first time through the umbrella organisation provided by the MUF or older voters who are disgruntled with both NC and Congress(I).

The election was neither a routing of fundamentalism—as Rajiv claimed—nor a victory for the Congress(I). In Kashmiri politics the Congress(I), as a grass-roots organisation, is virtually non-existent. Most of its winners were successful in Jammu either due to massive vote divisions caused by an unprecedented influx of independents, or because they were Farooq's candidates. In-



Farooq after swearing-in ceremony; and (inset) pre-stamped ballot paper found on an NC supporter

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR

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deed, the Congress(I) functioned as a junior partner within the alliance. During the negotiations that led to the Congress(I)-NC alliance, Farooq was given a free hand in picking Congress(I) candidates and final approval for appointing the new PCC(I) chief Ghulam Rasul Kar after the ouster of the group led by Mufti Mohammed Sayed. Also, the fact that the opposition parties, including the BJP, had no rural organisations went in Congress(I)'s favour in Jammu.

MUF, usually billed as a "fundamentalist" organisation, is an ad hoc opposition party with no real group ideology. Some of its leaders like Ali Shah Geelani, who trounced the NC in Sopore, spout extreme fundamentalist rhetoric of restoring Kashmir as a centre of Islam and subordinating the state to the Quran, and others like Asraf Sharraf speak menacingly of separatism. But much of the MUF is packed by educated youth, illiterate working class people and farmers who express their anger against 40 years of "family rule", corruption, and lack of economic development in the state. To a large extent the MUF was a repository of this protest vote.

The four seats captured by the MUF in Anantnag and Baramulla districts do not tell the the real story of the dramatic rise of this force, barely one year after it came into being as a political organisation. The so-called fundamentalists had been able to capture only one seat in 1977. In 1983 they had lost even this. But the three they won in Anantnag are significant in that all of them previously went to NC candidates by massive margins. Geelani's victory in Sopore was against a powerful NC minister, Abdul Ahad Vakil—NC had won this seat by 18,000 votes in the last election. More importantly, even though the alliance secured a two-thirds majority, it polled just under 50 per cent of the popular vote. But for constituencies like Ganderbal from where Farooq was elected by 22,000 votes, his percentage falling from 98.8 of the valid vote to 78.8 with an MUF candidate polling nearly 18 per cent even in this impregnable fortress), Khan Sahib, Uri, Charie Sharif, MUF candidates lost by slim margins. A rough tally indicates that MUF will have polled more than 35 per cent of the popular vote—more than that polled by the Congress(I).

Clearly, the MUF while not making significant gains in terms of seats, is far from being a vanquished force. Several disinterested observers believe that MUF candidates could have obtained twice the number of these seats had the Government played a more neutral role. According to top level intelligence estimates done on election eve, MUF was expected to bag at least 10 seats including three in the Srinagar district. People's Conference (PC), led by the charismatic Abdul Ghani Lone, was expected to do well in Bandipora, Sangrama, Handwara, Kupwara and Karna.

A journey through Kupwara and Handwara districts, when voting was in progress, indicated that Lone and his supporters held virtually unchallenged sway. But the counting was postponed in several of Lone's strongholds at the last minute. In fact, just when the counting began in Handwara on March 26, Lone and his counting agents were thrown out by the police from the counting station. Lone has filed written charges with the election commissioner that ballot-boxes from the counting station were removed overnight and that 100 of his counting agents had been arrested. Lone was declared the loser, two days later, by about 1,300 votes. Said a disconsolate Lone: "This simply deepens people's feelings against the Government of India. If people are not allowed to cast their votes where will their venom go except into expressions of anti-national feelings?"

Reports of rigging and strong-arm tactics kept pouring in from all over the valley into party offices and the offices of district commissioners. In Pattan, where powerful Shia leader Maulana Iftiquar Ansari had been denied a Congress(I) ticket and had freed his voters to work for the Opposition, entire ballot books pre-stamped for NC (bearing the serial numbers 024864-024898) were recovered with counterfoils intact from polling booths. Similar pre-stamped books (numbers 037201-037225) were recovered by opposition agents from polling officers at Idgah. Others were recovered from Handwara and Cahdura. Opposition candidates also charged massive booth capturing at Khan Sahib and Hazratbal where gangs of NC workers drove to polling stations in Matadors and entered the booths while the police looked helplessly on.

What gives some credence to these charges—many of them in the form of official complaints—is that the government machinery worked blatantly in favour of the alliance. Starting about two weeks before the election, 600 opposition workers were arrested in areas where MUF, independents and PC candidates were showing strength. In many polling stations located on properties owned by NC supporters, voters were simply

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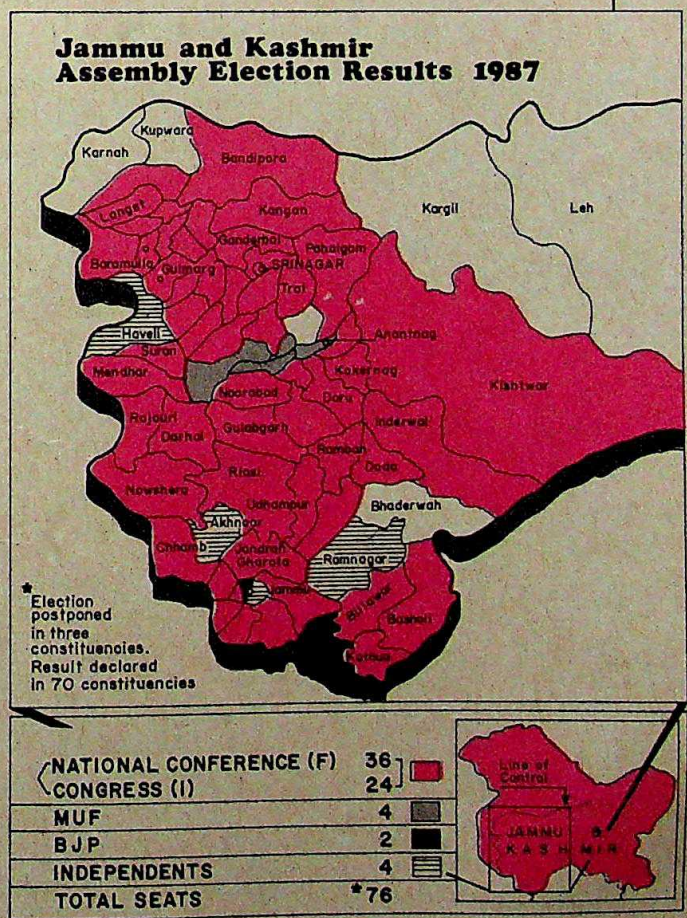

Map by B.K. SHARMA

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Though MUF bagged only four seats, it polled almost 35 per cent of the popular vote—larger than that polled by all Congress(I) candidates in the fray.

not allowed to vote. At Kawari in Kupwara district—Lone's stronghold—some 250 of his supporters were roughed up and pushed out of the polling booth by NC supporters. Yet the counting continued.

The police refused to listen to any complaint. At one counting station—an agricultural college near Sopore—a huge traffic jam was created at night during driving rain. Buses carrying ballot-boxes were stopped 2 km from the station, and in the ensuing confusion polling officers and policemen began removing the ballot-boxes, hand-carrying them to the counting area amid charges that boxes with the real votes were being swapped for boxes with phony votes. In many instances polling officers refused to seal ballot-boxes on the ground that they did not have seals.

While Farooq's election result was announced within three hours after the counting started on March 24, results from the all-important Anantnag district were held up for the next two-and-a-half days. The Anantnag counting station was like an armed camp with several hundred policemen surrounding it. One reason why the results were delayed was because the government-appointed counting officers—many of them illiterate forest guards—would stop the counting as soon as they saw opposition candidates taking a lead. At the counting room for Anantnag town from where MUF candidate Syed Shah was finally declared a winner, the presiding officer suspended counting after agents for the alliance pulled ballot papers out of boxes and scattered them on the ground when Shah's lead became obvious. At the Bij Behara counting room, the polling officers simply stopped counting when an MUF candidate established an early lead. At the Dooru station, the presiding officer declared an NC candidate elected as soon as he took a 300-vote lead even though one ballot-box with 1,100 votes had still to be counted. The MUF coordinator Qazi Nissar, who was present there, pleaded with the officer to be fair, but in vain.

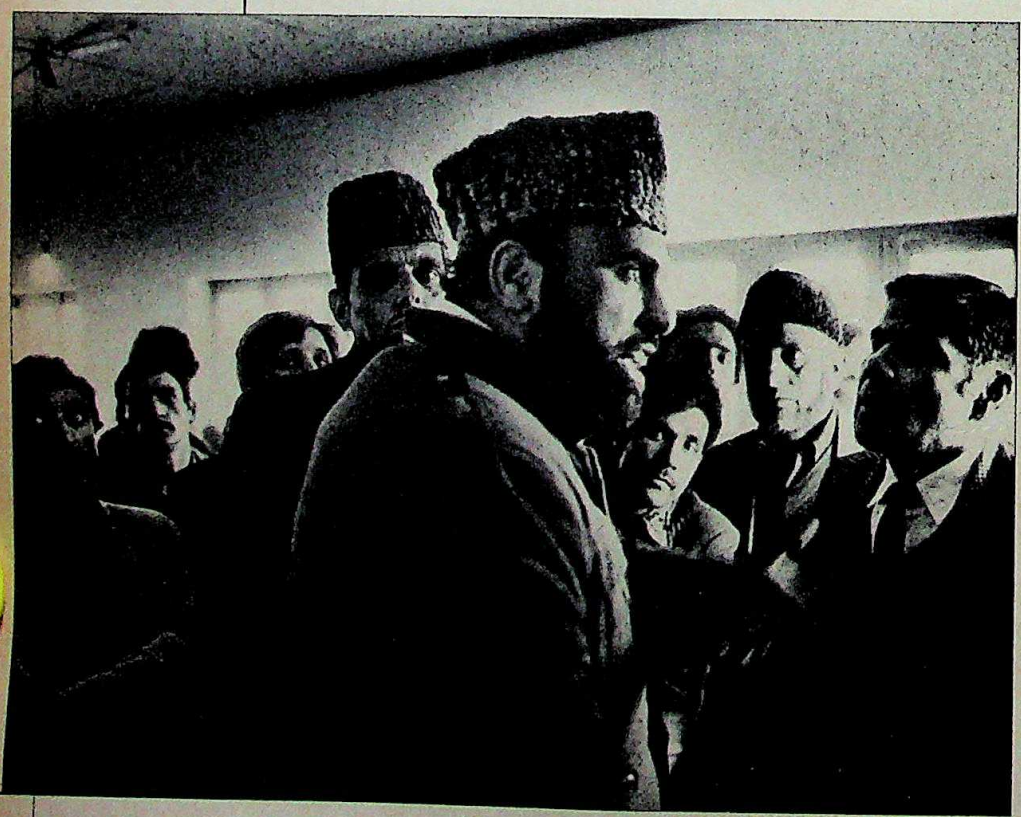
These events, some of them witnessed by INDIA TODAY, have only served to produce a deeper feeling of alienation among the youth who have flocked to the Opposition—even the MUF—in search of an alternative power structure in Kashmir. As a young lawyer pleaded: "I don't even pray regularly. But I'm supporting the MUF because there is nothing else. If you take my vote away I lose all faith in Indian democracy." Even Islamic preachers like Nissar, sensing their party would do well in the elections, had begun to talk about a stake in the Indian system. "I believe in the Indian Constitution," he said. "I will live and die an Indian. How long can people like us keep getting votes by exploiting Islam? We have to prove we can do something concrete. But this kind of thing simply makes people lose faith in the Constitution."

This is not to say that Farooq or his party manipulated the entire election. The NC is a mass-based party and Farooq is a dynamic and charismatic personality who was indubitably a one-man electoral missile during the entire campaign. He did not even once pander to fundamentalist or secessionist forces in his election rhetoric, as he has done in the past, and chose instead to dwell on bread and butter issues. But the alienation that the Kashmiris suffer is partly because ever since 1953, elections have been either uncontested or rigged and have failed to draw Kashmiris into India's emotional mainstream. The backlash has always been a flight to obscurantist or secessionist causes. The point is that if even 10 seats during this election were won unfairly by the alliance, it taints the credibility of the entire election.

In fact, the signs of a backlash are already there. Farooq faces a formidable challenge. He has no more alibis. He can no longer blame the Centre if he does not deliver rapidly on his promises to fight corruption and step up economic progress. His other task will be to hold out his hand to the valley's alienated people who feel that this election effectively disenfranchised them and somehow make them feel a part of the system. If he fails, increasing numbers of young voters—there will be 24 per cent new ones in the next election—will be drawn into anti-national causes as a protest and the alliance will go down in history as having accomplished nothing more than an election result.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR

Nissar lodging a protest: widespread resentment



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WEST BENGAL

A Startling Sweep

A political gale blowing from New Delhi in December 1984 had stunned West Bengal's ruling Left Front as the Congress(I) captured 17 of the state's 42 Lok Sabha seats. But in 27 months, the wind had changed direction more than anyone had realised. The decline in the Congress(I)'s tally of seats from 54 to a mere 40 in a 294-member Assembly was, quite simply, incredible. "How could it happen?" wondered a bleary-eyed state party chief Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, surrounded by unbelieving party workers. Within days, Union law minister Asoke Sen's dramatic resignation had signalled the beginning of a process in which many state Congress(I) leaders may find their wings clipped.

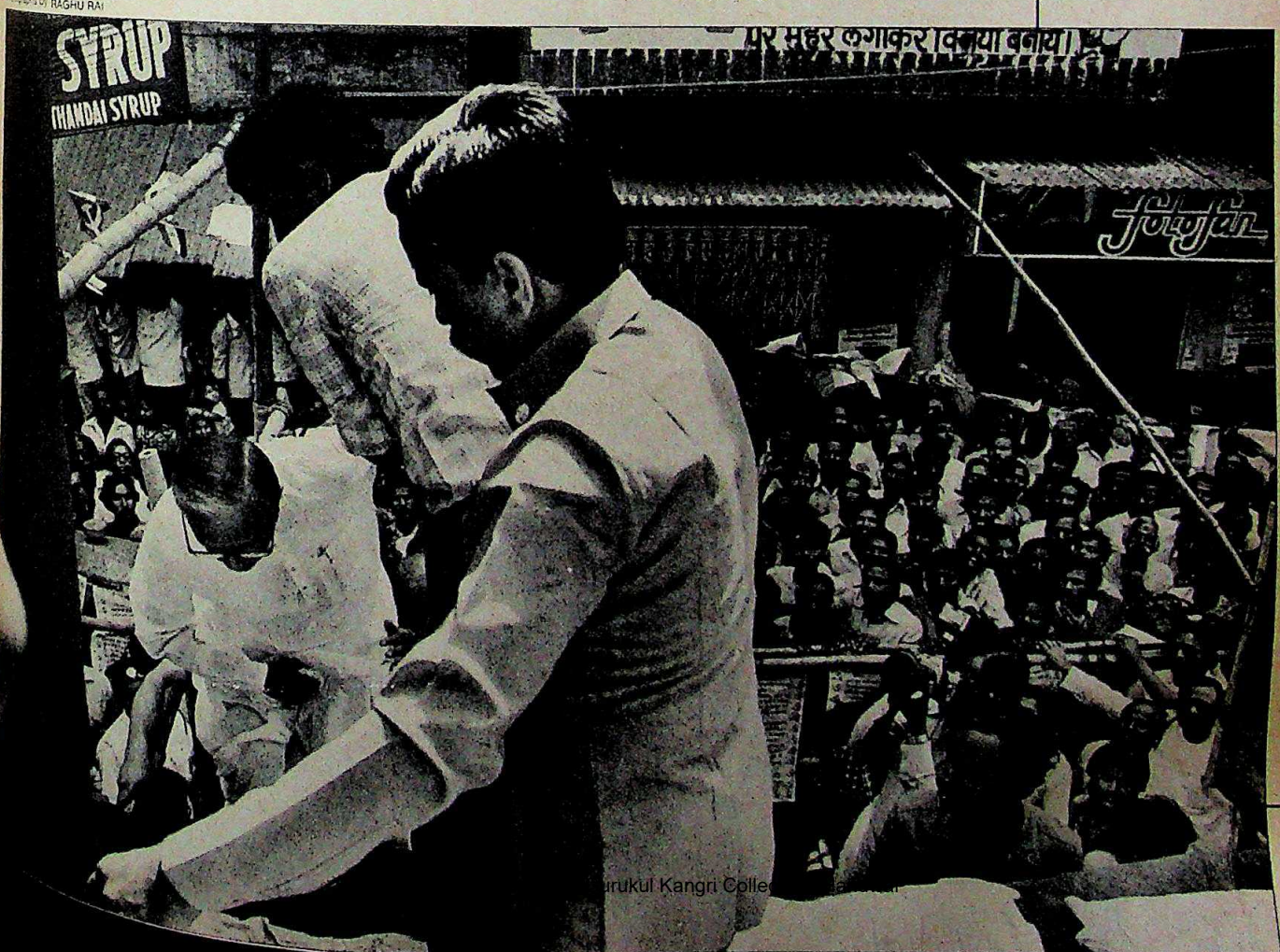
Every logical indicator had suggested that the party's tally of seats would surely increase. But explains the CPI(M)'s organisation man, Biman Bose: "Rajiv moved through Bengal like a king expecting people to bow down to him. But they only felt insulted when he offered them money and jobs in exchange for votes." Even Congressmen in retrospect admit that they badly miscalculated their strategy and "hurt the ego of the Bengali electorate in the process". Had it not been for the party's unexpected resurgence in the Greater Calcutta region, where it won 23 seats, the Congress(I)'s fate would have been even more pitiable. As it is, 21 sitting Congress(I) MLAs lost.

"Our slogan of 10 lakh jobs and rice at Rs 2 per kg for certain categories of people backfired badly," explained Saugata Roy, Congress(I) victor from Calcutta's Alipore constituency. "The CPI(M) took these slogans apart and declared them to be a complete bluff." Scepticism at Rajiv's promises, including his highly-publicised but little understood Rs 1,007-crore aid package, had been evident right in the initial days of the campaigning. The Marxists literally cashed in on this, selling lakhs of pamphlets ridiculing Congress(I) promises—a 25 paisa pamphlet on the Rs 1,007-crore package, for instance, sold five lakh copies, netting over Rs 1.2 lakh. Basu's trenchant criticism of Rajiv's "lies and false promises" proved to be equally popular, and 2,200 audio cassettes of his speeches priced at Rs 20 each were sold to district committees where they were copied and further distributed. The running battle between the two became the central issue of the elections.

Das Munshi, who acted as the prime minister's translator and official go-between, is being held culpable for providing inadequate, and at times misleading, feedback to Rajiv. "Today everybody is blaming the prime minister for our debacle," says an MLA, "but he only did what the state leadership told him to." One plan, as represented by Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Ajit Panja, was to

Every logical indicator had suggested that the Congress(I)'s tally of seats would surely increase. But in retrospect, Congressmen feel that they miscalculated their strategy and "hurt the ego of the electorate in the process".

Photographs by RAGHU RAI



Basu at a rally: popular mandate

Gurukul Kangri Colle

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Party insiders read in Sen's resignation a message to Rajiv not to impose people like Das Munshi on the state unit while senior leaders like Ghani Khan Choudhury and Sen himself are available.

shore up the party's organisation to mobilise votes. But Das Munshi's argument was that they could never match the Marxists' capacity for organisation, and should rely on Rajiv to dazzle voters.

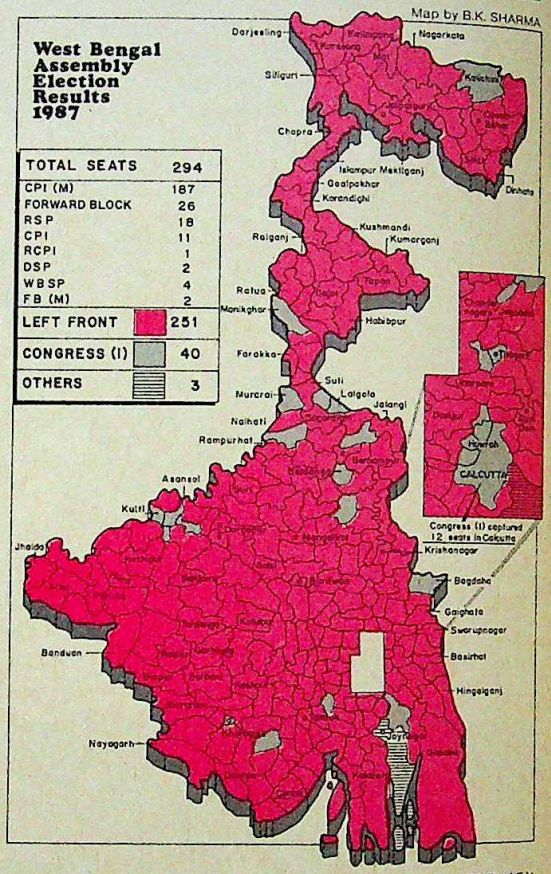
But this strategy proved disastrous. Said Panja dramatically: "The seeds were sown and the crop was there, but we failed to harvest it." And the prime minister appeared to agree, stating that the "formidable Marxist cadres" had outmatched the Congress(I)'s organisation in mobilising votes.

Rajiv, after consulting Das Munshi, has ordered a four-member committee to probe the debacle but it may yield little. Dissident activity did not affect the results even marginally, except in a handful of seats. Pranab Mukherjee's Rashtriya Samajbadi Congress, along with a few other parties under the Jatiya Front banner, had fielded 160-odd candidates. But there was clearly a polarisation between the Left Front and the Congress(I).

Most people seem to subscribe to Pranab Mukherjee's theory that the Congress(I) has always relied on the personal popularity of its leader, and not on organisation, to draw votes—and that the debacle is a personal defeat for Rajiv. Thus, even former Congress(I) bastions like Bolpur, Kaandi, Malda, Bankura Town, Arambagh and a number of north Bengal constituencies visited by the prime minister witnessed astonishing negative swings.

Though the use of Rajiv extensively took the Left Front by surprise initially, it actually went to its advantage. His record of resolving national problems and the Gorkhaland agitation became a constant target of Marxist assault. Similarly the Left Front propagated that the Centre was deliberately introducing religion into politics. This ploy obviously proved effective.

The most prominent exception to the overall voting pattern in the state was Calcutta, which gave the Congress(I) 13 seats. Voters in areas adjoining the city proper voted another 10 Congressmen in. This has baffled both Marxists and Congressmen, because pre-poll calculations had indicated a pro-Left swing here. The ruling party's failure to keep its 1984 election promise of more jobs and the opening of closed industries was expected to cost it seats in Calcutta and in the adjoining suburbs. Congressmen



Polling in progess: extreme polarisation

RAGHU RAI

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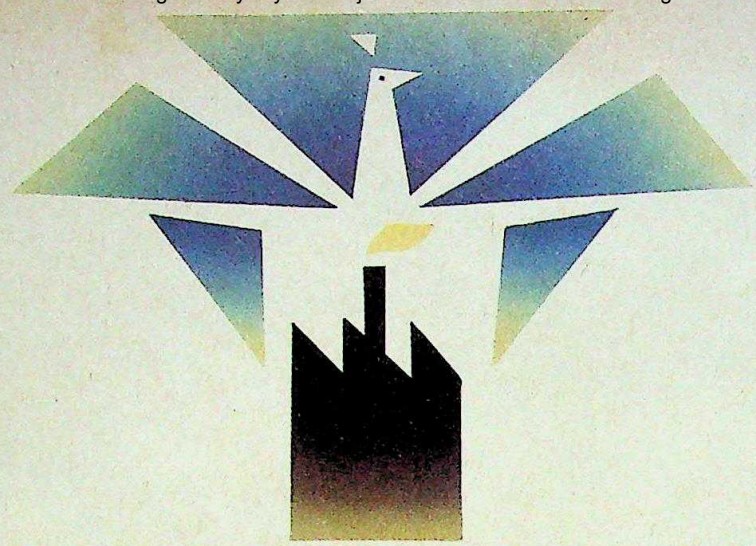

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like MLA Saugata Roy believe though that "in Calcutta, voters reacted directly to the non-performance of the Left Front Government". But Left Front leaders feel that they did poorly because Rajiv succeeded in dragging in religion by branding the Marxists as non-believers.

The CPI(M)'s single-party majority of 187 seats could prove to be a political stranglehold. Indeed, it has already hinted that it may reduce the role of the smaller Front partners. The Congress(I) warns that this absolute power could spell danger but the Marxists say it will only mean that they can work freely without the encumbrances of political compromise.

As far as Sen's surprise decision goes, it appears calculated to hit both the party leadership as well as the high command. "I believe that I can serve the Congress and my people better without being burdened by any political office," he declared. But party insiders read it as a message to Rajiv not to impose people like Das Munshi on the state unit while senior leaders like Abdul Ghani Khan Choudhury and Sen himself are available. Some feel that Sen acted quickly because he feared being dropped from the Cabinet anyway. Though few expect Rajiv to cave in to this pressure, apart from Das Munshi, Chief Whip Subrata Mukherjee may find his influence reduced. The state party leadership may well pass to someone non-controversial like MLA and former cabinet minister D.P. Chattopadhyay. Men like Chattopadhyay and MLAs Saugata Roy and Apurbalal Mazumdar, rather than Sen, stand a better chance of raising a new Congress(I) from the ashes of the latest poll defeat.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

Das Munshi felt that the Congress(I), should rely on Rajiv to dazzle voters. But this strategy proved disastrous.

JYOTI BASU

Ruling Supreme

DURING the last few days preceding polling day, Marxist Chief Minister Jyoti Basu seemed entirely eclipsed in the giant shadow cast by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who blitzkrieged his way across the state. But a few days later, belying all predictions, the diminutive, dhoti-clad septuagenarian proved his political mettle, leading his party and alliance partners to a remarkable victory.

INDIA TODAY'S INDRANIL BANERJIE *met Basu the next day at his office in Writers' Building, the state secretariat. The smiling chief minister remarked that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had just congratulated him on telephone. "Isn't this interview too soon after the polls?" he wanted to know, but added: "Anyway, ask whatever you want." Excerpts:*

Q. How could you be so confident of winning again considering that any government in power for so long is bound to breed disenchantment?

A. We have been in power for 10 years and there have been several elections—in the panchayats and also the Lok Sabha. We always review the results and draw conclusions so that we can remove our weaknesses. We don't conclude anything from the crowds. So we did not take the 1984 election reverses very seriously.

Only this time we did not realise that the prime minister would be utilised in this fashion or that he would also take on the responsibility of being his party's sole spokesman. Thus our main concentration was against him.

Q. Did rural voters support you because they were more concerned about "national integrity" than they were about local issues?

A. The changes in villages during our rule are solid, we have done a lot of work. Rajiv's entire tour in the rural areas had no impact. He drew crowds but they did not believe him when he said we had done nothing.

Q. Why do you think you fared so badly in metropolitan Calcutta?

A. I think the newspapers did us a lot of damage, denigrating our government day in and day out. The TV propaganda also had its impact.

Q. Is the Congress(I) defeat because of its failure to channelise Rajiv's popularity into votes or does the defeat signify a rebuff for him?

A. Because of both reasons. They depended too much on Rajiv's image, his speeches and promises. But Rajiv did not prove to be a vote-catcher. The party also did not do elementary things required to mobilise votes.

Q. What do you feel about Rajiv Gandhi's manner of campaigning?

A. It was very alarming. He resorted to lies, he dragged in religious issues and did everything to denigrate us.

Q. How do you respond to the prime minister's call to "break the despondency among the people and build a new Bengal"?

A. Are the high level of votes cast in this election a symptom of despondency? Fortunately, the people of this state have some intelligence and could not be taken in so easily. Nobody knew what Rajiv Gandhi's "Natun Bangla" stood for or meant.

Q. What do you feel about the prime minister's comment that you are the only competent person in the Left Front Government?

A. Earlier he did not make this distinction. Only later, somebody advised him not to denigrate me personally. Also, newspapers have been talking about how the CPI(M) does not exist after me. And large sections of the public believe this. But it's a lie.

Q. Do you think the Congress(I)'s defeat in the latest two elections augers ill for stability at the Centre?

A. We can't prop up the Congress(I). I have been saying that we should think about an alternative alliance at the Centre with regional and national opposition parties and chalk up a common minimum programme. Some regional parties have become all-India parties. Telugu Desam, the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha, is forced to think about national issues like foreign policy. So, such parties can possibly come together and form a national alternative. Our Central Committee will be meeting very soon and we shall raise this issue.

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Until another party can dislodge the Left Front cadres from their secure niches in government offices, trade unions, and in anchayats, the tate is unlikely to witness another political somersault.

The Left Front continues to entrench itself in rural areas, which have ecome its main power base. Today, each of the state's 41,000 villages as at least one unit of a left party.

TEN YEARS OF LEFT FRONT

The Red Stranglehold

TEN years ago, in the momentous month of May, politics did a somersault in West Bengal. In one electoral blow, the then Congress chief minister Siddhartha Shankar Ray and his 216 MLAs were pulverised into a party with just 20 MLAs, and the Left Front under the Marxist leader Jyoti Basu swept into power with 230 seats in a 294-member state legislature. May 1977 marked a catharsis for a state that had been rent by political violence for over a decade, witnessing first a bloody Naxalite insurgency and then an equally gruesome period of retaliation by Ray's Congress government. Calcutta had become what actor-playwright Utpal Dutt termed a "nightmare city", stalked by killers, goondas and a maverick police force. The Marxists promised "democracy, peace and progress", released thousands of political prisoners, sent back the last contingents of the Central Reserve Police Force, announced dozens of new development schemes and the dawn of a new era in rural Bengal.

Today, the Left Front is mostly judged by its failures, rarely by what it has done. Left radicals accuse it of apostasy, of betraying Marxist ideals; the rival Congress(I) denounces it for falling short of every critical target, from plan expenditures to minimum needs. In Calcutta, the Marxists are lambasted for the potholed roads, overcrowded buses, crumbling institutions and traffic jams. In Bengal's paddy heartland too, peasants complain of corruption among panchayat officials and the left *sarkar*'s general apathy. A universal feeling of stagnation pervades the state.

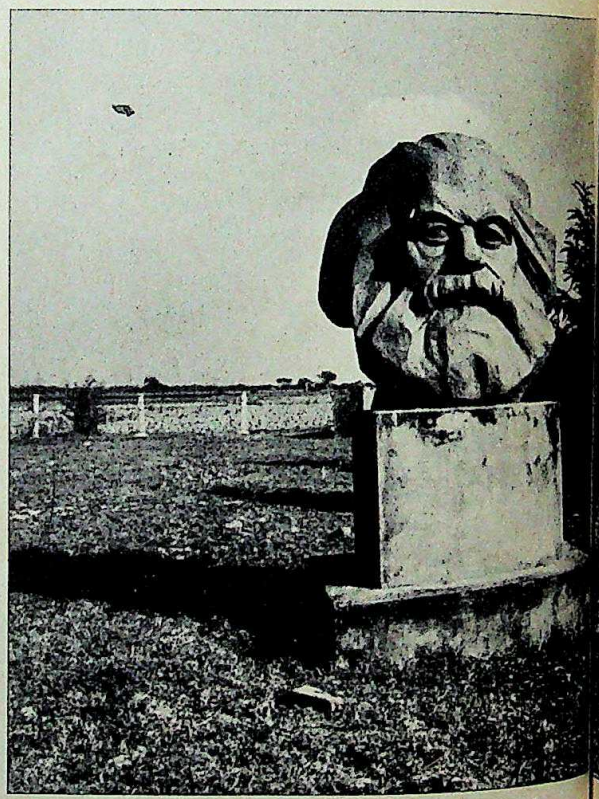
Yet, even as the Left Front approaches the end of its 10th year in power—a world record for a democratically-elected Marxist government—all its sins of omissions do not add up to tilt the balance of political power: the red flag continues to flutter almost everywhere. Today, each of the state's 41,000 villages has at least one unit of a left party. The dominant Left Front constituent, the CPI(M) and its frontal organisations alone claim almost nine million members out of the state's total population of 54 million (1981 census)—the strength has grown by 2.3 million since 1981-82.

The Marxists, of course, attribute this to their achievements of the past 10 years. But, says Congress(I) leader Subrata Mukherjee: "Any party in power attracts followers and this is more so with the Left Front as jobs, government benefits and other favours come with party membership." Indeed, a major CPI(M) concern since the 1984 reversal in the Lok Sabha polls has been the need to educate its new cadres in Marxist thought and weed out the "opportunistic elements" that have infiltrated at the grassroots.

The evidence of their achievements in rural Bengal is somewhat confusing. On the one hand, the number of shallow tube-wells has risen from 78,000 in 1977 to more than 2.25 lakh today, and deep tube-wells are up from 174 to 454. The Rs 156-crore World Bank-aided plan for tube-wells and pump-sets to water an additional 1,38,000 hectares is beginning to take effect. The result in terms of figures is spectacular: production of boro, the third paddy crop, for instance, has doubled over the decade and today West Bengal is the second-largest rice producer after Andhra Pradesh. Cashing in on this agricultural boom are a new breed of 'bhadralok' farmers, who, in many parts of the state, rake in profits exceeding Rs 1,000 per bigha.

On the other hand, large areas are still dependent on the monsoons and a single paddy crop. Though in 10 years the Left Front has brought an additional 5.3 lakh hectares of farmland under minor irrigation—compared to 5.1 lakh hectares in the previous 30 years—and is implementing a mega project to tap the Teesta river, over 65 per cent of the arable land remains unirrigated.

Left Front strikes rural roots: strong base



The percentage of people below the poverty line has declined from 59 in 1977 to 43.8 in 1983-84, according to the National Sample Survey. Landless peasants now get a better wage too, partly due to Left Front-led wage movements and partly as the revitalised panchayat system has emerged as a major employer between 1978 and '86. Panchayats created 256 million mandays in this period, assuring at least one member of every family of agricultural labourers employment for a 100 days in a year.

Former finance minister Ashok Mitra's remark, "if

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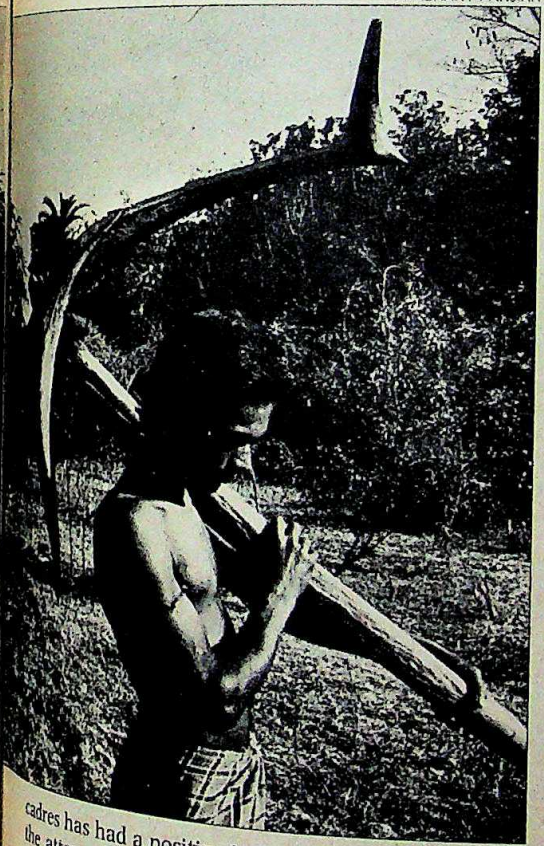
the panchayats fail, the CPI(M) experiment fails", reflects the Marxists' need to preserve their rural base. Outsiders like Princeton University's Atul Kohli point out: "The creation of red panchayats, the registration of sharecroppers, the facilitation of credit for small landholders and mobilisation of the landless for higher wage are all aimed at securing political position by improving the conditions of the lower classes." And the Left Front strategy seems to have worked.

Another large chunk of beneficiaries is the state's 1.3 million-odd sharecroppers and the 1.64 million recipients of eight lakh acres of surplus land. The famous "Operation Barga" which began in 1978 led to tenancy reforms and gave sharecroppers a better share of their produce as also security from evictions. The two programmes alone are estimated to have helped over two million peasants and provide the Marxists with a rock-hard base among the state's 8.6 million rural working population.

But while the Left Front's objective of creating a large loyal following controlled by a small band of

PRASHANT PANJIAR



cadres has had a positive impact in the countryside, the attempt at a similar penetration of urban and government institutions has proved disastrous. The politicisation of colleges, hospitals and even a critical force like the police, has crippled their functioning. Calcutta University, for instance, has been plunged into academic chaos ever since the CPI(M) failed to get its nominee the vice-chancellor's post. The police too has fallen prey to the CPI(M) decision to foster a union, which now decides on postings and duty allotments. Several times police union members have refused to take orders and have even abused senior officials. Marxist ministers too find themselves impotent in dealing with the Frankenstein they have created. The Left Front had once appointed an MLA, Shyamal Chakraborty, to revitalise the Calcutta State Transport Corporation where absenteeism, pilferage and rampant indiscipline were costing the state exchequer almost Rs 20 crore a year in subsidies. But Chakraborty quit in a year in frustration—and nothing changed. Similar attempts to revamp the state administration have floundered with Left Front bosses ultimately being forced to promote several clerks.

The Left Front has been somewhat more successful in controlling labour employed in private sector industries and the CPI(M)'s Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) is today a more disciplined force than ever before. But the Marxist entente with big business and multinationals has drawn fire from radical leftists and chunks of trade unionists have deserted CITU. A major revolt against the Left Front policy of wooing big business, believed to be Basu's brainchild, has so far been kept at bay by promises of large-scale new investment, including R.P. Goenka's much-publicised Rs 850-crore Haldia petrochemical project.

The Left Front's transformation into a social democratic party with pragmatism as its principal ideology has been necessitated because its policies failed to match the urgent need for economic development. For West Bengal's 14 million urbanites in particular, the overall pace of progress under Left Front rule was proving to be a tremendous disappointment. The Marxists might have ended the nightmare of crippling power-cuts by pumping in Rs 900 crore into the power sector, they might have succeeded in creating new industrial growth centres—but expectations have been rising even faster.

For the urban youth, Calcutta remains a tired, worn-out metropolis with millions of unemployed chasing increasingly fewer jobs. Sensing this disenchantment, the state Congress(I) has never failed to promise dramatic changes, including lakhs of jobs, and as Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi reiterated in his election speeches, a "new Bengal".

A major Marxist programme has consequently been propaganda that the Centre is responsible for the state's ills. Propaganda has also kept alive memories of the lawlessness of the 1972-77 Congress period, but the Marxists' unchanging theme is beginning to wear thin in urban areas. "The whole concept of a state government's limited resources and power is beginning to boomerang and people are beginning to wonder if it would be better to vote for a party connected to the Centre with its limitless powers and finances," says Timir Bhaduri, a dissident Left Front poll candidate and an ex-Revolutionary Socialist Party leader.

But here again, the Left Front's success in implementing its most fundamental programme—that of capturing every keystone in the state's power structure—is proving to be a boon. Today, elections alone cannot dislodge Left Front cadres from their secure niches in government offices, in trade unions, and in panchayats. Until another political party can break the Marxists' stranglehold in these places, the state is unlikely to witness another political somersault.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

Though in 10 years, the Left Front has brought an additional 5.3 lakh hectares of farmland under irrigation—against 5.1 lakh hectares in the previous 30 years—over 65 per cent of the arable land remains unirrigated.

The Left Front's efforts to penetrate urban and government institutions have proved disastrous. The politicisation of colleges, hospitals and even a critical force like the police has crippled their functioning.

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KASHIPUR

Crushing Blow

IN unity lies strength. This moral was established beyond doubt in Kashipur where the Rashtriya Sanjay Manch (RSM) Vice-President, Akbar 'Dumpy' Ahmed, with the support of the Janata Party, the Lok Dal and the CPI, bested the ruling Congress(I) candidate and state Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Ammar Rizvi. Not even the campaigning of External Affairs Minister Narain Dutt Tiwari, who has nurtured the constituency carefully over the last two decades, could upset the Opposition's winning cart: Ahmed won by a convincing 8,151-vote margin.

Undoubtedly, Congress(I) fortunes had been affected by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), whose candidate Jai Ram Jai drew away 12,921 Harijan and backward caste votes. But for the larger part, it was a straight fight between Ahmed, who secured 43,213 votes, and Rizvi, who managed 35,062 votes. The BJP aspirant could secure only 3,462 votes and forfeited his security deposit like the 17 independents and the BSP candidate.

Ahmed: deft campaigning

The loss was treated as a debacle and caused much gloom in ruling party circles because, just two years ago, Tiwari had won the constituency for the Congress(I) with an impressive margin of 48,808 votes. And despite Ahmed's claim that "the people of Kashipur voted out the Congress(I) because of its policy on local industry", there were few who were ready to swallow that explanation. Few dispute that the industrialisation of Kashipur, initiated under the aegis of Tiwari, has benefited the constituency.

In fact, the entire ruling party campaign was built around the external affairs minister. Even the slogan—*Tiwariji ki baat par, Mohar lagao haath par* (Stamp the hand on Tiwari's saying)—was aimed to cash in on Tiwari's popularity in the area. Rizvi wound up his campaign on this high note, saying: "It is not a question of voting for Ammar Rizvi or not. It is a question of voting for Tiwari or not." And for nine days, the external affairs minister took time off his busy official schedule to camp in the constituency. Even on the polling day, he was hard at work, visiting Muslim areas alone in a rickshaw.

But his efforts were in vain, largely due to the strategy adopted by Ahmed. In meeting after meeting the RSM leader drilled home one point religiously: "Tiwari himself might have done some good for you but his men have failed your expectations." It was a rewarding strategy for there was much resentment against the sitting Congress(I) MP of the area, Satendra Chandra Guria, who had secured the ticket in the last poll on Tiwari's recommendation and for whom Tiwari had campaigned extensively.

Guria has for long felt that the Muslims and Sikhs of the constituency—who make up 39.6 per cent of the electorate—had voted overwhelmingly against him in the last parliamentary elections. Subsequently, Guria has not only behaved arrogantly with these sections but has even managed to alienate most of his party's local leaders. Ahmed went all-out to woo the Muslims and Sikhs and played on their hurt sentiments.

Indeed, Guria may have had more to do with the defeat than many outsiders realise. On March 21, he was deliberately rude in public to R.P. Joshi, a popular local leader, formerly of the Lok Dal, whom Tiwari had inducted into the party just before the by-election to strengthen Rizvi's chances. Though Joshi covered up his displeasure, his supporters—who are considerable—were so upset by the incident that subsequently, many of them canvassed actively for Ahmed.

Another point that went in Ahmed's favour was his deft marshalling of his slender resources. The RSM campaigners fanned out in rural areas and worked as a strong, well-knit team. In contrast, the Congress(I) workers, who were much greater in strength, continued to work in urban areas only. The ruling party ministers too seemed more preoccupied with ensuring that Tiwari and Rizvi noticed their presence. In fact, Corbett National Park, about 70 km from Kashipur, became a familiar resting spot for the party's luminaries.

Little wonder, the question of the possible fall-out of the defeat troubled many Congress(I) leaders when they zoomed back to the state capital in their Ambassadors. They certainly were not worried about the highly vocal RSM leader's performance in the Assembly, where, because the RSM has only one other MLA, it cannot be regarded as a potent force as yet.

However, much is being read in Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh's absence from the constituency. Though the chief minister campaigned actively in Hardwar, Patti and Rath—the three other constituencies where by-elections were held—he chose to make only a fleeting appearance at Kashipur. Even the dozen-plus state ministers who visited the constituency apparently came of their own volition and not on any official bidding by Singh. The chief minister's remark to one of his senior ministers that "I am hardly needed in Kashipur when Tiwari himself is around" is unlikely to help him when the final analysis is done.

—DILIP AWASTHI

The shock defeat of Congress(I) stalwart Ammar Rizvi in Kashipur, a ruling party stronghold, at the hands of the joint opposition candidate, Akbar 'Dumpy' Ahmed, has demonstrated once again that there is strength in opposition unity.

The general resentment against the sitting Congress(I) MP of the area worked to Ahmed's advantage.

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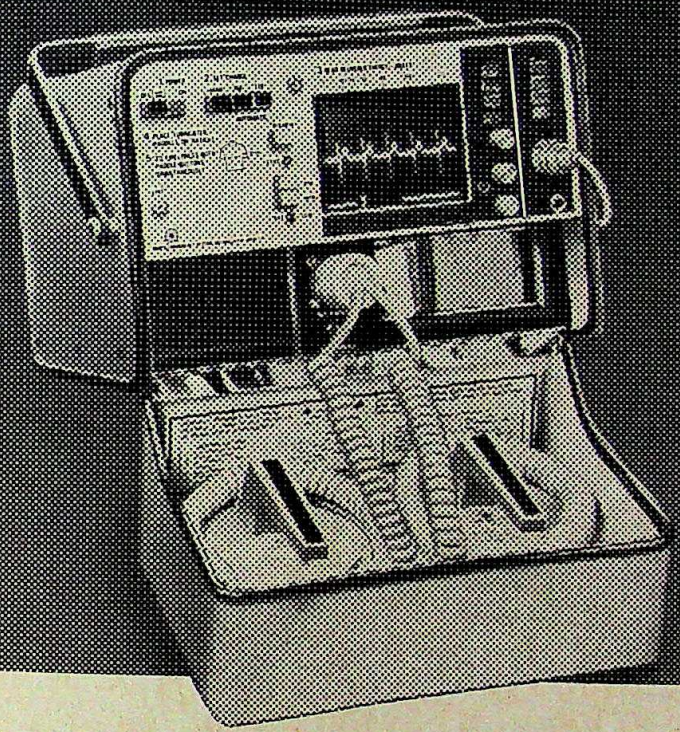

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THE SARABHAIS

Trading in Trusts

NEARLY 2,000 trusts, 400 investment companies and 96 other firms for holding the family jewellery and property: the Sarabhais have outdone themselves in what tax officials say is an intricate tax-avoidance scheme perfected into a fine art. But the taxmen have worked their way through the legal jungle, and the tax money has started flowing out of Sarabhai coffers. An investigation into an extraordinary case by RAMESH MENON and T.N. NINAN.

THE first day of March, 1976, was a busy one for the Sarabhai family in Ahmedabad. No fewer than 67 family trusts were created that day: 15 named after Anand Sarabhai, 12 after Suhrid Sarabhai, 13 after Mallika Sarabhai, and so on up and down the family tree.

The next day was equally busy: another 35 family trusts were created. In all, more than 200 trusts were created in the first eight days of the month.

Such frenetic activity has consumed the Sarabhais periodically, usually in March—just before the close of the financial year. March 1974, for instance, saw 400 trusts being created. By the early 1980s, nearly 2,000 trusts existed for the 20 members of one of India's most illustrious and distinguished families.

When the list became too long for trusts to be named, numbers had to be resorted to. So there is a Gautam Sarabhai Trust No. 1, Gautam Sarabhai Trust No. 2 and so on till Gautam Sarabhai Trust No. 128. There are trusts named after valleys and trees, and trusts with no names at all, just initials and numbers, like MG-T61 Trust and AZ-8152-NZA Trust.

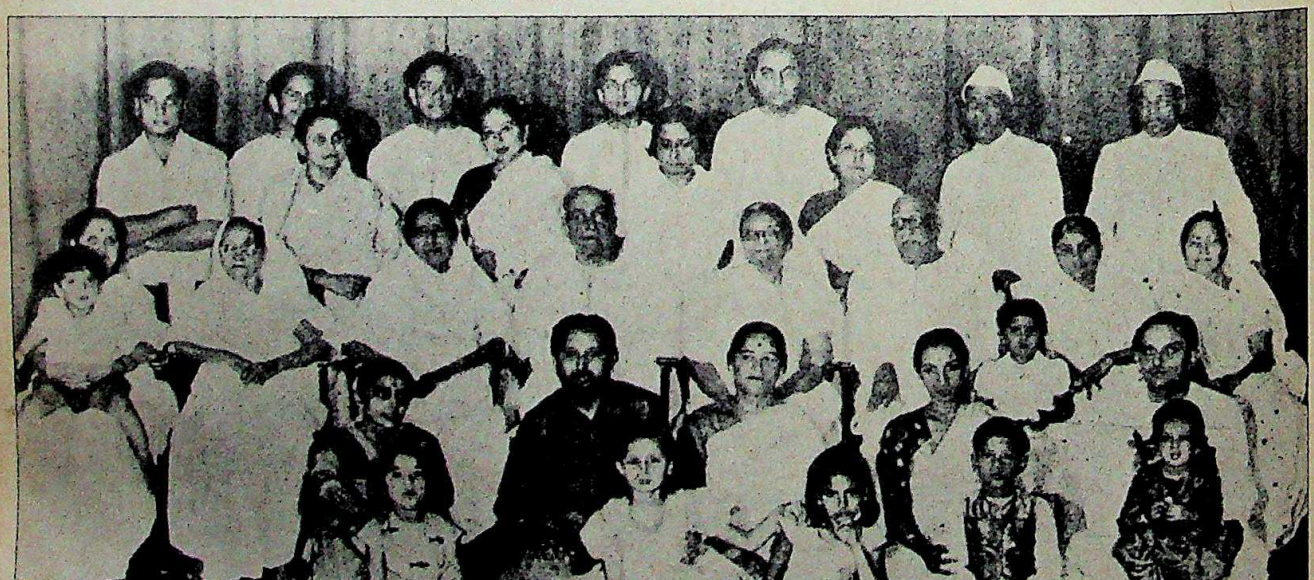
Why would anyone want to create so many trusts? The Sarabhais have their answers, and so do the Government's tax officials. If the latter are to be believed, the trusts are little more than devices aimed at avoiding tax. But the Sarabhais argue that the trusts have been created for specific needs at different times, to meet the present and future needs of family members. They say that many of the trusts do not benefit from any tax saving at all, and that 2,000 trusts cannot save any more tax than 20 trusts, so that the numbers are inconsequential. Finally, it is argued, the trusts cannot be said to belong to one family in the normal

SARABHAI TRUST MANIA

DATE	NUMBER
30.3.72	253
29.3.73	250
30.3.73	25
28.3.74	400
25.3.75	9
26.3.75	1
28.3.75	8
31.3.75	3
10.11.75	24
1.3.76	67
2.3.76	35
5.3.76	28
8.3.76	78

Note : Dates when nearly 800 other trusts were created are not readily available.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



The Sarabhai family in 1957: decline and dissension

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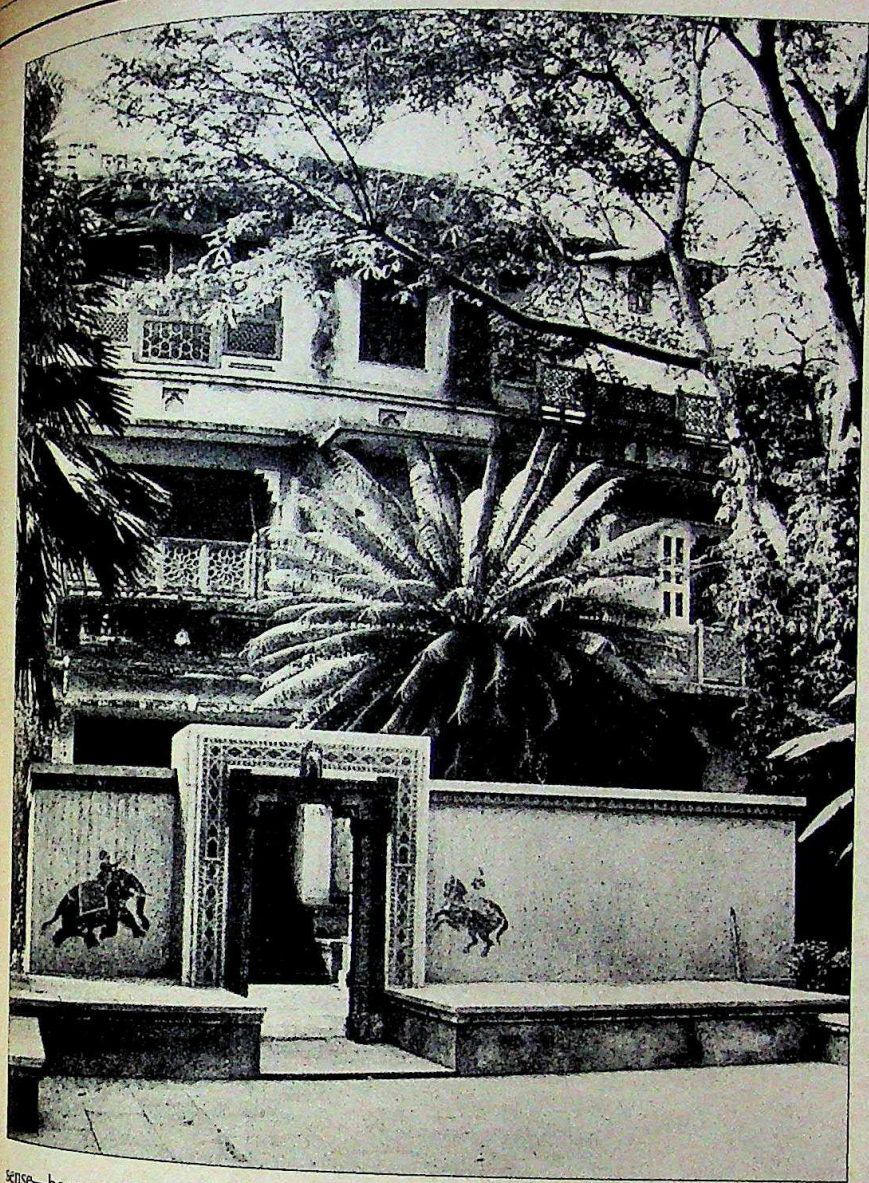

The Retreat: sylvan complex, but not a tax haven

sense—because they involve four generations of Sarabhais, including women (who would normally be said to belong to the families into which they have been married).

Whatever the truth, these trusts have now set the stage for a furious and continuing battle between the Sarabhais and the tax officials. Thousands of tax assessments are being disputed, appealed against, or conceded; compromises are being struck, penal action being launched, concessions being made. What ultimately emerges from this flurry of activity is the extraordinary story of a family's willingness to go to unimaginable lengths to avoid paying tax.

Said a senior tax official in Ahmedabad: "The Sarabhai family has made a mess of its Rs 400 crore business, which is losing money. But it has excelled in the tax avoidance business." Added another tax official: "This kind of behaviour comes about only when someone believes that it is a crime to pay tax."

The disputes have already resulted in the Sarabhais coughing up much larger sums of tax money. The additional burden already agreed to by the Sarabhais is about Rs 3 crore. And the Sarabhai Foundation alone has paid over Rs 60 lakh. One group company is now paying Rs 10 lakh every month against old dues, another is paying Rs 20 lakh every month. And the family's annual tax liability could multiply tenfold on the trusts alone.

In support of its contention that the purpose of the trusts was to avoid taxes, the Income Tax Department has confronted the Sarabhais with numerous anomalies and illogicalities in the trusts:

► Mallika Sarabhai, daughter of the late scientist Vikram Sarabhai and niece of family patriarch Gautam, set up a trust in the early 1970s saying that the income of the trust should in the next 21 months be given to the third child of Pallavi, a niece of Gautam's. Pallavi was not even married then. When she was barely 16, she also set up trusts, with her uncles (of the *previous* generation) as the beneficiaries.

► In several trusts, the beneficiaries named were already in their 60s and were to be paid several decades later.

► In some trusts, the settler would not specify who the beneficiaries were, leaving some other family member to appoint them, though the trust deed would say that the trust settler was creating it due to affection for the beneficiaries.

► Most trust deeds read alike, several are just cyclostyled copies with the names and numbers changed—suggesting a common plan and purpose.

► Virtually no new private trusts have been created after 1981, when the tax laws became unfavourable to trusts.

► Several trusts were not performing the objectives set out for them. The Sarabhai Foundation, registered as a charitable trust, had a 16-acre farm which housed mango and lemon groves. The family claimed that these trees were for botanical research, and got tax exemption on this account. But surprise checks by the income tax authorities revealed that students hardly used the premises.

The taxmen also found that the priceless Calico Museum had been given by Calico Mills to the Sarabhai Foundation and shifted from the Calico Mills to the Sarabhais' sylvan residential complex in Ahmedabad, The Retreat, where the museum was not really open to the public. Other facilities—like the books and music library, as well as the botanical garden—were also found to be used primarily, if not exclusively, by the family.

The taxmen decided that the Sarabhai Foundation did not therefore deserve the status of a tax-free charitable trust, and that it was a private trust meant to benefit the Sarabhais. The foundation has therefore been slapped with heavy tax bills.

Disputes have also arisen over 400 investment companies that the Sarabhais have created—partly to reduce the annual wealth tax liability from Rs 40 lakh to Rs 5 lakh (or so say the taxmen). Other companies have been set up to lease such items as refrigerators and other household goods to the Sarabhais, to provide street lighting on the road into The Retreat, to hold jewellery, and so on.

The tax officials say that the objective, again, was tax avoidance—because there

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was no wealth tax on companies. Thus the Sarabhais transferred their personal assets—like jewellery, buildings and even gardens—to these companies, drastically reducing the tax burden on a total family wealth of about Rs 40 crore.

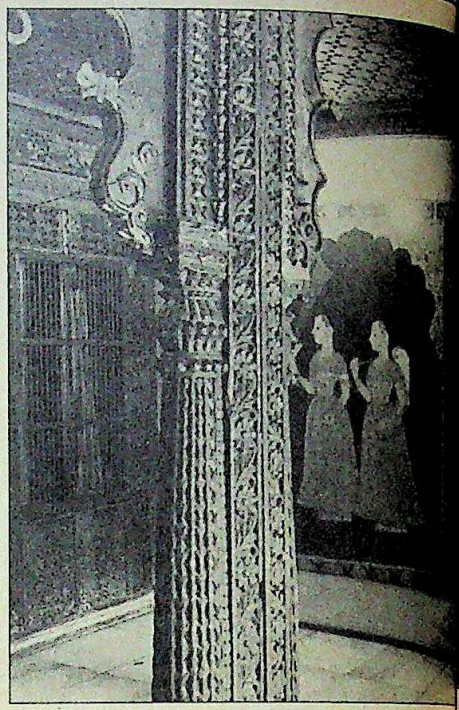
Other business families have played similar games, but as in the case of the trusts, the Sarabhais have shown that they are a class apart. The family set up 36 companies to hold the family jewellery, worth Rs 15 crore. The family members would create a jewellery company and execute an agreement that they could take the jewellery on an annual rent of Rs 500 a year. The jewellery remained in personal lockers, with no tax burden. Ingeniously, the rental charge was used by the company to insure the jewellery.

In another case, Gautam Sarabhai, the architect of some of these schemes, claimed medical expenses worth Rs 6.04 lakh from the Employees Welfare Account of one investment company of which he was an employee on a salary of Re 1 a month. The reimbursement was shown to be drawn for the treatment of his late wife, Kamalini, and included transcontinental visits by members of the family as well as travel costs for doctors coming from the US.

Many of the family companies provide services to other family companies or to family members themselves. And tax officials say that such a company will charge more for services to a profitable associate, and not charge at all to one that incurs a loss—in order to minimise the tax burden. Accounting entries, they add, are often put in at the year-end.

About 25 companies were used to finance the Sarabhais' foreign travel as well as their personal expenses, including compensation for the payment of electricity, entertainment and personal servants. Even the air-conditioners and refrigerators of these firms were used by the Sarabhais by paying rent.

The Income Tax Department has vigorously followed the Sarabhai trail for the last few years, leading to the tax disputes. And the Sarabhais have filed over 4,000



Classy Clan

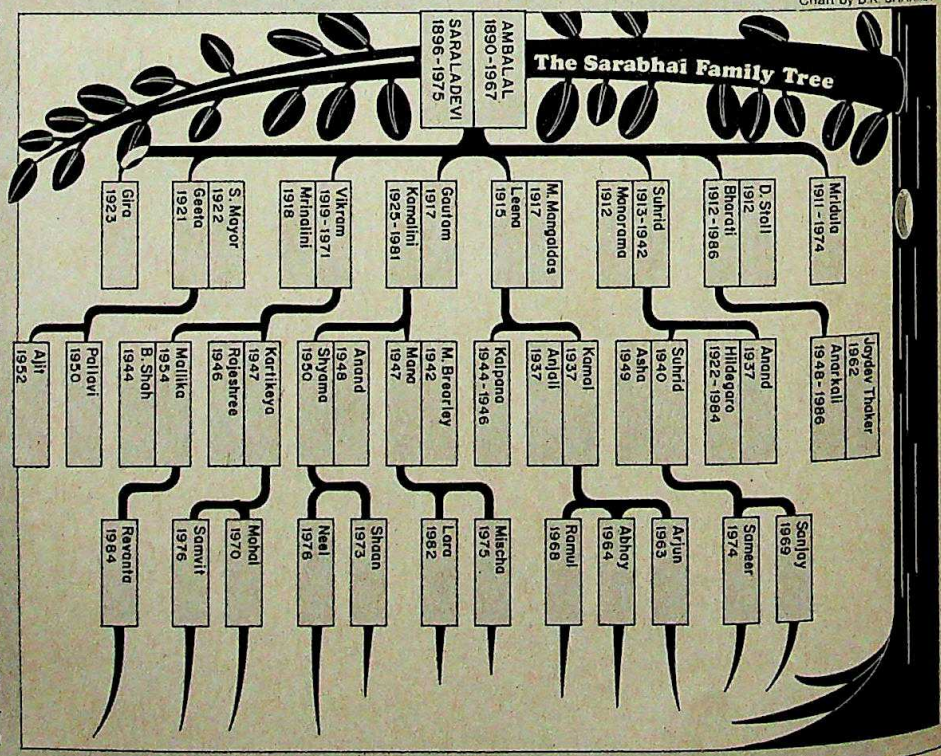
THE Americans have the Rockefellers, Indians have the Sarabhais. Both are families with immense wealth and large corporate empires—and contributions to society that go well beyond the world of business. Both have given generously to charity, contributed to the arts, figured in the world of politics, stood for taste and distinction.

The Sarabhais have, of course, operated on a much smaller financial scale than the Rockefellers, but in many senses they have been even more versatile than the Rockefellers. Friends of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, labour leaders, builders of some of Ahmedabad's finest and proudest institutions, contributors to science and dance, creators of the priceless Calico Museum, the Sarabhais have been princes among merchants and merchants among princes.

Anusuya, sister of the founder of the family business Ambalal *(see family tree)*, led the 1918 textile strike during which Maha Gandhi first went on a hunger strike. She also founded and ran the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association at a time when her brother headed the Mill Owners' Association at the age of 22. Years later Mridula Sarabhai, Ambalal's daughter, was with Gandhi in Noakhali, she was particularly close to Jawaharlal Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah. And because of her role in helping women in distress, she was known as the 'abductor of abducted women'.

Leena runs Shreyas, an institute for destitute women and children, her brother Gautam (now the 70-year-old

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



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Calico Museum: private pleasure

cases in the courts and income tax tribunals against what they consider faulty assessments. Nearly 2,000 of them refer to the trusts alone. A battery of lawyers and accountants—in many cases, the same experts who had set out the rationale for the trusts—has been fighting their cases.

If the manner in which the trusts and investment companies were created give rise to questions, the tax department's charges against the Sarabhais are not easily answered either. For instance, after creating nearly 2,000 trusts, the family tried to shift the corpus of the 'discretionary trusts' (whose trustees can decide who should get the benefit of the trust) to 'specific trusts' (where the beneficiaries are specified). This was after a change in the law that imposed a higher tax burden on discretionary trusts.

In another complicated manoeuvre, gold bonds worth Rs 8 crore were sold two days before their date of maturity to newly-created investment companies (in which the seller was the only shareholder), in exchange for companies shares. Within days, the shares were sold to the same set of (but different) companies, at 25 per cent of the face value. An artificial capital loss was claimed as a result.

When the bonds were redeemed, wealth tax was sought to be escaped by creating new trusts in which each donor was the sole beneficiary. The shares of the companies were then gifted to the trusts.

Also, various Sarabhai companies have been paying substantial amounts of interest to other family companies. The receiving companies claimed the paying company should have deducted tax at source, but the latter said it had no such liability. So both the payer and the payee deferred the income tax liability of about Rs 2 crore a year for three years in a row.

These charges by the tax officials have come at the end of three years of concerted effort. And they were helped in their efforts by a judgement a couple of years ago by Supreme Court Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy in a McDowell case, holding that "colourable devices" in tax planning are tantamount to tax evasion. The judgement explicitly said that "though tax planning could be legitimate if within the framework of law, colourable devices couldn't be part of tax planning and it was not honourable to avoid payment of tax by dubious methods as it was the obligation of everyone to pay taxes honestly without resorting to subterfuges". It added that "it was for the court to take stock, to determine the nature of the new and sophisticated legal devices to avoid tax, and expose the devices for what they really were and refuse to give judicial benediction".

Early last year, the income tax commissioner of the Sarabhai Range, V.S. Banthia, and income tax officer Madan Lal created history in Ahmedabad when they individually summoned, over January and February, all the members of the Sarabhai family to question them about the trusts. Both the officials had spent many nights peering into hundreds of trust deeds trying to fathom the financial wizardry that went into them.

At first, senior income tax officials who put their heads together to work their way through the maze found that they had stepped into a "legal jungle". But slowly they put the pieces together and concluded that the family had avoided paying taxes amounting to crores of rupees by resorting to the subterfuge of creating trusts. One breakthrough is said to have come, for instance, when Mallika Sarabhai was questioned for over four

family patriarch) was till recently running Ahmedabad's B.M. Institute for Handicapped Children, and was also chairman of the National Institute of Design—which the Sarabhais helped create. The family also runs Jyoti Sangh and Vikas Grah (for destitute women).

Vikram, Gautam's younger brother, gave birth to and spearheaded India's space effort, and died a premature death in 1971, when he was chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation. He also helped establish the Ahmedabad Textile Industry Research Association as well as the Physical Research Laboratory. Vikram's wife Mrinalini and daughter Mallika are dancers and run the dance school Darpana.

The Sarabhais also played a role in starting the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad. Gautam's wife Kamalini dabbled in psycho-analysis, and was partly instrumental in bringing Eric Ericson to India to research Gandhi and publish his definitive book, *Gandhi's Truth*.

Despite these many and varied achievements, the Sarabhais are perhaps even more distinguished for their elegant taste and style, patenting a Gandhian austerity amidst refined wealth. The family home in Ahmedabad—called The Retreat—is a veritable botanical garden with shaded walks, each building and home a small art gallery.

The Sarabhais have also been avant-garde. None of them has gone to school, being privately educated at home before going to university. Many of the couples in the clan have never formally married though they have brought up children—who in turn have raised their own brood without going through the ritual of marriage. In recent years, however, disputes and tensions in the family have created rifts—and Mrinalini and Mallika, for instance, have moved out of The Retreat, now occupied primarily by Gautam and sister Gira.

In business, the Sarabhais once ranked among the top few industrial houses in the country. But decline has set in, the young inheritors are no longer associated with the companies, and Gautam's tutelage has seen the two major companies—Ambalal Sarabhai Enterprises and Calico Mills—slip into the red. Assets and turnover have been declining (about Rs 400 crore each), and the losses have been mounting. Calico Mills has just been given financial transfusion by the government-owned financial institutions, and there is talk of them wanting to wrest control from Gautam. Meanwhile, Ambalal Sarabhai Enterprises—created by amalgamating several group companies in 1982—is now sought to be divided again.

Inevitably, the family's reputation has taken a beating. And the tax disputes over the trusts have not helped.

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hours at a stretch. The path through the legal jungle now led to a gold-mine.

When the officials began to draw their conclusions, the Sarabhais got active. A family with a reputation for contesting even minor tax assessments now came out with proposals saying that they were ready to pay Rs 60 lakh a year in taxes on these trusts. The tax officials were taken aback, but they continued with their investigations and finally asked the Sarabhais to pay around Rs 80 lakh. The Sarabhais appealed to the Central Board of Direct Taxes in New Delhi, but with no luck.

With the tax authorities after them, the law itself has been changed to deal with the situations created by the Sarabhais. In 1981, for instance, the entire corpus of private trusts became taxable, and that too at the maximum marginal rate of tax—making them infinitely less attractive tax-saving devices. Then, when the Sarabhais began transferring their wealth to companies because these were exempt from wealth tax, this law too was changed in 1984 so that closely-held companies had to pay wealth tax.

With the law becoming less charitable to trusts and the tax savings becoming less attractive (if not non-existent, in some cases), the Sarabhais have now changed tack. Virtually no new trusts have been created after 1981, and over the last few years several trusts have been wound up. Some 500 trusts have ceased to exist. Another 100 are now proposed to be wound up. More will disappear in the future. The tax authorities say that another reason for creating the trusts may have been to escape estate duty, which has now been abolished—removing another reason for keeping the trusts in existence.

Meanwhile, the tax disputes have served to focus attention on the manner in which the family companies function. Tax officials say that as many as 40 companies have their head offices in one small room, several companies share employees, and many of the companies exist only on paper. Employees often got transferred from one investment company to the other so as to deny them terminal benefits, payable after five years of continuous service.

Court disclosures have been revealing. Chiman Chatur Patel who works with the Sarabhais said that though employees sat under one roof, they worked for different companies. Natwarlal Somnath Pandya, another employee, deposed that though he was transferred time and again from one company to another, neither did his place of work nor his work change. Sevak Shah, an ex-employee of Sarabhai Technological Development Syndicate, said in an affidavit before the Gujarat Industrial Tribunal that he was a clerk in one company, the secretary of another and a power-of-attorney holder in the third. But he didn't know what was happening in any of these companies.

While Gautam Sarabhai has marshalled the family's defences, the tax authorities made a breakthrough when they questioned his niece, Mallika, for over four hours.

The man who has to face the tax authorities on all the contentious issues is none other than Gautam Sarabhai—a very private person who does not talk to journalists. At 70, he is the only member of the family who still has a say in running the Sarabhai group of companies. And the future must look grim.

He is a lean, spare figure, the light grey eyes slightly rheumy. Clothed in spotless white, he sits in the typically elegant Shanti Sadan—a building that was once occupied by the Income Tax Department—and prepares his defence.

It is a defence that the Sarabhais have repeatedly presented to the tax authorities, who all too often have rejected the arguments put forward by the lawyers hired by the trusts and investment companies. But the arguments are not always without merit, and will be presented in appeal to the courts.

For instance, Gautam has pointed out to the tax authorities that his family has never stopped short of a full disclosure of the facts, and that it is only the interpretation of the facts that differs. A tax official agreed with this and remarked sardonically that the Sarabhais' was a case of 'daylight robbery'. Nevertheless, it took a full nine months for the taxmen to sort out the taxability of the jewellery companies alone, and to establish that the entire chain of transactions was meant for personal gain. Tax officials admit that, despite all their efforts so far, they have been able to sort out the affairs of only 800 of the 2,000 trusts. The rest still remains to be investigated. The 800 trusts have so far been assessed for an additional tax liability of Rs 3 crore, plus interest.

Gautam has also argued that the Supreme Court judgement in the McDowell case has encouraged the tax authorities to look differently at cases that they have routinely dealt with for 15 or 20 years. He has pointed out that several of the decisions relating to the family trusts have meant paying gift tax voluntarily, that the jewellery companies do not enjoy any tax benefit, that the capital loss on the gold bond companies has not meant any tax saving, and so on.

The Sarabhai lawyers—among them Nani Palkhivala—have also argued before the tax authorities that trusts created for people not yet born is merely a way of providing for the welfare of succeeding generations that will be there and that such provisions too do not mean any extra tax benefit. The controversy over tax not being deducted at source is explained as a valid form of accounting practice, and the family has often acquiesced to the authorities' rulings in order to end fractious dispute and to avoid litigation cost.

Even the Sarabhai lawyers have admitted to the tax authorities that their clients have a mania for multiplying trusts and companies in a manner that defies logic. And in the ultimate analysis, it is perhaps this frame of mind that has led an illustrious family to concentrate, not on the growth of business and the seizing of opportunities, but on how to build fortifications against the taxman. The result today is breached fortifications and a battered empire.

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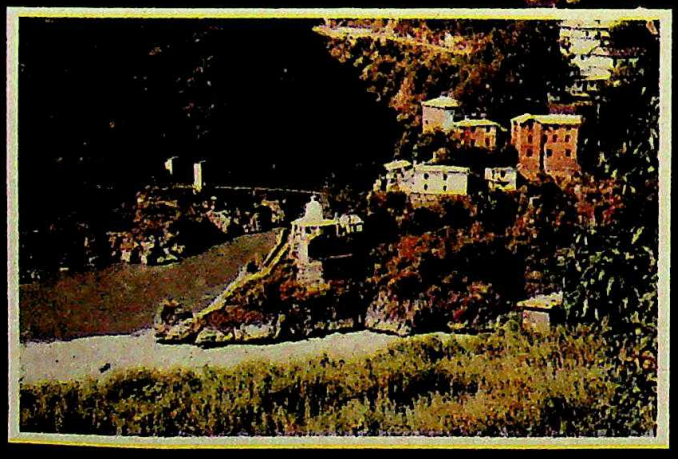

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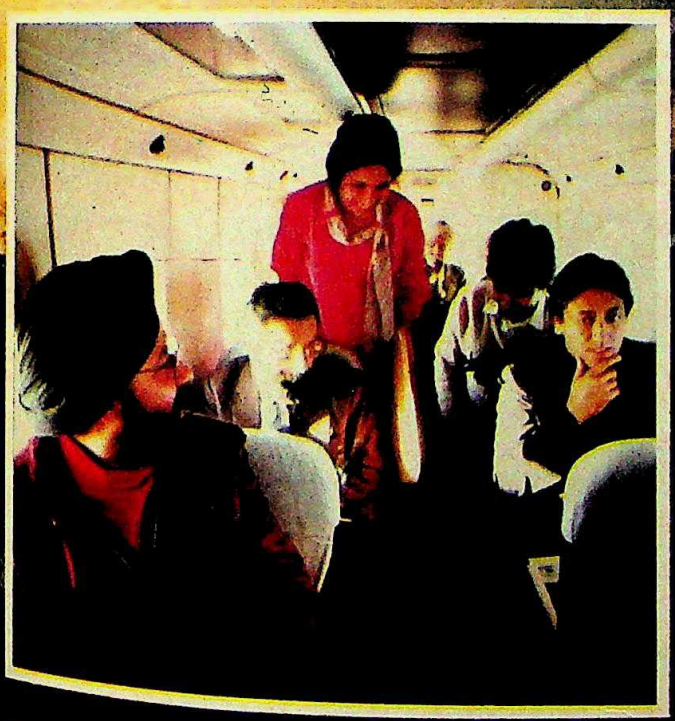

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CRICKET

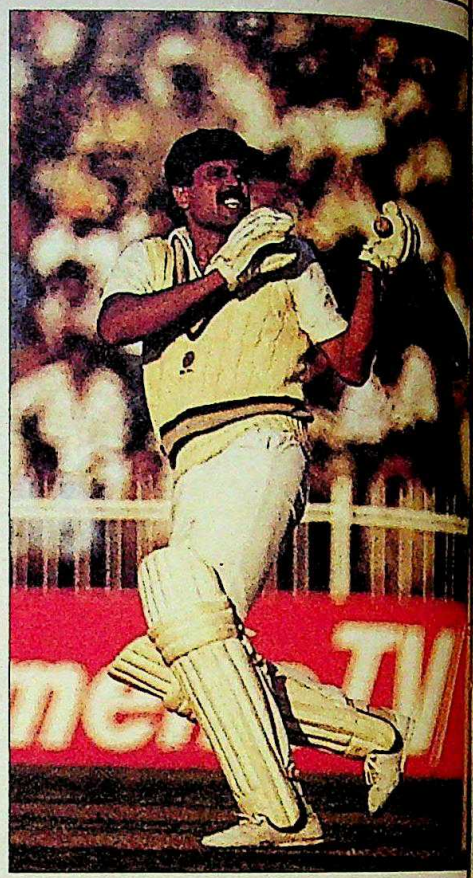
Hard Lessons

IT was India's Imrangate. In cricketing measure, no less a scandal than the one engulfing the White House. A reputation in disarray, a leader lacking leadership, a team that acted in invincibility and a public in despair and disillusionment. Asia's Ashes. No contest so fierce, no stakes so high or public involvement greater. Yet, in the end, Kapil's devils were fallen angels, the cracks in a once-indestructible armour cruelly exposed to public glare and ridicule.

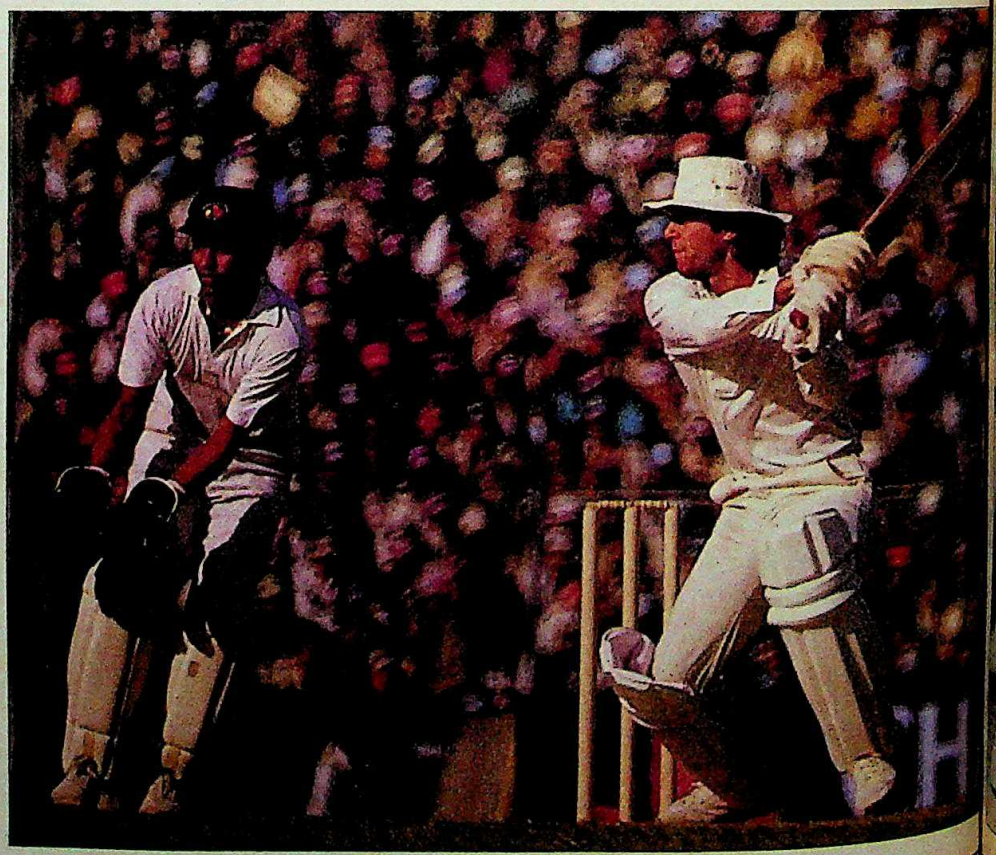
Indian cricket fans can forgive—and forget—most transgressions. But their Bible lists two Commandments. One; Thou Shalt Not Lose To Pakistan. The second and ultimate sin—Thou Shalt Not Lose To Pakistan in India. For 35 years, the second commandment has remained inviolate. And now, even that fig leaf has been ripped aside.

Perhaps for the first time, there was a visible sense of collective relief that a cricket series had come to an end, such was Pakistan's domination over the Indians. It was not that they had better resources, just that they employed them more judiciously. And, above all, were better motivated. In the end, that was the difference between winning and losing. As Imran observed: "The team that played here in 1979 was much better than the present one. It was the faith we had in the team and the effort everybody put in that made all the difference."

For Imran, it was a dream come true. For Kapil, a dream gone sour. Losing the Test series was wounding enough. It was the Pakwash in the one-day internationals (5-1) that was the final ignominy. Suddenly, the world champions of one-day cricket were pretenders to a non-existent throne. And, in the end, there was no pretender so great as Kapil Dev himself. If Imran led from the front, Kapil led from the rear. His personal contribution was meagre enough. His best bowling figures in the Test series were 3 for 46. His best in the one-day series: 2 for 32. In six Test



Imran cuts and (right) Akram strikes: motivated



It was India's Imrangate. A reputation in disarray, a leader lacking leadership, a team that acted in invincibility and a public in despair and disillusionment.

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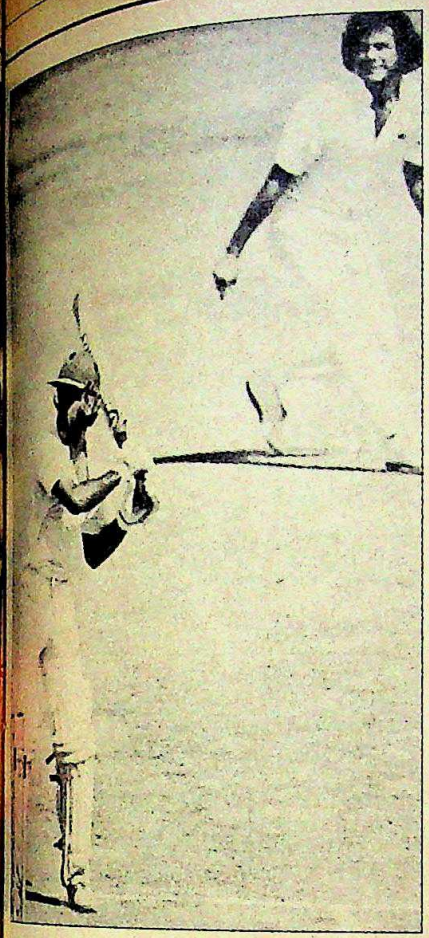

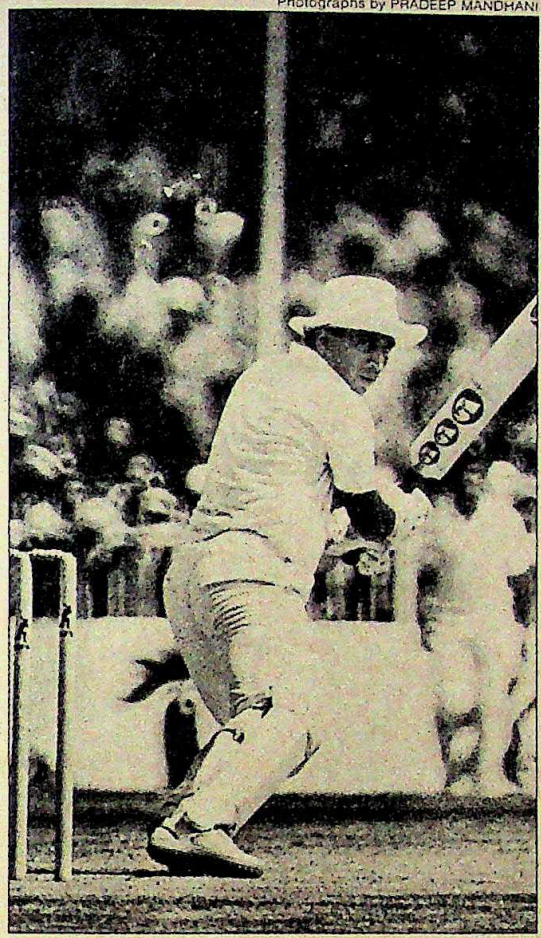

Pakistan's domination in the series was not because they had better resources, just that they employed them more judiciously. And, were better motivated.

(From left) Kapil misses, Srikkant hooks and Gavaskar glides: demoralised

innings, his highest score was 66. And, in the crucial one-day series, his batting average was 19.25. But it was his captaincy—or lack of it—that was largely responsible for India's sad showing. In comparison to Imran, Kapil was clearly a poor second, limited in imagination and tending to crack under pressure.

And pressure there was in abundance. Ultimately, the series resembled nothing more than the relationship between the two countries: long periods of boring inactivity suddenly exploding into hostile life. Seldom has a series threatened to bestow Test matches with the kiss of death. For the first four excruciating Tests, the pitches were like headstones in cricket's graveyard. For the first time in an Indo-Pakistan series, there was the rarest of subcontinental cricketing sights—vacant areas in the stands. Adding to the agony was the fact that neither of the teams was willing to take the slightest risk. Remarked former Test star M.L. Jaisimha: "If cricket has to survive in India there has got to be some co-relation between the board and the authorities who stage Test matches and those who play." Added Imran: "On these wickets, even a six-day Test will find it difficult to produce a result."

The villain of the piece was a man none of the unfortunate spectators even saw—Sitaram—who, along with his fellow groundsmen, is responsible for the preparation and care of Test pitches. But equally, it was the Indian Cricket Board which must share the blame. As one disgusted fan quipped after the fourth successive draw in Ahmedabad: "It should now be known as the Indian Cricket Bored."

Even so, there were moments of distraction. The little man Sunil Gavaskar created the biggest storm when he flatly refused to play in the second Test at Calcutta citing "personal reasons". The real reason: the last time he had played there, he had been abused by spectators and his wife pelted with missiles. Sport-crazy Calcutta—and Bengali sentiments—were in uproar. Effigies were burnt, processions taken out, state ministers got into the act and the newspapers went to town. But the master remained unmoved, even though it was the first time in 12 years and 106 Tests in succession that he would not be representing India. In the bargain, he also sacrificed

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The hard lesson for India is lack of bowlers who can get a side out twice. But the future of Indian cricket hinges on whether Kapil should stay as captain.

Indian players watch a departing Pakistan batsman: outplayed

setting another world record—for the most number of successive Test appearances. But, in typical Gavaskar fashion, his only comment was: "Let it not be said that Sunil Gavaskar does not care for his critics. Who else would have given them free ammunition just when they were running out of it?"

The next episode of the Gavaskar serial witnessed scenes of great jubilation in Calcutta when, in his next innings in the third Test at Jaipur, he went for a duck. But Gavaskar then proceeded to knock the wind out of everybody's sails by arriving at yet another landmark—the first player to reach five figures in Test cricket. The sight of the normally phlegmatic and unemotional Gavaskar punching the air in joy—and perhaps relief—when he scored his 10,000th run was, for cricket fans, an equally historic occasion. It is unlikely that Gavaskar's feat will ever be duplicated. There are only three other international cricketers in contemporary cricket who have crossed the 6,000-run mark: Alan Border (6,917), David Gower (6,553) and Vivian Richards (6,447), all of whom are at the fag end of their careers. But even if anybody does, as Gavaskar remarked: "Many people have climbed Mount Everest. But those who have been remembered are the ones who got to the summit first."

The indefatigable Gavaskar wasn't quite finished with his leading role in the proceedings. In Bangalore, on a minefield of a pitch, he once again stood alone among the ruins of Indian batting to score 96 in an innings that will probably rank among the best ever played, even though India lost the Test—and thereby the series. For a player in his 38th year to end a Test series with an average of just under 50 is added testimony, if any was required, to his class and consistency.

SADLY, with the sole exception of Dilip Vengsarkar, the same could hardly be said for the rest of his team-mates. Vengsarkar once again reinforced his reputation as a worthy successor to Gavaskar by heading the Indian batting averages in the Tests (67.33). Though consistently overshadowed by Gavaskar's achievements, Vengsarkar's performance in recent Tests has been phenomenal. In just 12 Tests (17 innings) he has scored an incredible 1,300 runs including six centuries. He is already the second-highest century maker for India and, after Gavaskar, the man who has accumulated the most Test runs—5,951.

But for the rest, India hardly lived up to its reputation of having the best batting line-up in the world. Srikkanth was his usual inconsistent self, serving up his favourite cocktail of odd and audacious shots. He started brilliantly, rattling up a century in the first Test at Madras, but failed to maintain the tempo, finishing with an average of 38.87 in the Tests. India's great Hyderabadi hope, Azharuddin, did manage to notch up two centuries but failed when the pressure was on. As Wasim Akram and Imran and later Tauseef Ahmed and Iqbal Qasim showed, Azhar is highly vulnerable to short-pitched deliveries and top-class spin. Shastri fared even poorer with the bat—his one century in the Tests took him seven hours—and apart from one spell of 4 for 69, did not impress with the ball either. Mohinder Amarnath is obviously over-conscious of retaining his place, thus rendering him a liability when the chips are down.

But the hard lesson for India is the lack of bowlers who can get a side out twice. The succession of seamers who were paraded on view—Roger Binny, Madan Lal, Raju Kulkarni, Bharat Arun, Chetan Sharma, Manoj Prabhakar—was a sad commentary on the paucity of an opening bowler to partner Kapil. The only bowler to emerge with some credit was Maninder Singh, but even he buckled under pressure and failed to maintain consistency in Pakistan's second innings at Bangalore after finishing with 7 for 27 in the first. Shivlal Yadav and Gopal Sharma are hardly in the match-winning mould, which does not bode well for the future of Indian cricket.

But the future of Indian cricket currently hinges on the key issue of whether Kapil should be retained as captain. Once again, a series has exposed his obvious limitations as a leader, his inexplicable bowling changes or his lack of them, his inability to motivate the team when the pressure was on, his poverty of strategy and judgement. He has now ended 36 Tests as captain with just four victories and it is doubtful if the patience and tolerance displayed by Indian cricket fans—or, for that matter, the selectors—can last much longer.

—DILIP BOBB

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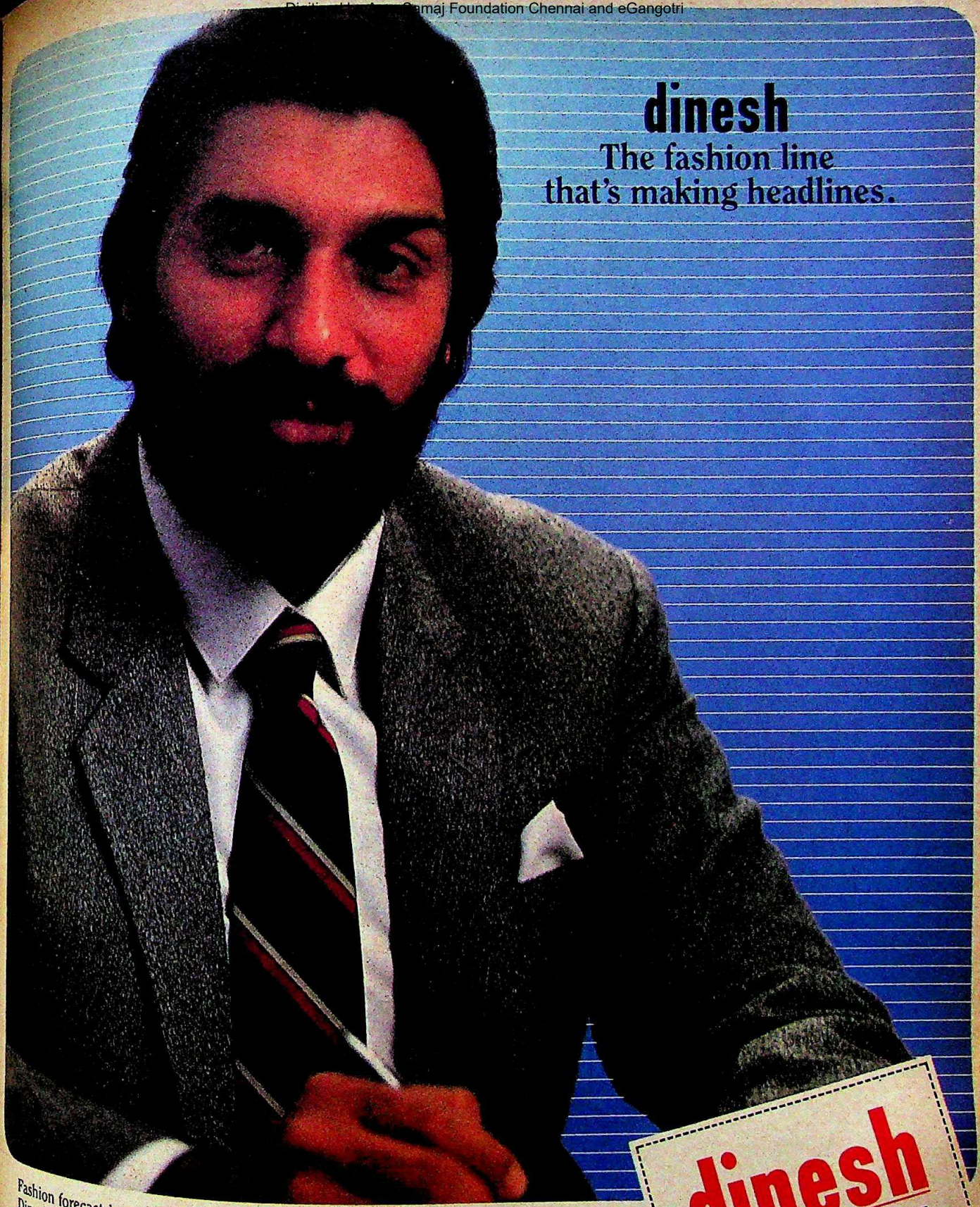

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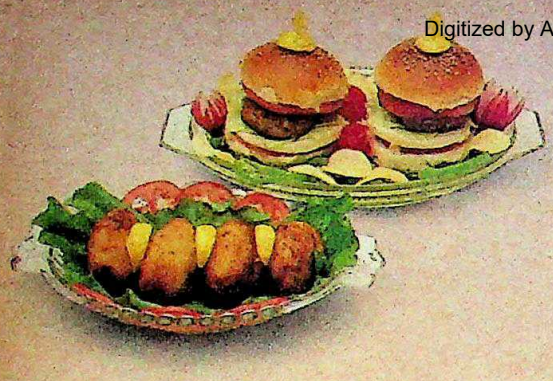

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JOHNSON MATTHEY

The Shamji Comeback

THE Johnson Matthey Bankers (JMB) saga was one of the most inflammatory scandals to rock London's financial and banking world. The "JMB affair" was back in business news headlines last fortnight when Umed Chand Golecha—former business partner of Rajendra Sethia—and Rajendra Kumar Choraria, who holds directorships of several import-export firms, were charged with false accounting and fraud in relation to JMB.

Golecha and Choraria are just two more Asian names implicated in the spectacular collapse of JMB—a banking division of the international bullion traders. The affair dragged in the mire a glittering array of super-rich Asians: Rajendra Sethia, Mahmud Sipra, Abdul Shamji, the Imam brothers of Pakistan and the Pahoomal brothers.

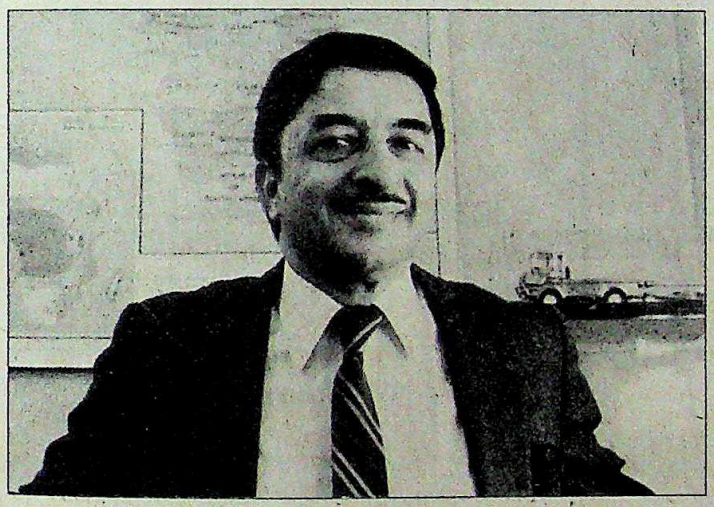
At the hub of the scandal was JMB. The bank found itself asphyxiated with bad debts, totalling almost £248 million, prompting the Bank of England to step in and rescue it in a controversial take-over. At the heart of JMB's problems lay its over-rapid expansion in trade finance, mostly to UK-based Asian traders. Loosely-connected trading groups relied heavily on bills of lading and other trading paper as collateral. JMB did not have adequate scrutinising procedures to check the terms and continuing validity of enough of this collateral to have security against the millions it loaned.

The stunning collapse was given a cutting edge by a Labour Party MP Brian Sedgemore who mounted a ferocious campaign against the Asian tycoons caught in the JMB quagmire. Much of his damning comments were reserved for Mahmud Sipra, the Pakistani shipping magnate and Abdul Shamji, head of the far-flung Gomba group. Sipra—whose El Saeed group of shipping and film companies owed £70 million—was JMB's biggest debtor. Sipra left Britain for Karachi and has not returned.

Shamji, with approximately £21 million in debts was made out to be the third biggest debtor to JMB. His friendship with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Conservative Party Chairman Norman Tebbit was given special attention by Sedgemore. Shamji had consistently denied allegations levelled against him and insisted that his Gomba group was fully capable of repaying all outstanding loans.

His problems began when JMB became unhappy with his efforts to settle its debt which had originally been calculated at £21 million. The receivers, Price Waterhouse, were called in by the bank to manage the debt-recovery process. Two attempts were made to settle the outstanding loans but failed when the two parties could not agree to the amounts.

Shamji then filed a writ to get rid of the receivers put in by the bank but the court rejected the appeal stating that Gomba broke an agreement, under which the bank had agreed to accept the reduced sum of £14.6 million rather than Gomba's full debt of £21 million. The six Gomba companies that were ordered to make repayments were: Gomba Holdings UK, Gomba UK group, the Duchess Theatre company, the Garrick Theatre company, Gomba Exmin and Routestone. A judgement for £5.1 million was given against Shamji personally and for £11.8 million and $852,000 against Arya holdings, the group's Jersey-based holding company. The idea behind the court orders was to give the stricken JMB a variety of sources from which they could recover the debt with interest.



Shamji: back from the brink

Gomba's UK empire, split into three parts, had, according to conservative estimates, an annual turnover of £50 million prior to the JMB crash. The group's three sections were: a 32 per cent stake in Belgrave Holdings (later pledged to JMB) which ran seven hotels, various commercial properties and had a part of its original engineering business. Second was the Rochester group of companies that included the Scottish truck manufacturer, Stonefield Vehicles. Finally there were his sophisticated safe deposit centres, handbag factory, the three London theatres, a nightclub and Shamji's stake in the famous Wembley stadium.

The affair acquired an international dimension when Shamji took the battle to the United States where, before a New York Federal Court, he claimed $80 million in compensatory and punitive damages from JMB and the Bank of England. He alleged that the bank unlawfully destroyed his businesses and had acted illegally as a bank in New York state because it had not obtained the required licence. Shamji is associated in the US with Strongsay Ltd, Baglap Ltd and Parklane Investments Inc.

Amongst the most closely scrutinised aspects of the JMB affair has been Tiny Rowland's *Observer* paper's dogged coverage of Shamji and the Gomba group's travails. It has provoked widespread comments that both, Rowland and Shamji with extensive interests in Africa are rivals there and Rowland was also in the running for the controlling stake in the Wembley Football Stadium. At the height of the JMB affair, Shamji filed libel suits against the Sunday paper.

The result of all this strident publicity in the media was general opprobrium for Asian businessmen in the country, coming in the wake of Rajendra Sethia's headline grabbing bankruptcy. The JMB affair earned Asian businessmen an undeserved reputation—of being shady wheeler-dealers rather than an industrious and highly inventive lot.

Amidst the adverse publicity, Shamji's tenacious comeback has largely gone unnoticed. After all the months of figuring in national headlines, the fact that Shamji has managed to claw back and pay his debts to the Bank of England, seems exceptional. The Gomba group has now repaid more than £17 million ahead of its debt schedule early this year.

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Among the assets sold by Gomba UK to repay his debts include: Stonefield Vehicles (for an estimated £ 5.6 million); the Garrick Theatre (£ 300.00); the Duchess Theatre (£ 1.35 million; stake in Wembley Stadium (approximately £ 5 million). The rest came from the sale of his shares in Belgrave Holdings and its hotel interests, stake in the Coin and Medals group—Birmingham Mint—and various company shares. Shamji continues to hold several million pounds of assets such as the Mermaid theatre, the Skindles hotel at Maidenhead, the Felldene estate and numerous other hotels and properties.

How did Gomba manage to come unscathed through this often-ferocious three-year struggle? Most observers put it to the solidity of Gomba's base stemming from its world-wide operations. What might have been a calamity for many companies, in the end proved only a hiccough for Gomba in the UK.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

ABDUL SHAMJI

"I was a political football"

ABDUL SHAMJI, 54, has acquired an enviable reputation for his remarkable resilience and commercial stamina. Shamji, born in Uganda, left school at 13 to mind the family store in the remote Ugandan village of Gomba. Soon afterwards, he obtained the license to import Japanese cars and trucks which he assembled locally. He has not looked back since. Deftly using his entrepreneurial skills to build a vast empire, the Gomba group became the largest in the country employing a 2,000-strong workforce and an annual turnover of 50 million Ugandan shillings. In 1972 this flourishing empire was halted in its tracks when President Idi Amin decided to expel Asians. Shamji endured a brief spell in prison before successfully bribing his way to freedom.

Adroitly using his extensive banking contacts in London he started to rebuild his second empire. In 15 years he rebuilt his Gomba group of industries—the name a reflection of his sentimental attachment to the obscure Ugandan village—into a more sprawling one than that he had left behind in Uganda: construction, real estate, commodity trading, vehicles and components, shipping, a crocodile farm in Malaysia to supplement his thriving leather business, and hotels in United Kingdom, North America, Malaysia and the Philippines. The Jersey-based company with its offices in London's gracious Park Lane is tightly run by Shamji and his two Texas University-educated sons, Ryaz and Alim. His unslaked zeal for acquisitions—each more daring than the previous—ensured that he was never far from news headlines in Britain.

In 1985, disaster hit him. The spectacular collapse of Johnson Matthey Bankers (JMB) caused the Bank of England to put the squeeze for immediate repayments of advances worth nearly £21 million. Shamji was forced to relinquish control of some of his large holdings to the receivers to repay the Bank of England.

Although he has squared his debts—the only one from amongst a galaxy of defaulting Asian millionaires, he says he is "shaken" by what he describes as the "hostility" of the press and the establishment. In an exclusive interview to London Correspondent RAMESH CHANDRAN, *his first since the* JMB *scandal became public, the dapper and courtly Shamji talks about the past and the future. Excerpts:*

> "Gomba did not go bust. It was Johnson Mathey Bankers that went bust...I simply became a convenient excuse for JMB's downfall."

► His assessment of the JMB scandal and his personal involvement:

Since I stood my ground and fought I was made the scapegoat in the JMB affair. I never ran. Let me remind you that Gomba did not go bust. It was Johnson Matthey Bankers who went bust. For our part, we had fully secured loans. I simply became a convenient excuse for JMB's downfall. Events since then have proved just how wrong our detractors were.

► On why Gomba was tardy in making its repayments to JMB:

There was never any question of my making any payments until JMB got into trouble. There was never any pressure from them on us to make any payments. The cover of our securities was so good. When they landed in trouble, they looked for a scapegoat.

► On the current status of Gomba's debts to JMB:

All monies currently due have been fully repaid including substantial costs. There is nothing current or prospectively due to Johnson Matthey. In fact the bank are holding on to certain securities at the moment to cover contingent liabilities.

► On his close friendship with Margaret Thatcher and Norman Tebbit:

I am a conservative. I contribute funds to the Conservative Party and I am not the only one who does so. I did meet them on many occasions as most substantial businessmen do. The photo of me and Mrs Margaret Thatcher at my office is like the one thousands of others have taken with the prime minister and display prominently.

► On his being singled out for attacks by Sedgemore:

He made numerous charges against me under the cover of parliamentary privilege. I was made into a political football between the Labour and the Conservative parties with the kick-off at Wembley.

► On his rivalry with Tiny Rowland, owner of the *Observer*:

I have no rivalry with Tiny Rowland. I think he was just upset at losing Wembley Stadium so soon after losing Harrods.

► On his speculated plans to sue Rowland, the *Observer* and Grenada Television:

You haven't heard the last of this yet. The lawyers are looking into it for an early decision.

► On his swift squaring of debts and his comeback:

It has been quite a battle. However, we at Gomba are stoically soldering on in the firm belief that the setbacks have only strengthened our resolve and apply ourselves to our tasks with greater determination. Immediately on discharge of the receivers, we have been able to negotiate and sign a contract to enable the Royal Shakespeare Company to present plays in our Mermaid theatre. This first deal augurs well for the future.

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ASLV PROGRAMME

Setback in the Sky

THE 31-hour countdown was smooth, the lift-off perfect. But, less than a minute after the sleek Augmented Satellite Launch Vehicle (ASLV-1) blasted off from the Sriharikota Range last week, and arched into the sky trailing squiggles of smoke, the 40 tonne rocket suddenly lost height and direction and plunged into the Bay of Bengal. The course taken by the first flight of the new generation of rockets was symbolic of the sudden dampener the failure represents for India's ambitious space programme.

The ASLV-1 launch, delayed by 15 months, was tom-tommed as a "quantum jump" for Indian space scientists—a giant leap into the use of an array of hi-tech, inter-active microprocessors, to form what is called, the closed loop guidance system meant to keep the rocket on course at the right speed, and to make in-corrections if it goes astray. The other major technology to be tried out by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for the first time, was the strap-on systems—two boosters tied to the main vehicle to give the rocket a more powerful thrust at lift-off.

All that came to naught when the ASLV-1's mid-day blast-off from the Sriharikota Range in coastal Andhra Pradesh, ended in a watery grave. For the scientists, the failure was a bitter and traumatic development. Everything had gone with clockwork precision from the start of the final countdown, at 5 a.m. on March 23. All checks were completed and launch readiness conveyed to Mission Director M.S.R. Dev for the final okay, 14 minutes before lift-off. Finally, at 12.09 p.m., the two strap-on boosters were ignited and ASLV-1 soared majestically

RAGHU RAI

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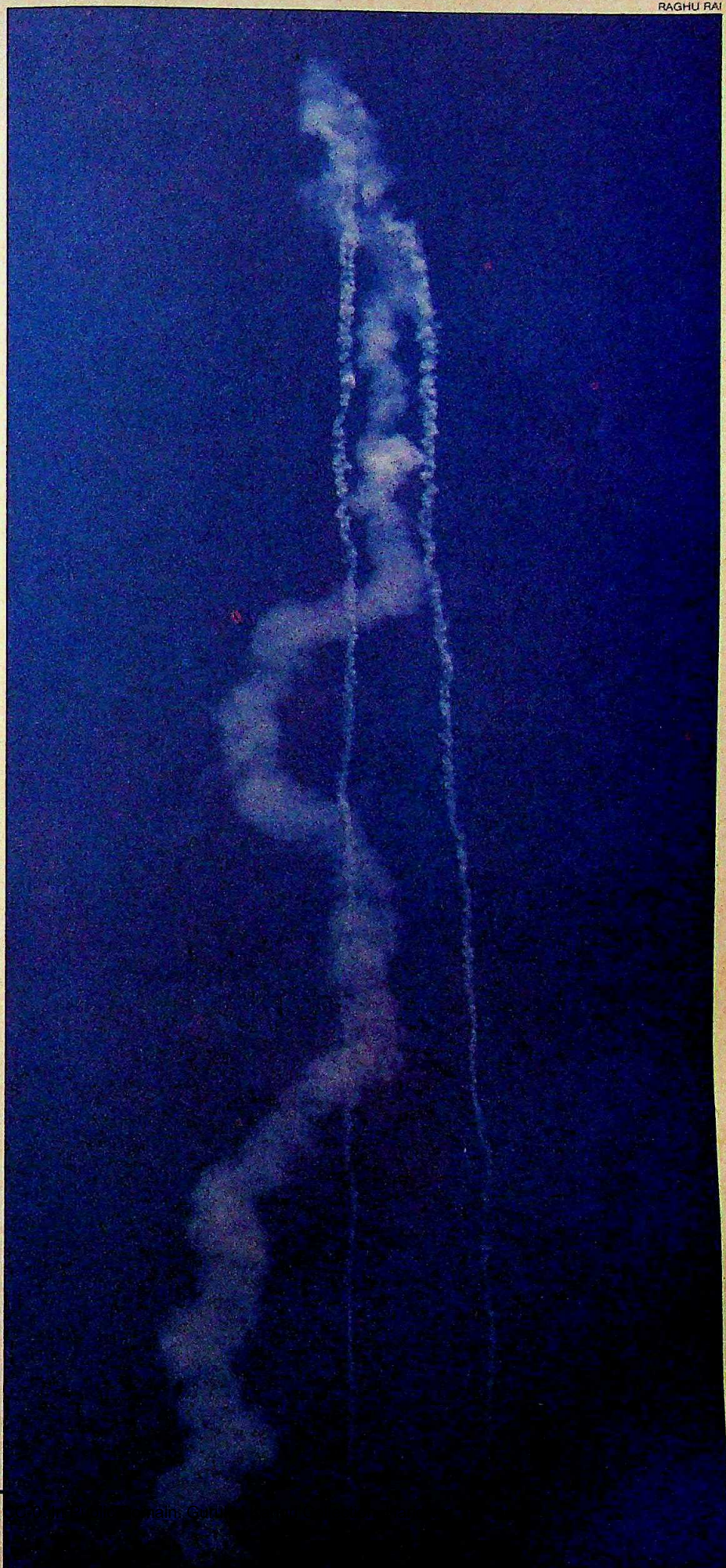
into the sky, leaving behind a fluffy trail of smoke.

From the terrace of the two-storeyed mission control centre, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, ISRO Chairman Professor U.R. Rao, Andhra Pradesh Governor Kumudben Joshi and Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao watched. Another 10,000 were watching the historic event from viewing galleries and housetops in the Sriharikota Range employees colony. As the rocket climbed steadily, they hugged one another and shouted in excitement. At a height of 12 km, the boosters separated and came down in two slender smoke trails.

But in the mission control room, scien-

The ASLV blasts off; and (right) the strap-on booster separates: watery grave

RAGHU RAI



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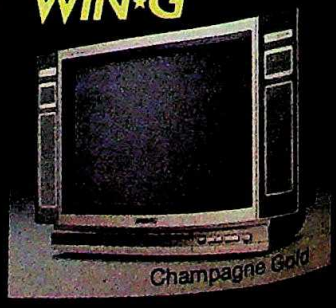

Champagne Gold

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tists and engineers quickly realised that something had gone wrong. The first warning of the impending disaster came 48.5 seconds after lift-off, when the plotters and consoles in the Range Safety Room showed ASLV-1 going off course. Four seconds later, the burnt out strap-on boosters separated, and the rocket went astray.

In the blockhouse bunker, barely 100 metres away from the launch pad, the 44 scientists and engineers stared in disbelief at the console spewing data, gathered from signals sent by the 150 kg satellite SROSS-1 (Stretched Rohini Series Satellite-1), intended to be put in a 400 km circular orbit by ASLV-1. The console showed the rocket taking a sharp nose-dive. All of them, including five women, had spent sleepless nights during the last three months, assembling and linking the 55 sub-systems of the rocket to a specially prepared computer programme, for its final launch. The data showed that the rocket motor to be ignited after 48.5 seconds had not fired, and finally, 163 seconds after blast-off ASLV-1 dropped headlong into the Bay of Bengal. The cruel irony is that the motor which failed was a proven one, being the first stage of the earlier Satellite Launch Vehicle-3 (SLV-3) rockets. Said the Director of Sriharikota Range M.R. Kurup: "It appears that the failure of the motor to burn is the reason for ASLV-1 not going up, but it will be two weeks before we can conclude why the motor failed."

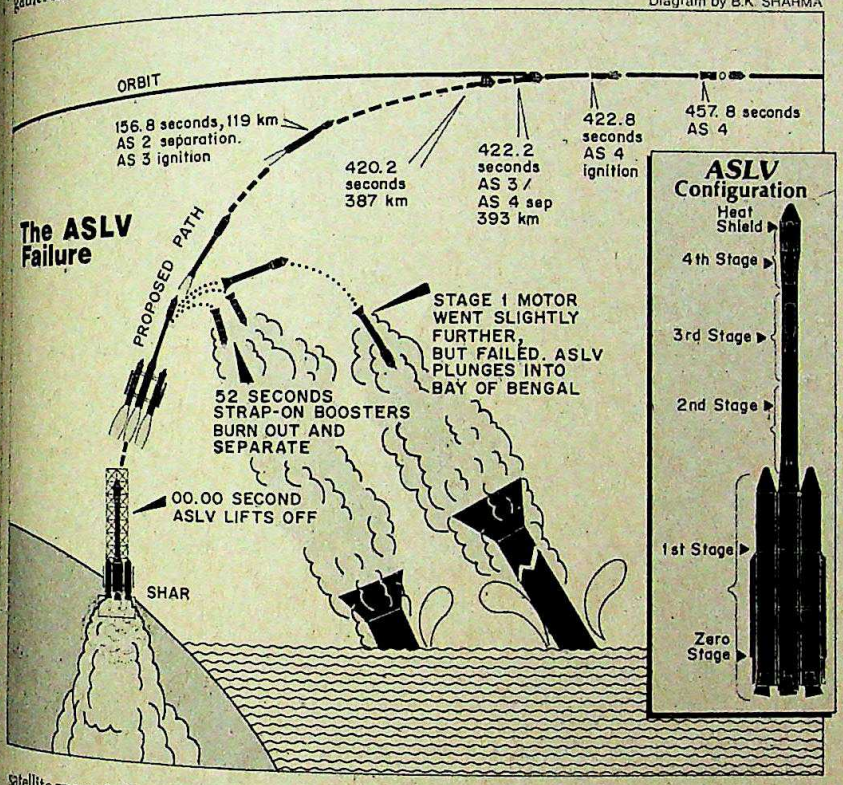
Nearly two hours after blast-off, Rao officially announced that ASLV-1 had failed. "It is a setback. But ISRO will be at the drawing-boards to get the rocketry programme operational as quickly as possible. We are committed to self-reliance in launch vehicle technology," said Rao. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi tried his best to reassure the disappointed scientists. Congratulating them for "the good work ISRO has done", he told them not to lose heart. "It is only a setback in time. It is only when you stumble that you can get up and walk better," he said.

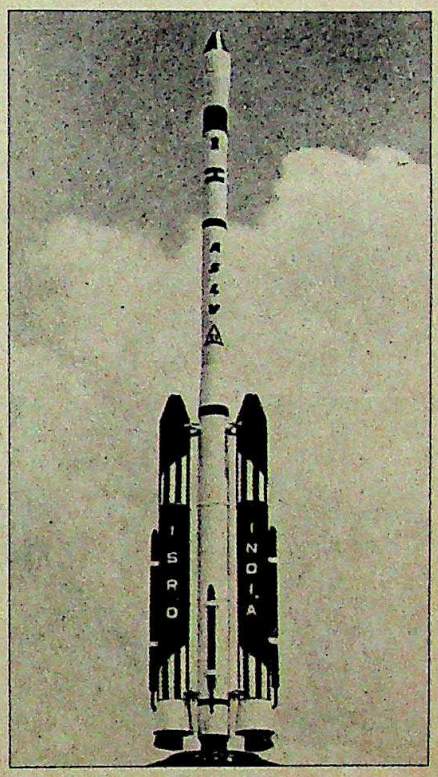
But his words sounded hollow in the face of the failure and its implications. For a space programme begun way back in November 1963, when a 7 kg pencil-shaped rocket was launched from a decrepit church building at Thumba near Trivandrum, last week's performance was a major setback. It was the first launch in four years, and the second of five launchings to fail in the last nine years. The first SLV-3 rocket came hurtling down five minutes and 15 seconds after lift-off, on August 10, 1979. The next three SLV-3 launches were successful and ISRO changed gear to put the first ASLV in flight, skipping the schedule for two more SLV-3 launches. ISRO also decided on a brain transplant, and put in the closed loop guidance system in ASLV-1, instead of using the open loop guidance system, as was originally planned. But the gamble to save time in order to take rocketry to the operational phase, did not pay off.

The major setback caused by the failure of the ASLV-1 mission is in testing the flying qualities of the new class of rockets. Though in its external features ASLV-1 is an upgradation of the earlier SLV-3 design, the 'brain' of the rocket is an improved one. The closed loop guidance system is the new kind of brain to control the rocket's speed, its direction and make corrections in flight, if it deviates from the pre-planned path, and ultimately lob the 150-kg SROSS-1 satellite into the 400-km circular orbit. Mission Director Dev said at the end of the scientists' "quick look review", that "the setback is the lost opportunity in getting first hand information from the satellite about how the ASLV-1 behaved and the efficacy and accuracy of the closed loop guidance system."

Satellite tracking specialists also missed the chance to study how the distance of a satellite in orbit can be measured by firing a laser beam at on-board reflectors. ISRO is to decide by May whether the experiment can be repeated on the ASLV-2 mission already committed to carrying a new kind of earth scanner. The actual cash loss by the

Diagram by B.K. SHARMA





The ASLV-1 with the booster rockets

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failure of the ASLV-1 mission is about Rs 6 crore. Says Kurup: "Failures are part of the game but the setback is only one of time. This can be absorbed before we begin flying the next generation of Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle rockets."

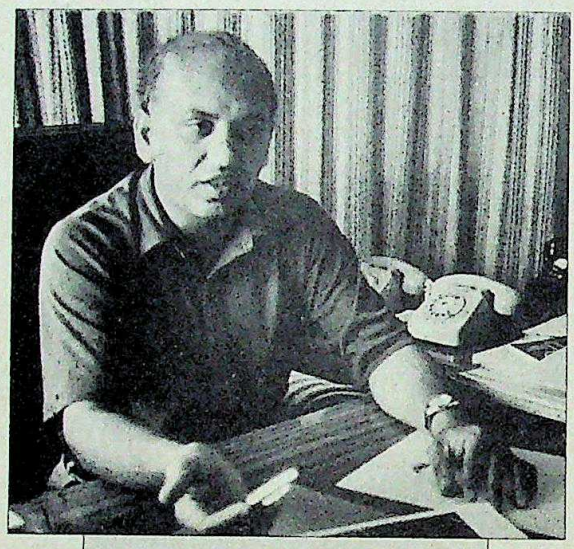
With the stand-by sub-systems, including the main rocket vehicle, built by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd and motors on the shelf, the engineers at Sarabhai Centre can get the second one ready in less than a year, after making changes to be suggested by the ASLV-1 failure analysis committee by April 15.

Space programmes the world over face failures. Rocket technology is tricky and much of the know how is not shared among countries. Only six nations—US, USSR, France, China, Japan and India—have developed launching facilities. All the programmes have had their share of failures. Strangely, China, a latecomer to the field, has the most enviable record of 18 launch successes and only three failures.

In that context, ASLV-1 cannot really compare with rockets like China's Long March, the European Space Agency's Ariane, US's Delta and USSR's Proton. They all stand more than 33 metres tall, weigh more than 220 tonnes at lift-off, and can send a satellite more than 1,500 kg into orbit around the earth. Even the next generation of Indian rockets—the Polar Satellite Launch Vechicle—will, for its 44 metres height and 260 tonnes weight, be able to put only a 1,000 kg satellite into orbit. Clearly, the height-weight factor is a crucial one, and if heavier loads are to be ferried into space, ISRO will have to work on alternative designs, admit engineers of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Trivandrum, where the designs are drawn. It involves much more than the money now spent on the space programme. The ASLV project is likely to cost Rs 23 crore and the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle is to cost more than Rs 350 crore.

For India, the stakes in the space programme are huge. In addition to acquiring international prestige, the development of rocketry can perhaps bring the country a thick wad of much needed foreign exchange through commercial launchings by the turn of the century. Extra launches can also spread the heavy cost of developing each rocket. But for the present, the concern is with mastering the hi-tech in avionics for guiding and controlling spacecraft, and collaborating with Indian industry to supply space grade equipment. Admits S.C. Gupta, director of the Sarabhai Centre: "All this could not be put to test by the first ASLV, but we hope to be back with the second flight in a year to try out the new technologies."

An equally important reason for building rockets is to launch India's own satellites for telecommunications, weather forecasting, remote sensing and radio and TV networking. The Satellite Instructional Television Experiment covering village clusters in six states, with programmes for farmers and schoolgoers in 1974-75, using channel-time bought on the France-German Symphonie satellite, showed the exploits of space technology to Indian planners for the first time. Meanwhile, the ISRO Satellite Centre made the Aryabhata and later, Bhaskar I and II satellites carry cameras to take pictures of the country to map its surface and sub-surface resources. Eventually ISRO was able to convince the Government to contract Ford Aerospace to build the multi-purpose Indian National Satellite System (INSAT-1 A). Though much of the ground work had not been done by the time INSAT-1A was orbiting the earth, the failure of the satellite and the orbiting of INSAT-1B gave user agencies enough time to build the earth stations and other facilities, to use the satellite efficiently. Today, the satellite's use for such practical applications goes on unnoticed.



"It is a setback. But we will get the programme operational as soon as possible."

U.R. RAO
chairman, ISRO

The use of satellite photographs for planning and improving agriculture, developing wastelands, tapping groundwater sources and mapping forest and mineral wealth has not grown, though pictures taken by the American Landsat series of satellites and the French SPOT satellite are available with the ISRO's National Remote Sensing Agency. Says Rao: "This is a vital area where, if we have our own satellite, it is possible to map whatever resources we want to know about, and do not have to depend on others for the latest photographs." The Indian Remote Sensing satellite (IRS), to be launched by a Russian rocket in September-October this year, has comparable capabilities.

ISRO has an elaborate IRS utilisation programme to interpret the wealth of data beamed back by the satellite, for better planning in agriculture and mining of metals. But Rao says all states have not set up remote sensing data utilisation centres, as suggested more than four years ago. Laments Rao: "The realisation about satellite applications bringing a revolution in our way of life simply does not exist." But he is hopeful that the IRS utilisation programme will take the benefits of space technology down to the individual farmer.

The fall-out of the space programme is not as impressive as in the US, where space research led to the micro-chip and fibre optics revolutions. But one encouraging example of import substitution and indigenisation of technology is the making of a propellant fuel with unsymmetrical dimethyl hydrazine, by the state owned Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Limited—for the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle programme—using ISRO's own process of production. The chemical used to make the fuel was found to be useful in agriculture. But for more striking spin-offs, Indian space technology itself has to evolve. After last week's failure, that process is certain to be delayed even further.

—AMARNATH K. MENON in Sriharikota

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BAJAJ BID

THE Bajaj Auto bid for Ashok Leyland may yet come off, though competition could materialise in the shape of non-resident groups like the Hindujas. The Bajaj offer (which is subject to Government approval) was initially made through a bank for acquiring Ashok Leyland's 40 per cent overseas shareholding (held by a British government-owned company). The disinvestment decision is yet to be made in London, but is seen as inevitable and could come through in the next couple of years. Meanwhile, individual members of the Leyland management are believed to have contacted groups like the Hindujas in an effort to sponsor rival bids. But if Bajaj does succeed in its first-ever acquisition bid, Rahul Bajaj will be represented from the top to the bottom end of the automotive market.

AMBITIOUS AIMS

HINDUSTAN Brown Boveri (HBB) has ambitious diversification plans on its drawing-boards. The Rs 100-crore-turnover engineering outfit is readying to leap into computer peripherals, energy management systems, facsimiles and even teleprinters. A sortie into railway communications, track control and signalling equipment has fructified into a collaboration with Switzerland's Integra. While these items are to be produced at Halol near Baroda, HBB has plans to turn out switchgears at Rae Bareilly, and a joint venture with the Gujarat Industrial Investment Corporation is expected to result in the production of industrial steam turbines. The total investment of around Rs 20 crore in these projects will push up HBB sales to Rs 150 crore in three years' time.

NEW RANGE

THE beleaguered Gramophone Company of India which had to be bailed out by R.P.Goenka some time ago, is planning to go in for a whole host of products to enable it to come out of the red. Capacity utilisation in its main line of business—records—has dropped to a mere 16 per cent and piracy has hit pre-recorded cassette sales hard. Its experiments with cassette decks and moulded furniture have proved none too fruitful either. The company is now planning to go in for gas leak detectors and kitchen equipment like microwave ovens. It is also looking for a Japanese tie-up to make digital audio tapes and compact discs using laser technology. The moulded furniture venture is being revived with the East European market as the segment. Other ventures involving technology-oriented fields are also on the drawing-boards.

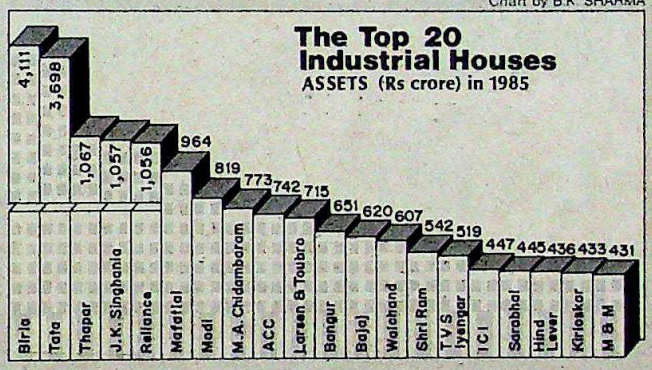
SOAPY LURE

UNDAUNTED by the failure of half a dozen soaps in recent times, several companies are rushing into the consumer goods market with their offerings. J.B. Advani and Company, which has introduced the internationally-known English Leather line of consumer products, is all set to launch its soap, after-shave and cologne in the Indian market. The hair-care and skin-care products will hit the shelves in the next month. For good measure, Boots has set up a consumer products division and Martin Burn plans to go in for chocolates, candy and toiletries. Meanwhile, Colfax Laboratories, which produces Old Spice items in India, is planning to refurbish its packaging.

BLOOMING BIRLAS

THE large industrial houses have been doing well for themselves, recording handsome growth rates in assets, turnover and profits. The latest count done by the Department of Company Affairs shows that the Birlas are now well ahead of the Tatas in terms of both assets and turnover—but that the Tatas have performed decidedly better on

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



profitability. In fact, Tata profits more than doubled in 1985, moving up from Rs 113.35 crore to Rs 251.83 crore, while Birla profits increased by less than 30 per cent, from Rs 120.96 crore to Rs 154 crore. The other groups remain far behind in the race. The Mafatlal, Modi and Singhania groups have barely managed to cross the Rs 1,000 mark in group turnover. Similarly, three groups (Reliance, Thapar and Singhania) have scraped through into the four-figure range in assets.

EXPANSION SPREE

NIRMA, the washing powder company that has jingled its way to the top of the charts—with sales last year of over Rs 180 crore—is now headed for greener pastures. It plans to introduce a toilet soap (also with the Nirma brand name), which will be produced at a new plant coming up in Mehsana district in Gujarat. In another project, Nirma plans to manufacture 10,000 tonnes of alpha olefin sulphonate (a raw material for soaps and detergents). The factory for this too will be located in Mehsana. Besides Nirma, two other companies—Godrej and Dharmsi Morarji Chemical Company—have also been licensed to make this raw material, but Nirma hopes to put its product on the market first. Other projects in the pipeline for the future include a toothpaste, and the production, for captive consumption, of sulphuric acid and soda ash. Nirma might also make a pitch for linear alkyl benzene.

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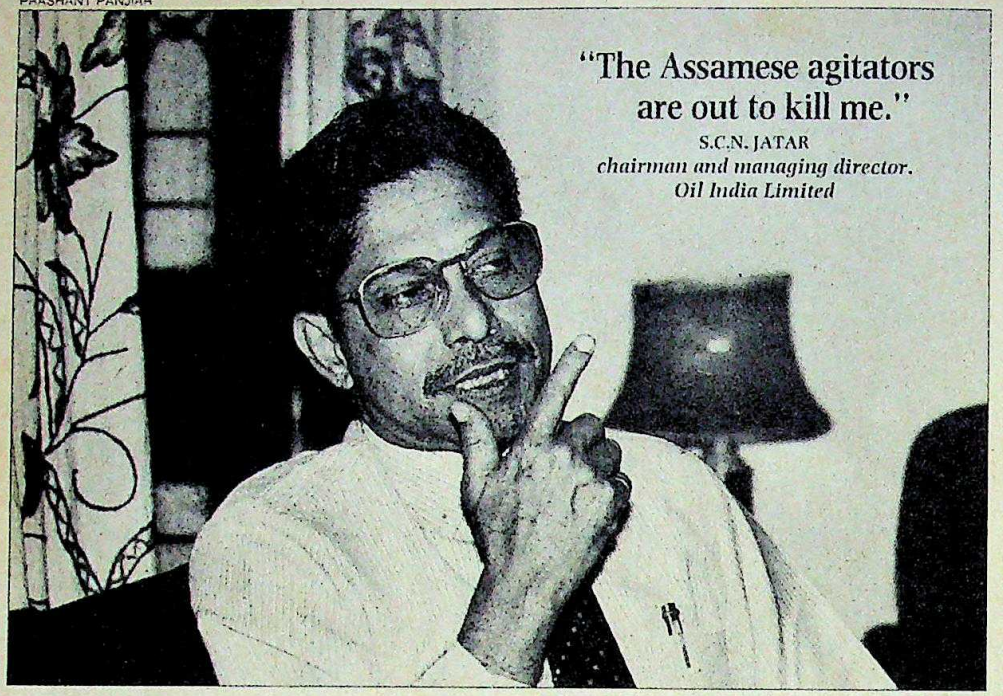
PRASHANT PANJIAR



"The Assamese agitators are out to kill me."
S.C.N. JATAR
chairman and managing director, Oil India Limited

OIL INDIA

Absentee Chairman

THE writing is quite literally on the wall in Duliajan, the headquarters of Oil India Limited (OIL) near Dibrugarh in Assam. The graffiti all over the small town makes the same demand: remove S.C.N. Jatar, chairman and managing director of OIL. The anti-Jatar movement, spearheaded by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), has been gaining momentum over the last four months. And it has now reached its crescendo with the stalemated aliens issue adding fuel to the OIL fire.

As far back as September 1985, AASU had submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi listing various charges of corruption and favouritism against the OIL chief but it went unacknowledged. The agitation and the repeated reminders too were ignored. It was only after AASU called a five-day oil blockade last month that the Centre sat up and took notice. Making amends, it hastily started talks with AASU and the ruling Asom Gana Parishad's (AGP) representatives in Guwahati and assured them that the charges against Jatar would be looked into. Momentarily pacified, AASU called off its oil blockade but a bandh was organised in Duliajan on March 3 and yet another on March 23.

However, the fact that the Government had so far chosen to ignore an agitation against the head of a public sector enterprise as important as OIL is shocking: it has an annual turnover of over Rs 400 crore and in 1985-86, its gross profit stood at Rs 118.34 crore and net profit at Rs 68.23 crore. As a result of the Government's indifference, the agitation has grown to such an extent—it has already caused a loss of Rs 12 crore—that it has become impossible for Jatar to visit Duliajan. The OIL chief has not visited his headquarters since October last year and AASU has threatened to call a total bandh if he ever does. So the chief tries to do the impossible by trying to run the show from New Delhi. Apart from demoralising the employees because the organisation in Duliajan has turned virtually headless, it means that officials have to keep flying to New Delhi to arrive at decisions that should actually have been taken at the site.

Employee morale is at its lowest in Duliajan with mounting hysteria against "outsiders". Three non-Assamese officials were assaulted this month; in October last year, 2,000 youths gheraoed Mohammad Salim, chief of OIL's seismic camp near Duliajan, and demanded jobs at the site; in January this year, the house of R.K. Saxena, a company executive, was stormed; candidates for jobs from other states were waylaid and beaten up, forcing the management to hold interviews elsewhere.

Jatar says that the atmosphere in the once tension-free complex has been vitiated. So much so, that when a non-Assamese officer is assaulted, it is only his non-Assamese colleagues who help him. But Nakul Barooah, a former OIL executive who resigned his job to join the AGP and lead the agitation against Jatar, makes light of the violence: "The boys get worked up sometimes. We are trying to ensure that such assaults do not take place."

The entire agitation hinges on the aliens issue. The primary charge against Jatar is that being an outsider, he is anti-Assamese and ensures that only non-Assamese get jobs. Says Prabin Dihingia, general secretary of AASU's Duliajan unit: "The Assamese may not qualify for senior jobs but they can at least be recruited at lower levels. But most of the jobs go to outsiders." Jatar, however, claims that the recruitment of Assamese has in fact risen from 68 per cent to 82 per cent of the total since he took over. As proof, he points out that two of the additional directors and four of the seven general managers are Assamese—the first time in OIL's 27-year history that they have risen to such senior positions.

But both the AASU and AGP refuse to buy that. They have never taken kindly to Jatar right from the time when he was pulled out of the army and deputed to OIL by Indira Gandhi in February 1981, soon after the famous oil blockade during the anti-alien stir. His brief was to ensure that the agitation did not disrupt oil flow. In February 1983, when AASU called a 21-day non-cooperation programme to protest against the holding of the assembly elections, Jatar deployed military engineers to keep the oil flowing. The 180 Assamese company executives had handed in identical resignation letters, complaining that Jatar was anti-Assamese. In fact, later even Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta had publicly remarked that a local person should replace Jatar as only an Assamese could safeguard the state's interests. To add

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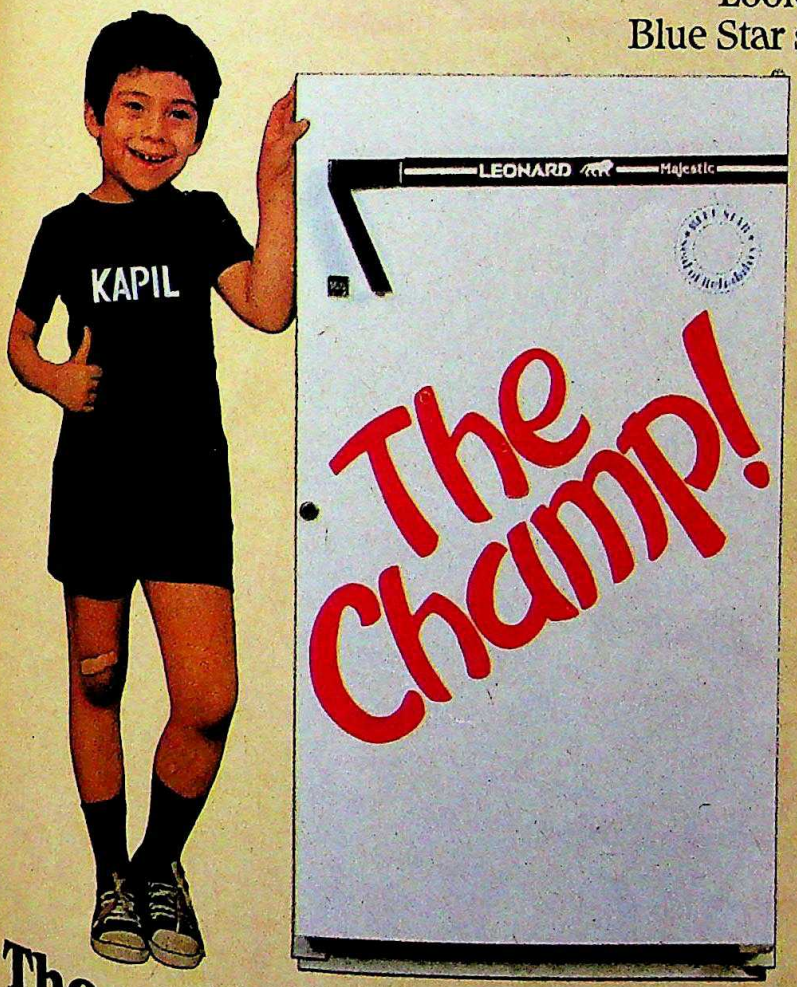

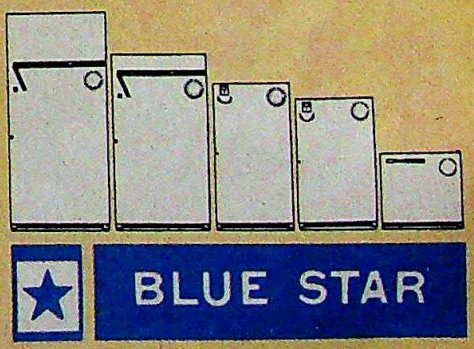

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RAMESH MENON

Anti-Jatar graffiti in Duliajan: writing on the wall

insult to AASU's injury, Jatar, who was due to retire last year, was given a three-year extension. Says Dinesh Deka, president of AASU's Duliajan unit: "Giving him an extension without even looking into our charges is plain arrogance."

AASU has made a long list of charges against Jatar, many unsubstantiated and some factually incorrect. Barooah says the purpose of the memorandum was merely to draw the Government's attention to happenings in OIL: "We do not have access to documents and files. If an inquiry is held, it will easily spot the irregularities. We thought the memorandum would serve the purpose but instead he gave Jatar an extension."

Jatar suspects that Barooah has a personal axe to grind because he removed him from the tender committee which approves contracts. He says he found Barooah's brother sending in quotations in response to the company's enquiries. In a spirited 77-page reply to the charges against him, Jatar says that the agitation is motivated by sectarian interests. Some of the charges accompanied by Jatar's replies:

► AASU says that in April 1983, 244 unskilled workmen in the age group 40 to 50 years were recruited although young and able local candidates were available. The defence is that the workmen had been engaged as casual contract labour for many years in OIL and were regularised because the Government wanted to abolish contract labour.

► Jatar did not disclose for well over a year that his son, Ravi, had taken a job in Ingersoll Rand. Under the rules, he was required to do so since OIL has business dealings with that company. The allegation also runs that Jatar granted huge contracts to Ingersoll Rand so that his son could collect fat commissions. But Jatar says he informed OIL about his son's job on November 25, 1985, five days after Ravi joined that company. R.P. Bhairali, director, operations, says that the charge about contracts was baseless as OIL had had dealings with Ingersoll Rand long before Jatar came.

► The company awarded a contract to Adroit, a Bombay-based ad agency, to make an audio-visual. Jatar's daughter, Nita, happened to be an Adroit executive. Jatar says Adroit was found to be the best agency among the contenders.

► Jatar's nephew, Major S.S. Thakar, was appointed as a superintending engineer in OIL, in preference to an Assamese candidate. Jatar says the appointment was okayed by the board of directors.

► In November 1984, many senior officials including Bhairali and Hazarika, went to Pune ostensibly on an official trip but actually to attend the wedding of Jatar's daughter. Says Bhairali: "What's wrong? All over the world, organisations make such adjustments."

► The company has hired two helicopters to inspect the pipeline from Duliajan to Barauni in Bihar. But Jatar uses them to fly from Dibrugarh to Duliajan, 75 km away, which is a waste of money. Jatar says he uses the helicopter as there is danger to his life.

► In May 1984, OIL decided to buy eight bottomhole heaters from Raychem for Rs 1.03 crore. Since the idea was to find out if these could reduce wax in the oil wells, three or four heaters would have sufficed. Eventually, only one of the heaters worked, so the user department advised the financial director not to release the payment. But OIL's Calcutta office not only paid the supplier but also released the security deposit against the performance guarantee. Jatar says eight heaters were bought because they wanted to test them under varied conditions.

As for the number of irregularities in recruitment and purchase pointed out by AASU, Jatar says that the decisions were not taken by him but by various officials and, in any case, were okayed by the board of directors. Jatar is also charged with destroying some wells by overdrawing on them. While an OIL committee conceded that there had been overdrawing, it did not think the damage was irreversible. The Institute of Reservoir Studies, Ahmedabad, has now been asked to probe.

Jatar ascribes all these accusations to the AASU's bias against outsiders and wants a judicial inquiry into them as also into charges against AASU and AGP leaders, who he says are making money by influencing contracts. In his living room in Delhi, Jatar displays a trophy few would be proud of: a bow and two arrows recovered from some sharpshooters who attacked him four years ago in Duliajan. "They are out to kill me," says Jatar, remembering how agitators lynched to death R. Mitra, technical manager of OIL in January 1980. The Government does not seem to be in a hurry to find out the extent of truth in AASU's charges. Meanwhile, Duliajan continues to simmer.

—RAMESH MENON

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DEMPO STEAMSHIP

Sinking Ship

FOR years it has been steadily sinking. Dempo Steamships Ltd, once a blue chip company whose Rs 100-share was quoted at seven times the par value, is today up for grabs. But there are no takers.

The immediate cause was small—a winding-up petition, filed in the Bombay High Court, by the Goa-based Syndicate Marine Enterprises. Dempo had been unable to pay the company a comparatively trivial sum of Rs 1.42 lakh. The court has appointed an official liquidator, who is now engaged in disposing of the company's assets. Like Mogul Line before it, Dempo is destined to fade into oblivion.

The Dempo saga is a reflection on the parlous state of the shipping industry today. No less than five companies have gone, hat-in-hand, to the newly-formed government-owned Shipping Credit and Investment Company (SCIC), which is busy working out rescue packages. The writing on the wall is clear—unless urgent measures are taken in the next couple of months, many more will go the Dempo way.

"We had just no alternative," says Dempo Vice-Chairman Surendra V. Dempo. "Our sister concerns have pumped in more than Rs 5 crore to keep us afloat for so long. But after five years of continuous losses, and more than Rs 40 crore in loans, all of which the company is in no position to repay, we do not see any future at all."

At present, three of the company's four ships are lying off the coast of Gujarat. They are long overdue for repairs which cannot be carried out because of the empty coffers. The fourth ship is in Italy. And, says Dempo: "It will take Rs 36 lakh just to get it back here."

What has really crippled the industry is the sharp decline in freight rates. Bulk carriers were earning $15,000 (Rs 198,600) a day, in the '70s. Now the rate has dropped to a mere $3,500 (Rs 56,340). With the break-even point being twice that figure, the sea of red ink in which the industry finds itself is understandable.

Dempo had problems peculiar to itself. While other companies kept their heads above water by going in for offshore vessels and into other relatively profitable areas, Dempo stuck to bulk carriers. Besides, it went in for the purchase of two ships from Mitsui of Japan, in 1980. The deal had been approved by the Government, and Dempo was confident that the Shipping Development Fund Committee (SDFC) would advance it the necessary foreign exchange. But it did not do so.

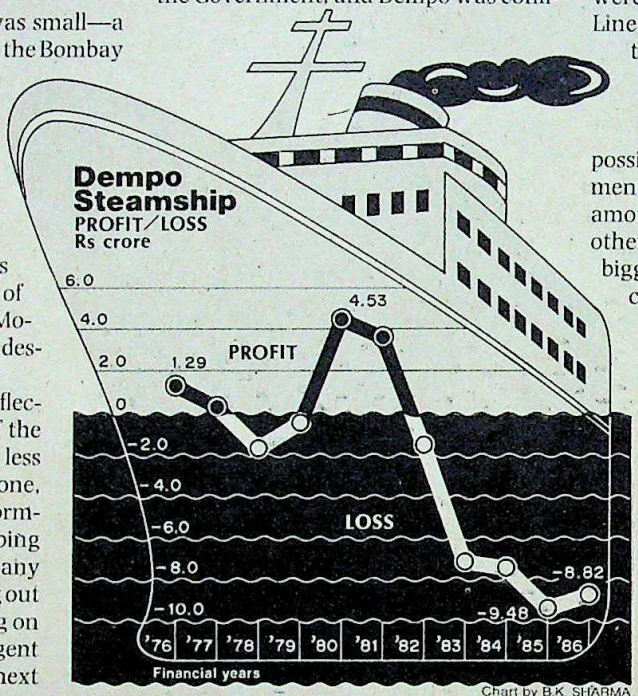

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

MAHINDRA PARIKH

S.V. Dempo: in deep trouble

"The SDFC rate was 4.5 per cent. Instead, we had to go in for a Euroloan at 22 per cent interest. The interest charges alone were Rs 10 crore. The additional burden on us was a whopping Rs 18 crore," explains Dempo. That apart, according to government regulations, Dempo had to simultaneously buy two ships of similar capacity from Hindustan Shipyard. While a payment of some Rs 70 lakh was made, delays in construction and, of course, the financial crunch, meant that the company was in no position to take delivery. The two ships were eventually handed over to Mogul Line, but the money has not been returned. For a company already starved of working capital, this was perhaps the unkindest cut.

Dempo feels that a rescue is still possible, but it is now for the Government to take the initiative. "Given the amount of loans we have from SDFC and other agencies, the Government is the biggest partner in this venture. If we can put in Rs 5 crore, they too can do their bit," he says.

But as far as the shipping industry goes, the Government evidently has a lot on its plate already. All moves to ensure cargo support for Indian bottoms have come to naught in the face of concerted opposition from shippers. The SDFC, which has pumped in more than Rs 600 crore into the industry, has been wound up. Its replacement—the SCIC—was formed only on December 8 last year, and has still not had the time to come to grips with the problem. It has other candidates who need urgent attention. On the dole line are Scindia (with accumulated losses of Rs 64 crore), Ratnakar (Rs 32 crore), India Steamship (Rs 46 crore), Chowgule (Rs 16.7 crore), and Indo-Oceanic (Rs 8 crore).

Among the proposals which have cropped up are a spate of mergers. "It is inevitable that the number of shipping companies will reduce soon," says an industry analyst. But that route too will run into heavy weather. For, the few successful companies are unwilling to saddle themselves with perpetual millstones.

"We are not averse to a merger," says Great Eastern Shipping Chairman Vasant J. Sheth. "There have been informal discussions. But there are lots of ifs and buts. Nothing concrete has resulted so far." Great Eastern is one of the few companies which has fared well. It is also keeping itself covered by going into more

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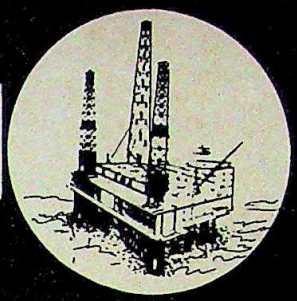

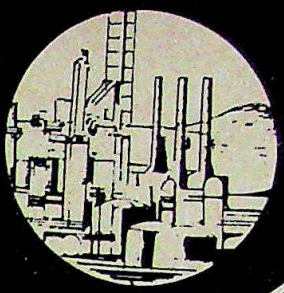

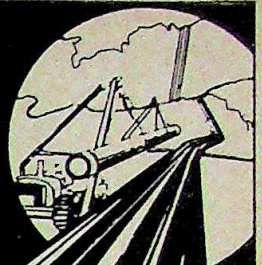

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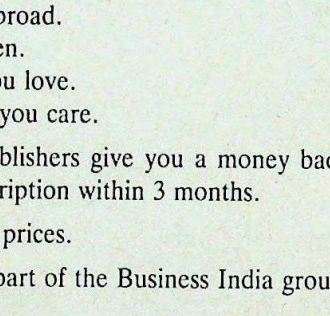

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profitable areas such as real estate and hotels.

The other possibility is that the losing ventures will be absorbed by the state-owned Shipping Corporation of India (SCI). A precedent has already been set by Mogul Line, and SCI has anyway been asked by the official liquidator and the SFFC, to take care of the manning and maintenance of the four Dempo ships. "We have not yet been asked to take over the company," says SCI Chairman L.M.S. Rajwar. "Nor has there been any such suggestion in the case of the others." But Rajwar equally feels, that if the recession carries on, there will be very few survivors left: "Indian shipping might soon mean SCI only."

The demise of Dempo Steamship is yet another pointer to that prediction coming true. "When we went to meet the finance minister some time back, to tell him about the industry's problems, he told us that we should have regular discussions," says Dempo. "We also told him at that time that it remains to be seen how many will survive till the next round. Well, there will be at least one person less." For the 22-year-old company, which once ranked among the top 100 industrial giants in the country, the obituary has already been written.

—PARTHASARATHI SWAMI

ORKAY

New Medicine

WHEN a textile tycoon decides to turn medicine man, the corporate world may well be forgiven for raising an enquiring eyebrow. But Orkay Chairman Kapal Mehra seems comfortable enough wearing his new cap. "There are no growth avenues barred," he says. Orkay has moved back into the limelight after its tie-up with Cetus Corporation of California to initially market and finally manufacture an anti-cancer drug, Interleukin-2 (IL-2). The deal has been signed and government clearance is awaited.

Red tape apart, there is still some way to go. Though IL-2 has worked wonders in the laboratory and among terminally ill patients in the US, clinical trials are yet to begin. These trials are scheduled to be held in three Indian hospitals once the Government okay is received. The results are to be coordinated with Cetus' findings elsewhere.

But this so-called miracle drug is not the only string to Orkay's bow. "We are negotiating with four or five US companies for other life-saving drugs presently not available. IL-2 should increase our turnover by Rs 200 crore. If everything works out, the sky is the limit," says Mehra.

The message is clear: a company that has grown rapidly in the field of polyester yarn and cloth, and which saw a sharp drop in profitability last year, is now looking for fresh and hopefully greener pastures. Thus, Orkay is setting up a research laboratory which Mehra says will have 200 doctors. "This is a commercial proposition," he clarifies. "We will have the best equipment and brains. We will be selling man-hours to foreign companies for the research they want us to conduct. It is a brain drain in reverse. A genetic laboratory abroad has already been identified and we propose to buy it and shift it lock, stock and barrel."

JAGANNATH DUBASHI

Mehra: exploring new avenues

How well and how soon these plans will materialise is not known, and government clearances could always prove to be unexpected hurdles. But Mehra is going full tilt down the diversification route, and talks of entering the field of bio-technology as well as buying a local pharmaceutical concern to obtain the marketing skills and the know-how. The company is also making a sortie into the construction field, as also a mini-cement plant.

As against these ambitious new plans, older schemes have made slow progress. The leasing venture planned some time ago is still to get off the ground, and the proposal to amalgamate the 20 or so companies in the group's stable has not yet fructified. The amalgamation move has been under wraps for a long time, mainly because the legal advantages of a merger or a takeover are yet to be worked out.

Also, the diversification plans are going to cost a pretty penny. Adding up the bits and pieces, it will cost more than Rs 200 crore in terms of investment including working capital needs. That's a tidy sum for a company that saw its profits drop last year from Rs 13.5 crore to Rs 6.9 crore, despite a hefty increase in the turnover from Rs 186 crore to Rs 243 crore. But it is possible that all the plans will not work out, and the full investment budget may not therefore be required. Thus, Orkay had some time ago decided to go in for consumer electronics, a scheme which was dropped like a hot potato when it was belatedly discovered that "there was very little scope for growth and turnover". And the same thing could well happen again.

"We have gone into these areas with our eyes open," says Mehra. "We believe they will do well but our company is wedded to growth and if Orkay finds something not contributing to this aim, it will be dropped. For that matter, even I can be dropped."

But Orkay's diversification has become a must after the polyester field has become a sector where profits are thin and competition intense. Orkay's life-saving drugs venture may thus end up saving more than just human lives.

—PARTHASARATHI SWAMI

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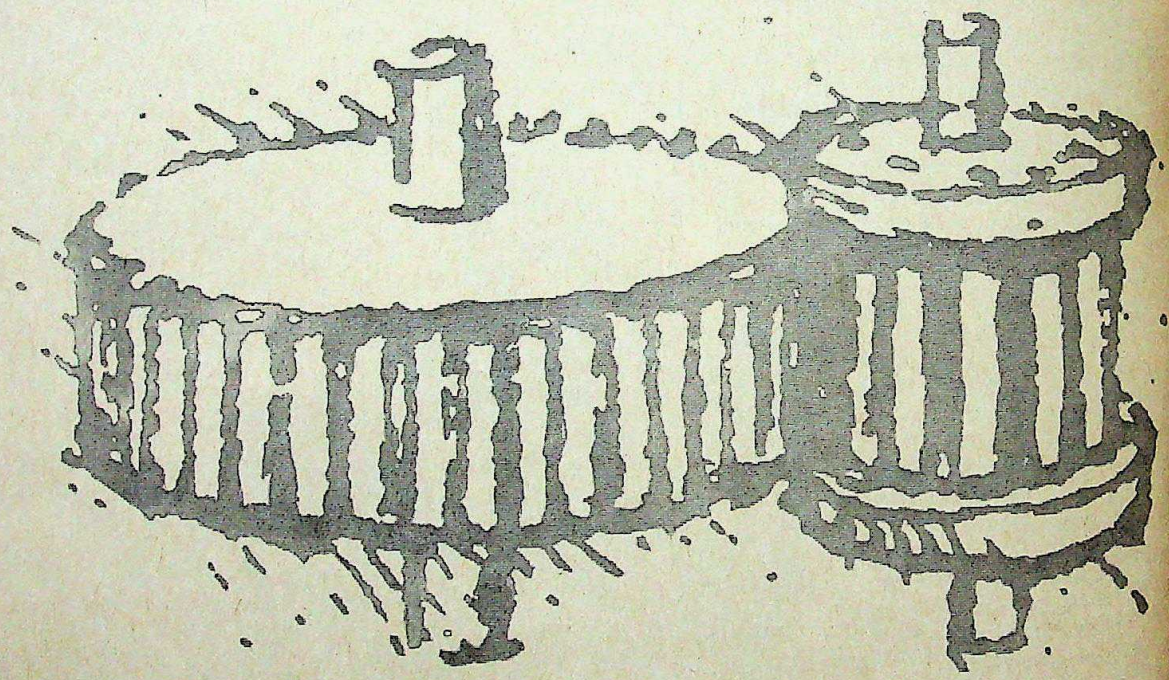

Five hundred years ago Leonardo Da' Vinci designed a work of art ...

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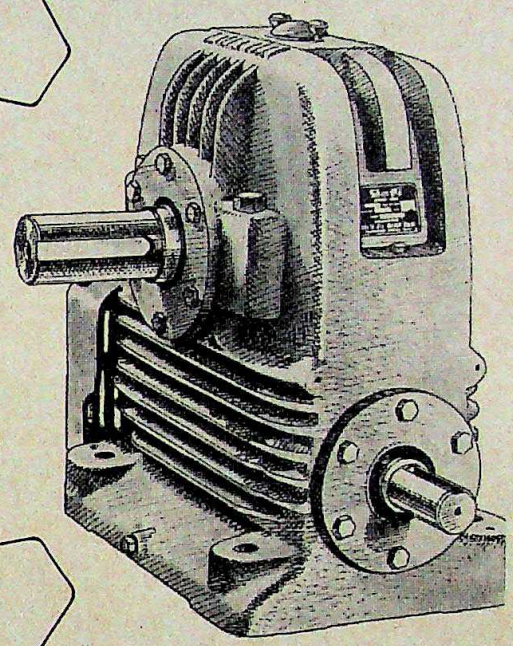

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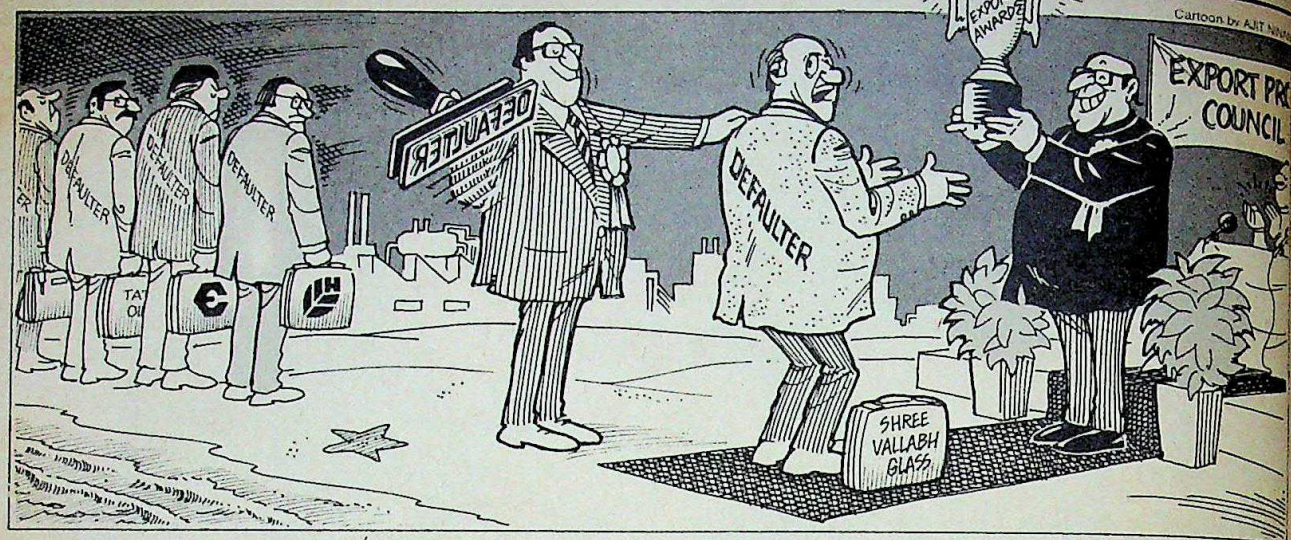

EXPORT OBLIGATIONS

Unrealistic Demands

THE list includes some of the biggest, and possibly brightest, stars in the country's industrial firmament: Voltas, Tata Oil Mills, Hindustan Lever, Escorts, Asian Paints, to name just a few. Last month, however, the Government took some of the shine off their corporate images. Replying to a question in Parliament, Commerce Minister P. Shiv Shankar announced that 79 of them had failed to stick to their export commitments.

That inevitably kicked up a rumpus, with many of the companies on the firing line indignantly protesting that they were innocent of any wrongdoing. Snapped Manmohan Singh, managing director of Frick India, the air-conditioning and refrigeration equipment company: "We have no export obligation of any kind. It is absolute nonsense if anyone says this." An official of the Birla-owned Kesoram Spun Pipes echoed his statement, as did some others. They may have a case, but the majority is plainly guilty.

The Government slaps export obligations on companies that, among other things, seek to expand their production capacities, tie-up with foreign collaborators or obtain licences for new ventures. These generally stipulate that manufacturers have to export a percentage of their production, usually for five years. Companies have no option but to accept the obligations if they want their licences. But a good number of them—like Indian Dyestuff Industries, Shree Vallabh Glass and Lucas Indian Services—have not quite met their obligations, as the latest official revelation confirms.

The official records show that the Government had imposed a 10 per cent export obligation way back in 1977 on Voltas, which was keen on a sortie into water pollution control equipment. However, the company did not make much headway in exporting the equipment, forcing the Government to send it a show cause notice in 1981. Meanwhile, Voltas was asked to export the equipment through the state-owned Projects and Equipment Corporation (PEC). It did this, but claims it didn't receive a reply. Voltas also asked the Government for more time to meet its export obligation. Last August, it wrote to the Industry Ministry that some Rs 75 lakh worth of equipment supplied to a municipal corporation against a World Bank tender was a "deemed export" and so qualified for its obligation.

The matter is still pending with the Government, and a Voltas source argued that the company should not be on the defaulters list: "By virtue of asking us to approach PEC the Government has recognised the problem." Several others too have their explanations, even though they do not dispute the official contention that they are defaulters. Indian Dyestuff Industries, for example, was given a licence over a decade ago to turn out reactive dyes on condition that it exported some of them. "However, demand in the international market was sluggish," explains J.G. Patel, the company's joint managing director.

"We have been unable to fulfil our export obligations for the simple reason that our prices are not internationally competitive," asserts N.S. Murthy, executive director of Lucas Indian Services, a subsidiary of Lucas TVS. The Madras-based ignition coil manufacturer was dumped with a five-year export obligation in exchange for permission to import Rs 15 lakh worth of gauge wires from Japan, but Murthy claims that Taiwanese and South Korean competitors quote 40 per cent less for ignition coils.

There are of course a bevy of other sinners, and some of them have been put in the dock through official oversight. The list of defaulters was compiled by an arm of the Commerce Ministry. But other government departments had exempted some of the companies from their obligations without informing the ministry. Hindustan Lever, for instance, obtained a waiver on its obligation to export some Rs 18 lakh worth of fine chemicals for five years after it approached the Government. Official records show that another department failed to write to the Commerce Ministry about the waiver: the last letter the ministry received on the case from the department was in 1984. Such examples abound. "Our documentation is messy and is not updated," admits a government official.

Adding chaos to the confusion, companies themselves do not seem to have furnished all the required documents to the Commerce Ministry. HMM Ltd, the milkfood company, says that it has fulfilled its commitment to export Rs 50 lakh worth of malted milkfoods for five years, while Bayer India, the drug outfit, maintains that it is not guilty because it stopped producing in 1985-86 the anaesthetic injection on which it had a 20 per cent export obligation.

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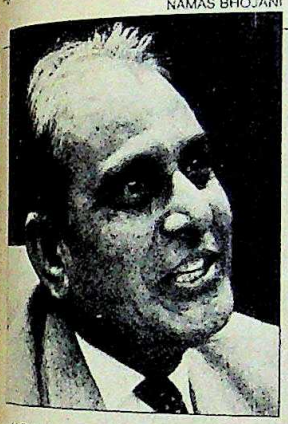
Frick adds that it has no obligation to export centrifugal pumps for which it had a collaboration with an American firm because it went back on a decision to manufacture them and informed the Government of this, and the Asian Paints case is similar. Says a puzzled K. Rajagopalan, director, Asian Paints: "How can we have an export obligation for a product we did not even start making and the licence for which was surrendered to the Government five years ago?" Commerce Ministry officials, however, claim that they have not furnished all the necessary documents to the ministry. So they remain on the list—again, a clear instance of the wing of the Government not knowing what another does.

NAMAS BHOJANI



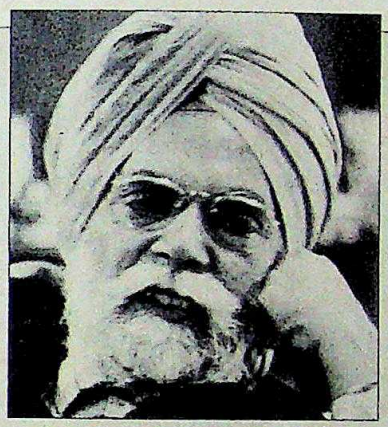
"Government should stipulate that a company export say Rs 5 crore or Rs 10 crore and then leave it."

J.G. PATEL
joint managing director, Indian Dyestuff Industries

But however faulty the Government has, it has served to cast a harsh spotlight on a contentious issue. Last fortnight, the simmering debate over export obligations threatened to heat up, with several businessmen and officials of chambers of commerce arguing that the system was highly unfair, did not work and should therefore be scrapped—a viewpoint that many senior government officials privately share.

Among other things, such contentions centre on high local input costs pushing up product prices downstream and therefore making wares uncompetitive overseas. "Why should the world buy Indian products which are 20 to 30 per cent more expensive?" as an Escorts official puts it. So, the argument goes, slapping an export obligation is unrealistic. In fact, the Government partially conceded the point recently by permitting manufacturers in a number of industries to obtain raw material at international prices. Equally important, as D.H. Pai Panandikar, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry secretary general suggests, is the point that the country's poor infrastructure does not help foster an export culture. Pai Panandikar argues: "You cannot force someone to export. Why have the export obligation condition at all?"

But the rival viewpoint is not without merits: companies simply do not wish to export because selling in the domestic market is far more profitable. Remarks a



"We have no export obligation of any kind at all. It is absolute nonsense if anyone says this."

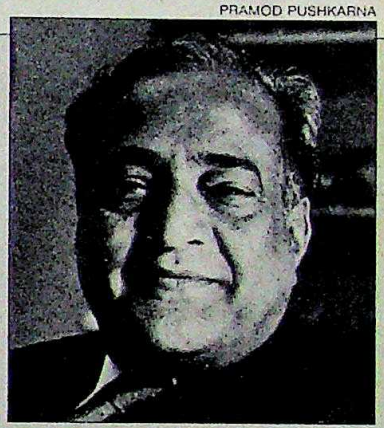
MANMOHAN SINGH
managing director, Frick India

senior bureaucrat: "The reason why businessmen are not looking at the export market is that they're used to looking at the domestic market." The statistics seem to bear this out. A study of the largest engineering companies with combined sales of over Rs 3,000 crore showed that 40 of the larger ones exported less than Rs 30 crore. And Reserve Bank of India reports suggest that for every rupee Indian companies spend abroad, they earn just 79 paise.

Against this backdrop, the export obligations scheme is understandable. And if it isn't working, one reason is that the Government cannot even keep track of the paperwork involved. Another is that it has balked at exercising its sweeping powers against defaulters. Companies have to post bonds and bank guarantees, and the Government can take them to court if they do not fulfil their commitments. The Government can also levy fines, cancel licences, confiscate goods in lieu of the exports and sell them to the State Trading Corporation of India. In turn, this public sector company is supposed to export them. But, as economist S.K. Goyal of the Indian Institute of Public Administration points out: "How many licences have been cancelled for non-fulfilment of export obligations? The export paraphernalia is falling flat on its face."

A senior Commerce Ministry official candidly concurs: "Even if action is initiated against a company, it runs to the

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



"How many licences have been cancelled for non-fulfilment of export obligations? The system is falling flat on its face."

S.K. GOYAL
Indian Institute of Public Administration

administrative ministry which then intervenes and no action is taken. Nor can action be taken: the Government can't cancel the licence of a factory which is in production because jobs will be lost."

More to the point, the Government's approach to export commitments is grossly unrealistic. Apart from expecting companies that do not kick off production to export, it often imposes obligations without assessing whether a company can in fact hawk its wares abroad. A government functionary tells of how marble manufacturers in Rajasthan obtained clearances to import machinery only on condition that they export 25 per cent of their products. "How many foreigners buy marble from India?"

Then, government rules stipulate the

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manufacturers cannot offset their obligations by exporting some other items. This can lead to ridiculous situations. Examples: Indian Dyestuff failed to export the item for which it had made a commitment but more than offset this by exporting other dyes. Says an exasperated Patel: "What is the Rs 1 crore or Rs 5 crore we would have earned on reactive dyes compared with the Rs 25 crore we will earn this year? The Government should stipulate that a company must export say Rs 5 crore or Rs 10 crore and then leave it to the company." Similarly, Shree Vallabh Glass finds itself in the soup despite having bagged several export awards. Waving a bunch of certificates, C.A. Taktawala, director, angrily declares: "What sort of a joke is this? On the one hand the Government praises us for excellence in export performance and on the other puts us on a defaulters list."

Indeed, export obligations can boomerang. Over a decade ago, Triveni Engineering Works set up an export division, spent around Rs 1.25 crore on cultivating foreign markets, and eventually snared a Nigerian order to repair rollers for a sugar mill. There was of course the inevitable export obligation since the rollers came in duty free. The first lot of rollers was repaired and shipped, but the Nigerians stalled payment. Meanwhile, they shipped a second lot. Triveni sat on this since the Nigerians did not cough up cash. But the Government got on the company's back because it had not met its export commitment. The case dragged on for years, the company went in appeal, and when it finally got fed up of the red tape it decided to virtually shut down its export business. "We've withdrawn from the export market because of the harassment," says Triveni deputy general manager K.K. Bahl.

The sunny side of this dim scenario is that the Government has, even if belatedly, woken up to the problems inherent in the export obligations scheme. It is considering a Confederation of Engineering Industry proposal to permit exporters to bring in raw material that are not available here without paying taxes, provided they export three times the amount. Also on the drawing boards could be a "white list" of companies that stick to their export promises. They would be eligible for additional concessions. If nothing else, that marks a new willingness in official circles to consider alternatives to an old programme.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI with PARTHASARATHI SWAMI and bureau reports

TIDCO

Unusual Track

IF you want to buy a good company, come to Tamil Nadu. A number of interested businessmen are turning to a state-owned outfit whose primary business is promoting new companies, spinning them off to the private sector and then starting all over again.

The Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO), like its counterparts in other states, is pushing industrialisation and creating jobs by kicking off new enterprises. But TIDCO also puts up companies for auction—and makes money in the process. After promoting joint ventures at a blistering pace, it is now rapidly pulling out from at least five projects that have got off the ground.

> "We can only invest, and cannot and do not want to take on the task of management."
>
> E.V.K. SULOCHANA SAMPATH
> *chairperson*, TIDCO

Last month TIDCO started talking to private sector buyers on unloading its 26 per cent equity stake in four of its 24 joint ventures. The move itself follows the sale late last year of its 65 per cent shareholding in Tamil Nadu Chemical Products to liquor baron Ramasamy Odayar for Rs 4.69 crore. Since the face value of the shares was Rs 1.03 crore, that meant a cool profit of Rs 3.66 crore. The chemicals company was of course well in the black, its share price was looking up and TIDCO struck while the iron was hot.

The 21-year-old corporation's latest bid to sell companies is meant both to make fat profits and cut its losses. Up for sale is Tamil Nadu Chromates and Chemicals, which makes chemicals for the leather industry. TIDCO has been associated with the company for seven years, but the company had piled up a Rs 2.5 crore loss. But last year, it reaped a profit of Rs 45 lakh, and repaid Rs 35 lakh of the Rs 1.95 crore it owes TIDCO. So the timing is right. Says E.V.K. Sulochana Sampath, the AIADMK leader who has headed TIDCO for the last 18 months: "We are trying to find a buyer who will not only pay a good price for the company's shares but also agree to repay the loans in two years. If we can't get one we will hold on to the shares. After all, the company has started making profits."

TIDCO also plans to hawk its stake in three other units: Gangappa Paper Mills, Southern Hydrocarbon, and Southern Borax. Reason: It wants to infuse fresh management blood into these companies, apart from the lucre involved.

Behind such manoeuvres lies the concept of turning money around quickly and investing it in new ventures, a philosophy chairperson Sampath sums up by insisting: "We can only invest, and cannot and do not want to take on the task of management." Not surprisingly therefore, TIDCO is unloading 20 per cent of its 46 per cent shareholding in Tuticorin Alkali Chemicals to co-promoter Southern Petrochemical Industries Corporation (SPIC), the fertiliser giant.

SHYAM TEKWANI

"The mobility of TIDCO's funds is a good sign. TIDCO should not be an industry-running corporation but a real industrial development corporation. And that is what it is becoming now," says A.C. Muthiah, vice-chairman of SPIC.

Muthiah's admiration is only to be expected, but he is right. TIDCO's profits from peddling companies can plainly be expected to go into its new projects. It is executing 11 of them, including an explosives venture near Vellore in North Arcot district, and 11 more are in the pipeline. Also on the drawing-boards is an ambitious Rs 200-crore thermal power project at Manali, for which it has joined hands with Essar Shipping and applied for Central clearances.

Whether these come through or not, TIDCO has chosen a course of action other state corporations have shunned—and done so profitably.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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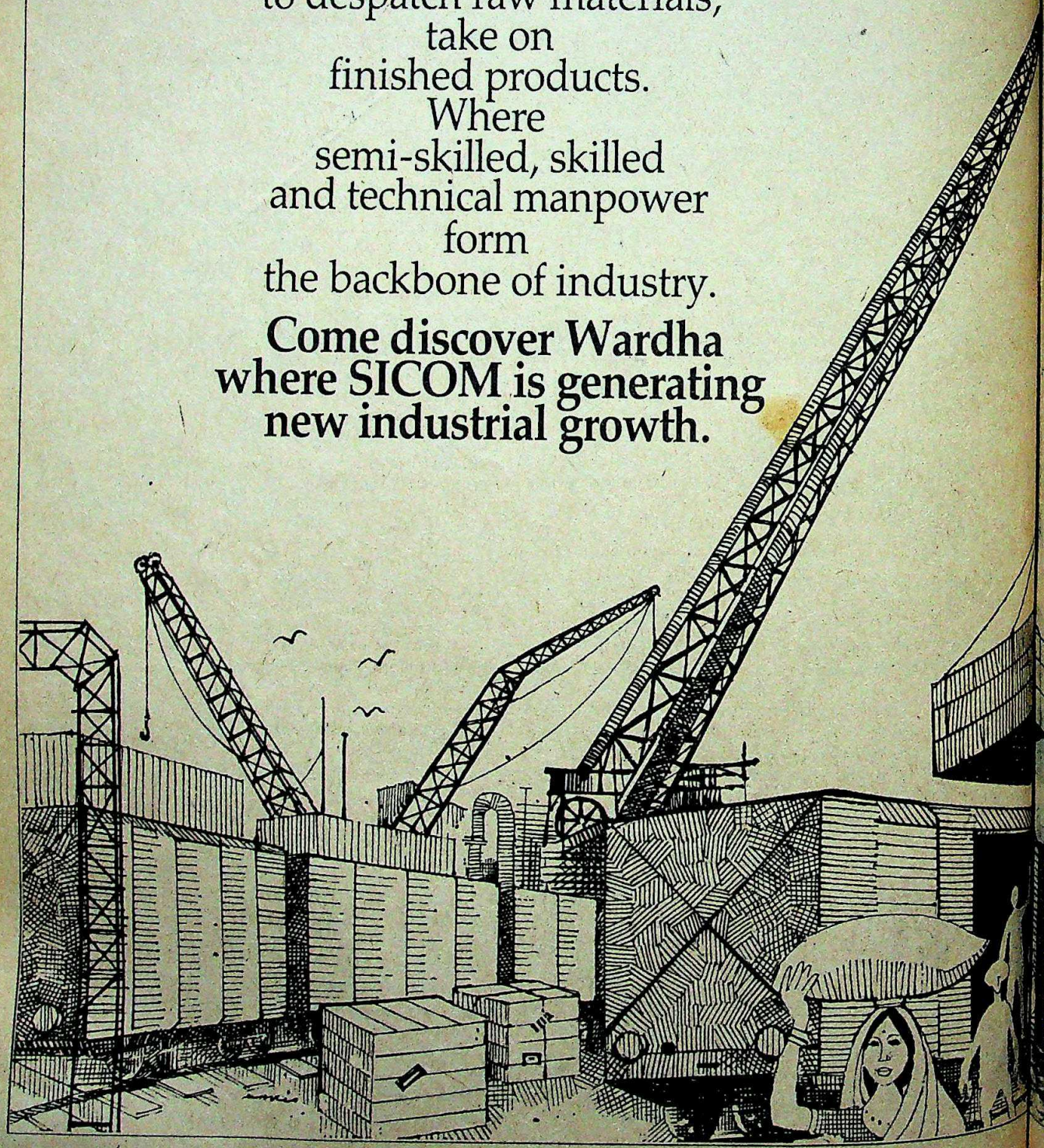

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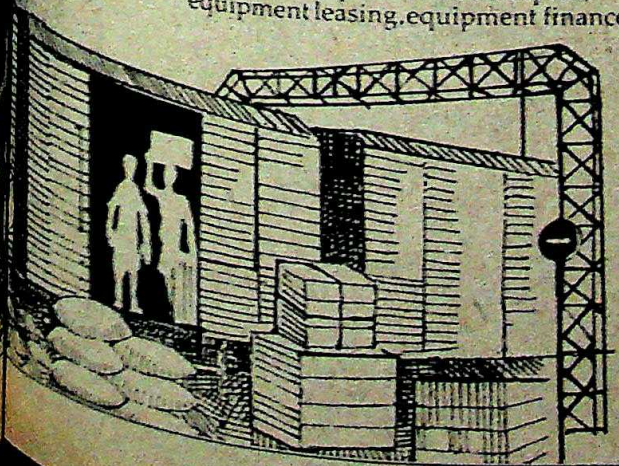

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EXCISE OFFICIALS

Stalling Tactics

AGITATIONS by government employees in West Bengal are not unusual, but this one is different. In a rare display of ire, the excise officials in the state have vociferously demonstrated over the past few months, held press conferences, and swamped state Excise Secretary Kamalakar Misra with telegrams.

Their collective unhappiness flows from the dramatic arrest last December of three excise officials posted at the Asansol distillery of Carew and Company. Willy-nilly, the officials have been dragged into a controversial case in which liquor was allegedly sent out of West Bengal without paying Rs 1.45 crore in excise duties. And now there are unsubstantiated charges of a cover-up in high places.

Police investigations zeroed in on the Vijay Mallya-controlled company, its transporters, liquor agents, warehouse operators and the excise men themselves. Subsequently, the enforcement branch of the state police filed charge-sheets against nine companies and 61 individuals. Top Carew executives have obtained anticipatory bail, but liquor baron Mallya along with two senior Carew officials had to put in an appearance before a special court at Asansol last month. The three excise officials too came up before the special court, charged with having been involved in a criminal conspiracy to defraud the exchequer.

The three-year-old excise evasion case centres on the alleged squirreling out from the distillery of truckloads of liquor on the basis of forged indents. Since excise rates vary in each state, liquor manufacturers have to pay duty to the state where the liquor is consumed. (If the despatches were fictitious, manufacturers would pay duty neither to West Bengal nor to the state where the liquor was supposed to have been sent.) West Bengal's Excise Act prescribes strict procedures for sending liquor out, including a requirement that local excise men can hand out an 'export pass' only if the excise authorities in other states send them a copy of the indent.

As the state Excise Officers' Association tells it, excise officer Biswanath Bhowmick found on being posted to the distillery that both copies of the indents were given to him by the Carew management, instead of just one. When he objected, copies of indents began arriving by post from states such as Haryana, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The snag: all of them carried Asansol postmarks. Bhowmick checked with his counterparts in other states and found that the indents were forgeries. Alerted by Bhowmick's discoveries, the Excise Department put its sleuths on the job and unearthed 56 forged indents in all.

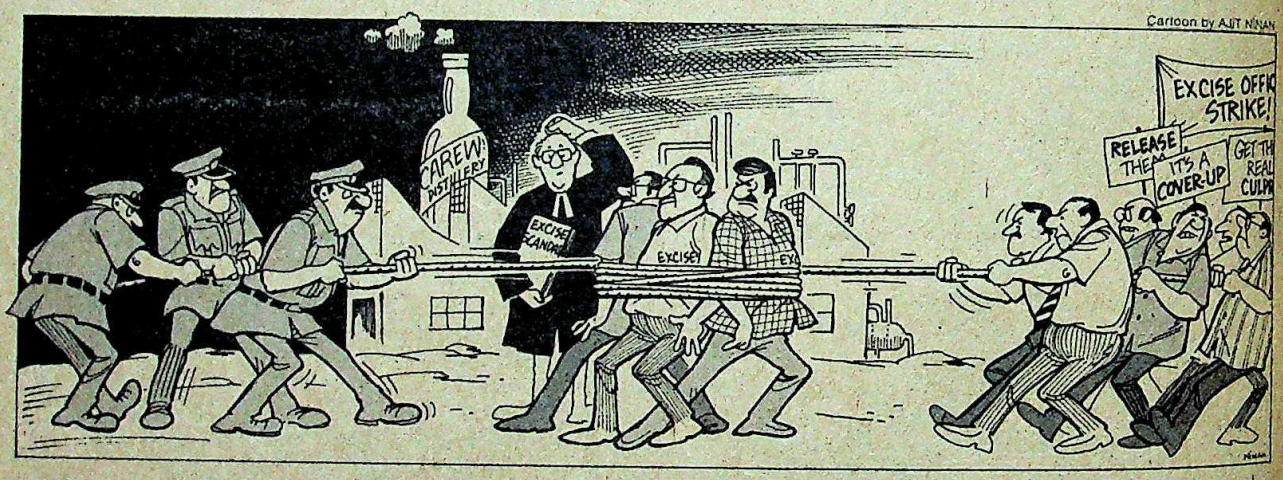
The Carew management, however, counters that it is innocent of any wrongdoing, and that it has been duped by an organised gang of unscrupulous traders, transporters and excise officials. "We have exported goods on valid export passes in every instance. We have acted in a bona fide manner," says T.R. Ghosh, general manager (legal and administration) of Carew.

The conflicting claims symbolise the welter of allegations and counter-allegations that have dogged the case. The Excise Officers' Association insinuated at a press conference last January that the arrest of their colleagues was "a subtle ploy" to get the real culprits off the hook. Pointing out that Bhowmick had filed the FIR against Carew, it argued that his arrest would deprive the prosecution of a key witness.

Joining the fray, *The Coalfield Times*, an Asansol-based weekly, went one better. It accused Special Inspector General of Police S.K. Singh, who heads the enforcement branch, of attempting to quash the case. Since Singh's charge-sheets rest on Bhowmick's FIR, the weekly claimed that Bhowmick's arrest undermined the entire case.

But both the newspaper and the Excise Officers' Association seem to be on a weak wicket in alleging hanky-panky by the head of the enforcement branch. Official files show that Bhowmick's discoveries and the subsequent investigations failed to turn up hard evidence against Carew. Ultimately, a special meeting of the state Cabinet decided to hand over the case to Singh.

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



Singh's sleuths concluded that a massive conspiracy had attempted to defraud the exchequer and that the three arrested excise officials must have been involved. Independent observers claim that at least one of them failed to adhere to legal guidelines in issuing export permits. Instead of waiting to receive indents by post, he went ahead and issued passes. In some cases, reference was made to excise officials in other states. Intriguingly, even then, passes were issued without waiting for their replies.

The truth will be decided by the courts. The state Government, meanwhile, is beginning to suspect that the excise officials' agitation is meant to stall the case. And with one arm of the Government suspecting another, West Bengal's excise case could work itself to a standstill.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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THE MARKETS

See Saw

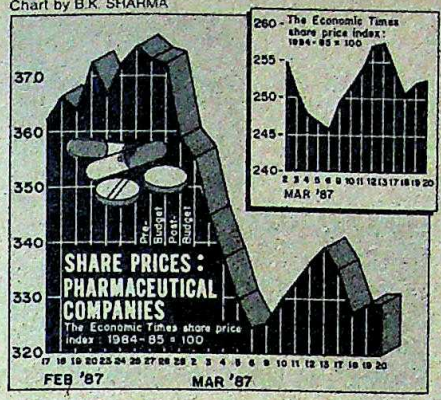
SLUMP, recovery, slump: that has been the history of the stock-markets in the first three weeks after the budget. The initial disappointment with Rajiv Gandhi's budget had resulted in the *Economic Times* share index plunging from a pre-budget high of 264.4 to as low as 245.8, a week later: a precipitous drop of about 7 per cent, in as many days.

Then, following some intervention by the financial institutions and helped by a ban on short-selling in specified shares, the index recovered to a hopeful 255.6 at the end of another week. But this recovery has proved unsustainable, and in the closing week of last fortnight, the market was depressed once again. The share price index, as a result, was back at 252.6.

Many shares have gained over the 2 fortnight, but most of these gains were notched up in the earlier part of this period. The partial recovery has, however, yielded to a slide and unless there is good news on the fiscal front, or reports of good corporate performance, the slide will continue. At the moment, even the corporate news is discouraging: several companies have reported lower profits, reflecting the pressure imposed by stiffer competition in several sectors.

There is still some hope of the minimum tax on companies being withdrawn or amended. And the proposal to deduct tax at source on professional payments may also be changed. Announcements on these will probably help some of the star performers' shares regain their lost glitter. Also, despite ITC, the expectation that the 'raid raj' has ended, may cheer the market.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



But despite all this, there is little doubt that no one expects another share market boom in the foreseeable future. The political turmoil in New Delhi, continued Punjab problems and the message that the Government is not overly concerned about the cheerfulness of the stock-market, have all registered on Dalal Street. Indeed, the most obvious feature of trading last fortnight was the absence of buying support and the lukewarm attitude of investors.

Enthusiasm must also have been dampened by the widespread reports of paper companies floating shares and debentures and cheating investors, and of many such shares not being worth the paper they are printed on. If numerous punters have got their fingers burnt, the resultant lack of enthusiasm for more of the same is only to be expected.

Matters may improve once the new regulatory measures that have been promised by the Government are in place, and the small investor begins to feel that he has some protection. Indeed, this may prove a vital factor in ensuring the success of the several public issues of shares and debentures that are due in the coming months.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1987 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 20.3.87	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	35.50	28.00	30.75	2.75 +
Asian Paints	247.50	207.50	230.00	8.75 +
Associated Cement	241.50	202.50	210.00	4.50 +
Atlas Copco	150.00	112.00	141.00	9.00 +
Avery India	169.00	150.00	153.00	11.50 –
Bajaj Auto	4800.00	3950.00	4425.00	125.00 +
Baroda Rayon	250.00	205.00	227.50	15.00 +
Bata India	160.00	128.50	152.50	0.50 +
Bayer	780.00	600.00	660.00	60.00 +
Bharat Forge	74.00	63.00	72.00	9.00 +
Bihar Jute	50.75	47.00	49.25	0.50 +
Blow Plast	126.00	92.50	110.00	7.50 +
Bombay Dyeing	75.00	40.50	68.50	nil
Brooke Bond	99.00	77.00	95.50	1.00 –
Cast Tyres	600.00	480.00	595.00	10.00 +
Century Spinning	810.00	670.00	710.00	2.50 –
Chloride India	148.00	89.00	94.50	0.50 –
Colgate	377.50	327.50	365.00	16.25 +
CCM	39.00	29.75	29.75	1.50 –
Dunlop	77.75	71.25	74.00	0.50 +
Escorts	107.50	87.50	95.00	2.50 +
E.I. Hotels	56.00	44.50	45.75	0.25 –
Esmayef	84.00	49.00	49.00	27.00 –
Finolex Cables	240.00	171.25	221.25	8.75 +
Food Specialities	182.50	114.00	165.00	16.25 +
Garware Polyester	188.50	164.00	170.50	4.00 +
G.E. Shipping	97.00	69.50	82.00	3.00 +
Gujarat St. Fertilisers	22.50	16.75	17.50	nil
Grasim Ind.	183.50	120.00	145.00	21.00 +
Hind. Cocoa	95.00	80.00	89.00	7.00 +
Hindustan Lever	262.50	223.75	236.25	3.75 +
Hindustan Motors	188.00	165.00	184.00	14.00 +
Hindi. Dorr	35.35	27.20	28.20	1.40 –
Hindi. Aluminium	390.00	295.00	355.00	18.75 +
	126.00	71.00	120.00	3.00 +

	1987 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 20.3.87	Change in Fortnight
IEL	61.50	53.00	54.00	0.50 –
Indian Organic	78.00	62.50	65.00	0.50 –
Indian Rayon	76.50	61.00	63.50	0.50 –
Indrol	510.00	260.75	282.50	17.50
Ingersoll-Rand	330.00	272.50	327.50	35.00 +
ITC	78.00	58.50	60.50	4.75 –
J.K. Synthetics	93.50	67.00	72.50	0.50 +
Kinetic Engineering	312.50	230.00	252.50	7.50 +
Kirloskar Cummins	810.00	670.00	800.00	20.00 +
Larsen & Toubro	100.00	82.00	84.00	3.00 –
Lipton	77.00	60.00	74.50	0.50 –
Lohia Machines	32.00	20.00	23.00	3.00 –
Madura Coats	71.00	66.00	70.00	2.50 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	46.00	38.00	42.00	2.00 +
Motor Industries	390.00	347.50	350.00	10.00 –
MRF	82.00	63.00	70.00	2.00 –
Mukand Iron	80.50	63.50	76.00	1.00 +
National Organic	577.50	490.00	625.00	27.50 +
Nirlon	26.00	18.00	19.00	3.00 –
Orkay Silk Mills	115.00	76.00	83.00	1.00 +
Otis Elevator	197.50	155.00	191.25	3.75 +
Peico Electronics	57.25	44.50	45.50	1.00 –
Ponds	375.00	325.00	362.50	12.50 +
Premier Auto	29.50	21.00	25.00	1.00 +
Ranbaxy	135.00	111.00	128.50	2.25 +
Raymond	79.00	68.00	71.00	nil
Reckitt & Colman	200.00	174.00	184.00	1.00 +
Reliance Industries	277.00	198.00	214.00	11.00 +
Shriram Fibres	36.00	27.75	28.50	0.50 +
Sandoz	140.00	87.50	100.00	2.50 +
SPIC	53.50	36.50	38.75	2.25 +
Siemens India	139.00	117.00	137.00	12.00 +
Tata Steel	1207.50	992.50	1032.50	12.50 –
Telco	665.00	550.00	590.00	5.00 –
Vulcan Laval	57.50	45.00	50.00	nil

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.9180	8.8306
Austria	Schilling	100	100.6851	99.8206
Bahrain	Dinar	1	34.7060	34.6280
Bangladesh	Taka	100	43.0298	42.9960
Canada	Dollar	1	9.8954	9.8155
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.8779	1.8618
Egypt	Pound	1	9.4290	9.3920
France	Franc	1	2.1276	2.1119
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6629	1.6510
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0798	0.0700
Iran	Rial	100	17.8930	17.8080
Italy	Lira	100	0.9900	0.9800
Japan	Yen	100	8.60	8.45
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.8190	0.8000
Kuwait	Dinar	1	47.2000	46.7220
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1455	5.1073
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.0100	0.9980
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.5960	0.5800
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.2497	6.2064
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7500	0.7439
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.0561	6.0064
Spain	Peseta	1	0.100	0.9000
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4580	0.4499
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.0232	2.0073
Switzerland	Franc	1	8.3779	8.3609
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.2790	0.2700
Thailand	Baht	100	50.7430	50.6920
UK	Pound	1	20.7210	20.5930
USA	Dollar	1	12.9025	12.8125
UAE	Dirham	1	3.5628	3.5001
USSR	Rouble	1	20.1404	20.1008
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.0877	7.0323

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 23.3.87.

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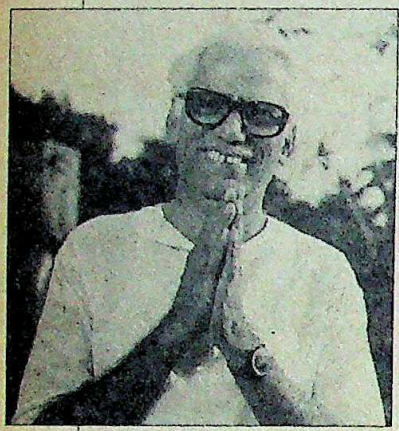
Uncomfortably Real

WHILE political films portraying the goings-on in the corridors of power are no longer new, a new Malayalam film, *Itha Samayame*, has been held up by the censors for being a little too real: the hero-villain, played by Jayaram, a Cochin-based chartered accountant, looks like former Kerala chief minister K. Karunakaran. The film was scheduled for release last fortnight just as elections were taking place in the state. Karunakaran, not surprisingly, apparently saw to it that the censors did not let it pass though, considering the poll results, he needn't have bothered. The film is an expose on the events in Thankamani village in Idukki district where a posse of drunken policemen had mass-raped village women.



Jayaram: deadly similarity

The chief minister in the film merely zips around in imported cars—killing two pedestrians in the process—flashing a toothy smile, inaugurating functions and praying at the Guruvayoor temple—just as Karunakaran does. The climax of the film shows the chief minister visiting the village, which in real life Karunakaran had not. One of the raped women lashes out at him: "Why do you pray in Srikrishnan temple Guruvayoor? You cannot wash away your sins. The sobs of the women in this village will ring in your ears when you pray there." The innuendoes go on right through and caused the censors to declare it a "problem film" and the hero-villain as Karunakaran's caricature. Viswambharan, the director of the film, though, says innocently: "This was purely coincidental." Incidentally, the meaning of the title of the film whose release was so perfectly timed is—It is the right time.

Rejecting Convention

LEGISLATIVE convention seems to go for a six quite regularly in Tamil Nadu as long as Speaker P.H. Pandian is conducting the proceedings. But last fortnight he outdid even himself. Pandian went on and on at DMK President M. Karunanidhi, explicitly blaming him for the bomb blasts in the state. Even as the DMK MLAs jumped to their feet, Pandian simply carried on. Finally it was left to Chief Minister M.G.Ramachandran to do the unbelievable: he asked the speaker to expunge his outburst. Still Pandian would not stop. Brushing the request aside, he said that his conscience would not allow him to erase from the record all that he had said. Finally, however, he relented and expunged an entire hour's proceedings.

The eraser of that length of proceedings was a record even by Pandian's own standards. During the budget session of the legislature, Pandian has often had to expunge portions of the proceedings including his own remarks. Said Karunanidhi: "Considering that he is a hot-tempered man, it is a surprise that Pandian was made the speaker in the first place." The DMK held protest meetings throughout the state for two days last fortnight demanding Pandian's removal.

A Gem of a Function

THE recent "Bihar Diwas" celebrations were held to honour 18 people who had done their bit to project a better image of Bihar. These "gems" (Bihar Ratnas) had been selected for three years—nine for 1984, six for 1985 and three for 1986—but were honoured only now because the state is celebrating its 75th year. It was the result of one man's untiring efforts: Subodh Kant Sahay, an activist from Jayprakash Narayan's days, and a Janata Party leader. The awardees included, among others, film star Shatrughan Sinha, economist L.K. Jha, historian Syed Hasan Askari, *Statesman* Editor (Delhi) S. Sahay, Lt-General S.K. Sinha (Retd) and Chairman of the Medical Council of India, Dr A.K.N. Sinha.

Shatrughan Sinha at the function: a political rebuke

But a couple of things stuck out oddly. The organisers did not disclose the name of the selectors and pointedly left out anyone from the state who was not a Bihari. Moreover, as a guest at the function pointed out: "If this policy is pursued, there will be no more "gems" next year."

The function is also being seen as a rebuke to the Congress(I) Government which has overlooked the state's platinum jubilee. Said an angry Shatrughan Sinha who is also supposed to have assisted with the function's organisation: "This government never does anything but pulls the legs of those who want to do something."

Public Outburst

PRIME Minister Rajiv Gandhi's lessons in public behaviour seem to have been well taken. Following Rajiv's example of humiliating his foreign secretary A.P. Venkateswaran earlier this year, Bihar Welfare and Jails Minister Mahavir Paswan has actually gone a step beyond. At a news conference he lashed out at his Welfare Secretary, G.R.Patwardhan, for indulging in corruption, making irregular appointments and awarding contracts worth over Rs 5 crore without the approval of the state Cabinet.

Paswan: a sorry show

The provocation for the outburst was a report in the *Patliputra Times*, a Hindi daily, carrying

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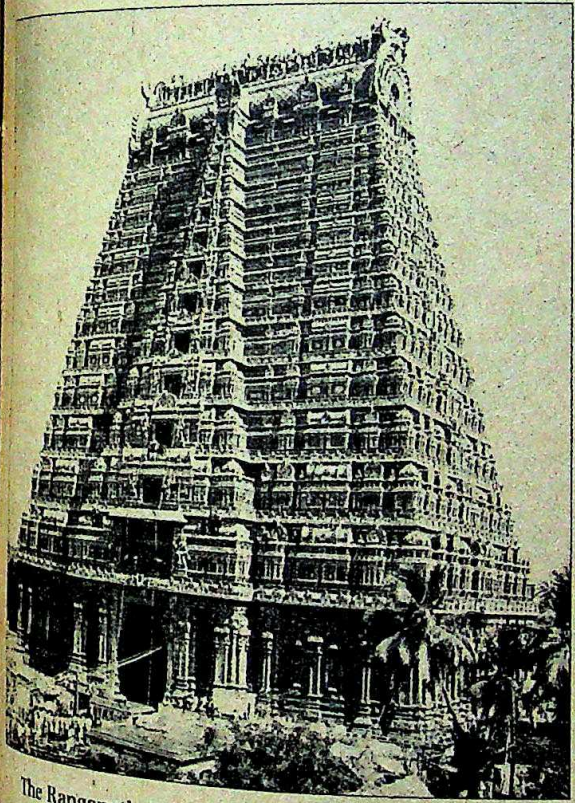
charges of corruption against Paswan. The newspaper is owned by former chief minister Jagannath Mishra under whom Patwardhan had served. Suspecting Patwardhan's hand behind the report, Paswan said: "It should be obvious that the inspired newspaper report has been published to cover the black deeds of the coterie and smear my image." But in truth, Paswan's outburst has only tarnished his image further. The official denied all the charges and the bureaucracy rose up in arms saying that this was no way to treat a senior official.

Petty Politics

WHEN the 236-foot-high tower—the tallest in Asia—of the famous Ranganathaswamy temple in Srirangam town in Tamil Nadu, was consecrated last fortnight, politics made its appearance. The state Government had earlier tried to persuade the key-man, Swami Alagiasingar of the Ahobila religious math, to postpone the function. When that failed, Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, worried about

V.R. RADHA KRISHNAN



The Ranganathaswamy temple: breach of protocol

having possibly hurt religious sentiments, announced he would attend the function which would be held as scheduled. MGR and his wife, along with Vice-President R. Venkataraman and his wife, witnessed the consecration of the Rs 1.4-crore tower on March 25. But quite in violation of protocol, AIADMK leader and Chairperson of the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation, E.V.K. Sulochana Sampath, was seated on the dais along with MGR and his wife. The municipal chairmen of Tiruchi and Srirangam, M. Balakrishnan and T.P. Mayavan, both of the DMK, were initially denied entry to the dais. But following a public uproar—there were an estimated eight lakh people present—the two were subsequently grudgingly allowed inside. Said Mayavan: "It is sad that politics lingered on even in this religious function."

Special Status

THE Bhopal Municipal Corporation claims that state Chief Secretary Krishna Chandra Sharma Acharya has not paid, since 1977, tax towards the palatial double-storied house he owns in town. According to municipal officials who understandably prefer to remain anonymous, Acharya owes the corporation about Rs 50,000. Acharya,

R.C. SAHU

Acharya and his house: privileged position

who lives in a government bungalow on concessional rent after letting out his house to a public sector undertaking for Rs 3,000 per month, disputes the assessment of the corporation's property tax officer. He has made a "self-assessment" of the house on the basis of its rateable value, which he himself fixed at Rs 7,340 a year, and told the corporation that he would pay only Rs 902 per year. The property tax officer had fixed the tax at Rs 6,400 annually. The corporation dare not take punitive action against Acharya because he is not only the state's most powerful officer but also a favourite of Chief Minister Motilal Vora.

Scandalous Behaviour

GOVERNMENT doctors striking work has become a common affair. But an incident which occurred during a strike called by the Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors sent ripples of outrage through medical circles in Bombay. For, about 50 striking doctors in the King Edward Memorial Hospital not only gheraoed Assistant Dean Shasiprabha Satoskar, but also subjected her to vicious and vulgar heckling for more than three hours. Still not satisfied with that, they also directed their ire against Satoskar's son who had not joined the strike, abusing him and telling that he would soon be dead. Satoskar broke down and the resident doctors' scandalous behaviour provoked the Municipal Commissioner S.S. Tinaikar to institute police cases against them. So far, 43 doctors have been suspended. According to hospital sources, the real reason for the doctors' rudeness with the assistant dean was because she had caught one of them taking medicines out of the hospital dispensary for selling it on the pavement outside.

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THEATRE

Intense Portrayal

NOT for a long time had a theatrical event generated so much excitement in Bombay. After more than 22 years, Alaknanda Samarth returned to the stage in a city where she had initially established a reputation as an exceptional actress in plays with Ebrahim Alkazi and Satyadev Dubey. But this time Samarth did not team up with any figure from Indian theatre but with film-maker Kumar Shahani—to feature in two short one-woman plays, G. Shankar Pillai's *Kunti* and Jean Cocteau's *The Human Voice*.

In fact, the production, sponsored by the Alliance Francaise, brought together an unusual galaxy of talent. Besides Shahani, there was painter Akbar Padamsee as set designer, dancer Chandralekha as choreographer, costume designer Bhanu Athaiya (of *Gandhi* fame), film cameraman Piyush Shah in charge of the lights and Veenapani Chawla as the producer.

Shahani has spent years studying the Mahabharat as a Homi Bhabha fellow, and given his fascination with the epic form, his interpretation of the Kunti legend was expectedly on a sweeping scale, transcending an individual woman's dilemma. "The play," Shahani said, "destroys the stereotype of the Indian woman as a breeder. Kunti wages a kind of war for her desires, for her ambition, for herself. You do not weep for Kunti."

In his stark production—with minimal music, fixed lighting and an abstract sculptural creation by Padamsee dominating the backdrop—Shahani reins in Samarth's style to present an almost incantatory interpretation of the Kunti legend.

In Samarth's superbly controlled yet intense portrayal of Kunti, the elemental desire, the yearning for superhuman sublimation, is brought out in a ritualistically modulated form, rising ultimately to a crescendo in an extraordinary cry of anguish and desire, followed by the final moment of consummation in a blaze of light and music.

Interestingly, *Kunti* was written by Sahitya Akademi award-winning playwright Pillai specially for Samarth last year (it was premiered in Bombay last fortnight) after she expressed the need to perform Cocteau's play. *The Human Voice* is another monologue in which a woman desperately seeks to cling to a broken relationship by maintaining a frenzied conversation on the telephone with her estranged lover. Dissatisfied with earlier translations of the French play, Samarth had herself rendered it into English, recognising in it "the poetry of the trivial, an expression of one kind of female impulse".

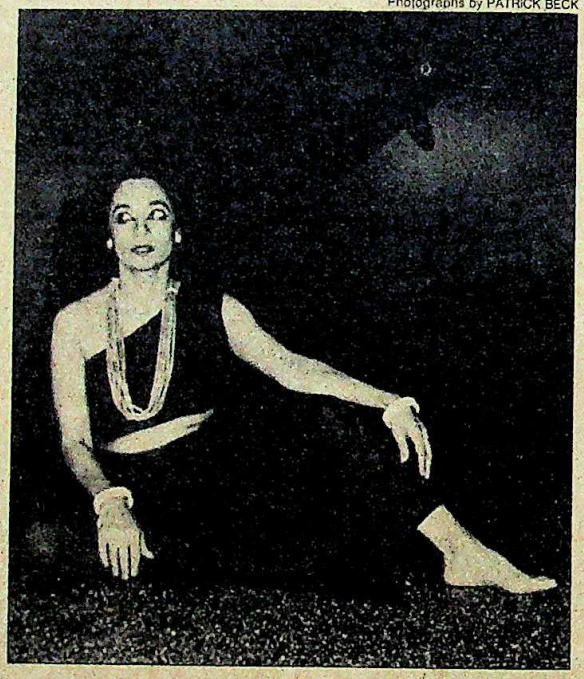
While the lighting and stage design in *Kunti* evokes a sense of infinite space and the splendour of creation, *The Human Voice* presents a claustrophobic, dimly-lit interior, with Padamsee utilising slotted angles ingeniously to represent a confining, closed room. In this limiting space, Samarth, nervous, and almost suicidal, presents a chilling experience of a woman dissipating her life and energy in futile struggle to retain contact with the object of her desire. In the end, as she collapses exhausted in bed with her legs outstretched, seemingly incapable of giving or sustaining life, she is the perfect counterpoint to the Kunti who begins her impassioned search as a woman confidently containing the elements.

Samarth, who has been described by Dubey as "our only properly trained actress" (she studied at the Royal Academy of Art in London) has utilised her skills in recent years as a teacher, first at the National School of Drama in New Delhi and then at Pillai's school of drama in Trichur. In *Kunti* and *The Human Voice* she wanted to go beyond realistic theatre and explore a ritualistic, metaphorical theatrical style. It was for this reason that she went to Shahani for directing the play, and the production eventually became a kind of landmark in Indian theatre as it involved a variety of talents from diverse fields. But finally, it was Samarth who had to sustain the plays all alone on the stage for two hours, an experience she describes as "a terrific learning opportunity but more terrifying than anything I ever imagined". But with the two plays, one of Indian theatre's pre-eminent actresses chalked up yet another achievement in a distinguished career on the stage.

—M. RAHMAN

Samarth in *Kunti* (below); and in *The Human Voice*: versatile

Photographs by PATRICK BECK



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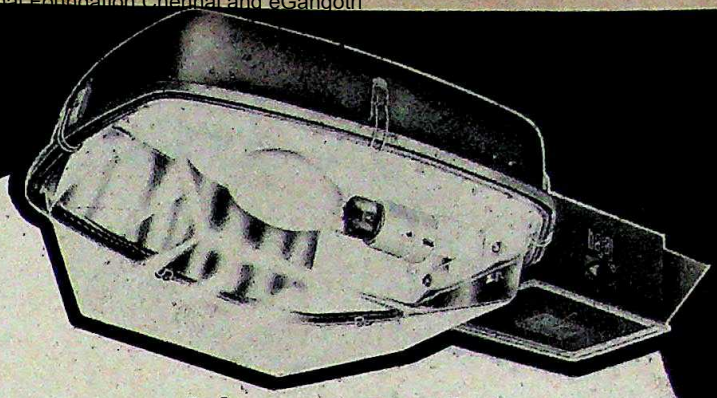

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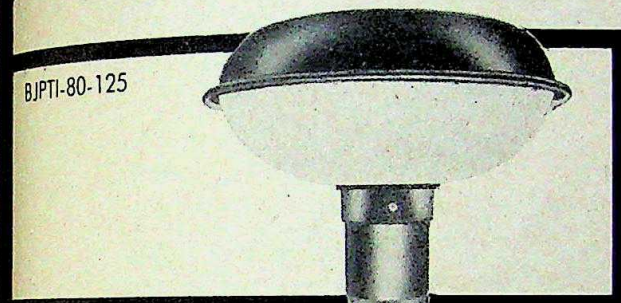
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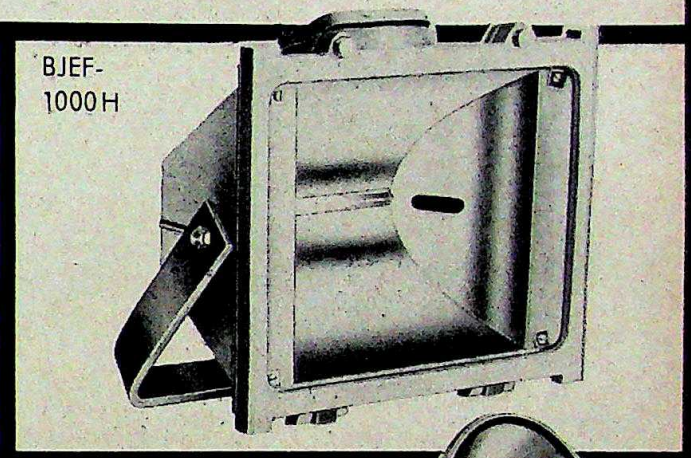
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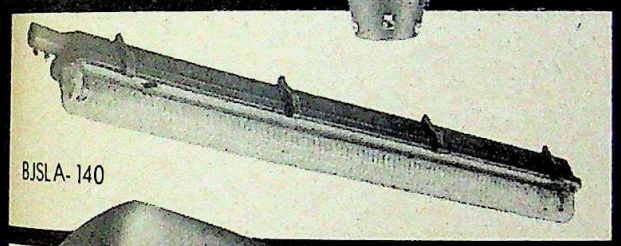
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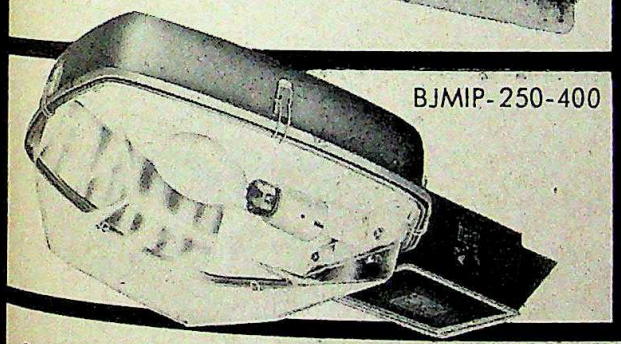
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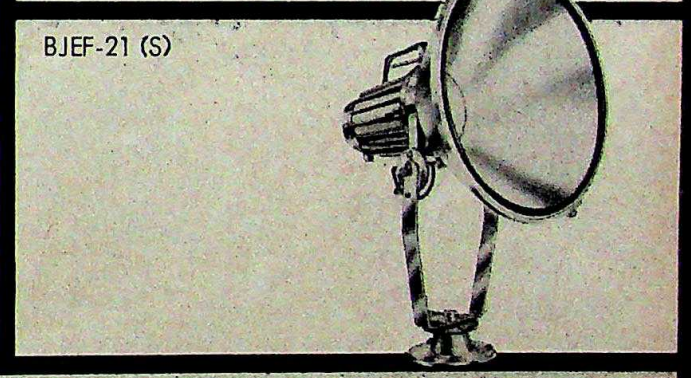
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KARNATAKA

A Notable Triumph

PEOPLE power is asserting itself in the most unusual of circumstances. Residents of over a hundred villages located along the Tungabhadra river in Karnataka have taken on the combined might of big industry and the state Government and succeeded in arresting the spread of a polluting stain that was threatening the river, their economic lifeline.

The battle, which began in the late '70s, is far from over but success, against all odds, is evident. The biochemical oxygen demand (BOD), an important parameter of pollution, has come down dramatically as has the chemical oxygen demand. The incidence of skin diseases has declined and, as a villager says: "Fish and crop yields are a little better now."

The credit for this must go to the villagers themselves. Last month, they took advantage of the Mylar Jatra, an annual festival in Bellary district attended by two lakh people, to stage an exhibition on what pollution means. On display were house tiles from Nalavagalu village, located near the offending Harihar Polyfibres (HPF) plant: the tiles had crumbled due to air pollution. Also on view were corroded nylon fishing nets, plus photographs of large-scale fish kills and affected villagers.

A majority of the people who came to the festival visited the exhibition and over 9,000 of them signed a memorandum to the authorities. They urged the Karnataka Government to take action against HPF and the neighbouring Gwalior Silk Rayon Manufacturing Company (GRASIM), both owned by the Birlas.

The poison entered their lives 15 years ago (INDIA TODAY February 1-15, 1981) when the Rs 38-crore Aditya Birla-owned HPF was set up at Kumarapatanam town in Dharwad district to produce 170 tonnes of rayon grade pulp every day. Then, in 1977, GRASIM was set up next door to turn the pulp into yarn. Effluents discharged by the two plants changed the life of villages located along the river's banks over a 50-km stretch that took the waters through Dharwad, Chitradurga and Bellary districts.

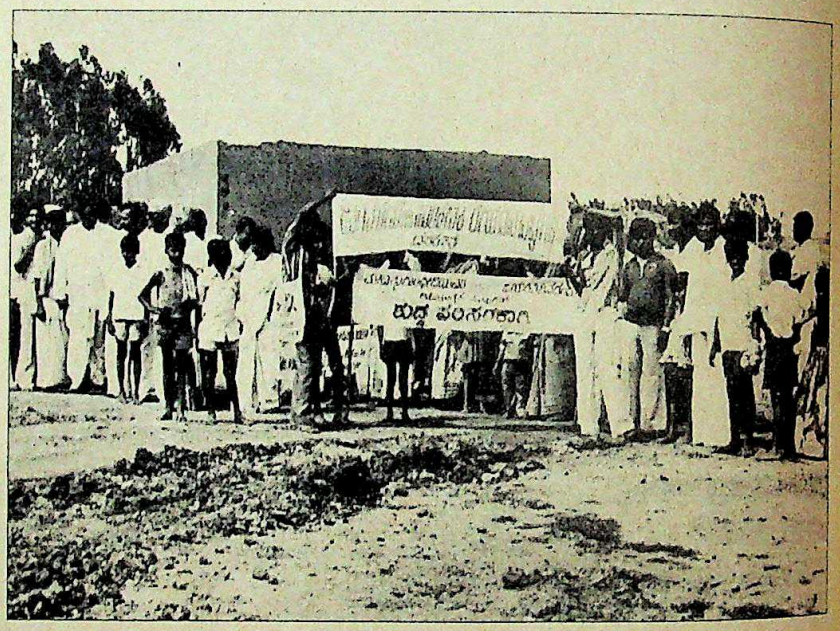
The results were disastrous: fish yields came down by 75 per cent; farm harvests declined by 30 to 40 per cent; and sheep began to abort, hurting sheep farming, a major industry in the area. Even villagers were affected by skin diseases and respiratory disorders.

After years of sporadic protest, the residents prepared for organised battle four years ago by setting up a voluntary organisation, Samaj Parivarthana Samudaya (SPS). Today, in the forefront of the SPS-led agitation are daily wage farmhands, fishermen and housewives.

The SPS became a catalyst for environment committees—Tungabhadra Parishar Samitis—which sprang up in several villages and meet regularly to chalk out new modes of agitation. Says Durgappa Bassapa Bargi,45, of Medleri village: "We started a samiti in our village four years ago with a membership of just 10. Now we number 40. Even a year ago, people were afraid to join any direct action against HPF. But now villagers readily come forward."

They have even taken HPF to court. In the past year they have filed more than 15 cases in the courts of the munsifs and the magistrate of Ranibennur, claiming damages from the factory owners and seeking criminal action against the factory management. They have also filed a writ petition in the Karnataka High Court urging the state Government to intervene and stop the pollution.

The constant pressure paid off and HPF went in for a modern effluent treatment plant, costing Rs 2.30 crore, in end-1983. The continuance of the agitation even after this installation has not been without reason: industry elsewhere is known to have kept treatment plants idle—to save costs—in the absence of public and government pressure. Keeping the environment clean is not cheap: HPF's plant costs Rs 37,000 per day to run. But it has been worth it. Surinder Singh Maru, vice-president of HPF, says: "We have been continuously upgrading and modernising our effluent treatment plant. We also have a business interest in pollution control, because we would like to recover as much waste as possible. We now recover 93 per cent of our waste, one of the highest for pulp factories in the country." HPF has also shifted its coal ash dump from Nalavagalu village.



Protesting villagers: sustained efforts

Even the state Government was forced to sit up and take notice. A full-fledged pollution control office, staffed by 10 people, has now been set up at Davangere town for day-to-day monitoring. Says S. Hanmanth Rao, chairman of the Karnataka Pollution Control Board: "All the parameters of pollution are within permissible limits now, except for negligible variations. Only the colour of the river continues to be black as there is no economically viable way of tackling that. But it will not cause any harm." From the look of things, though, it seems that the villagers are unlikely to give in until the Tungabhadra returns to its original purity.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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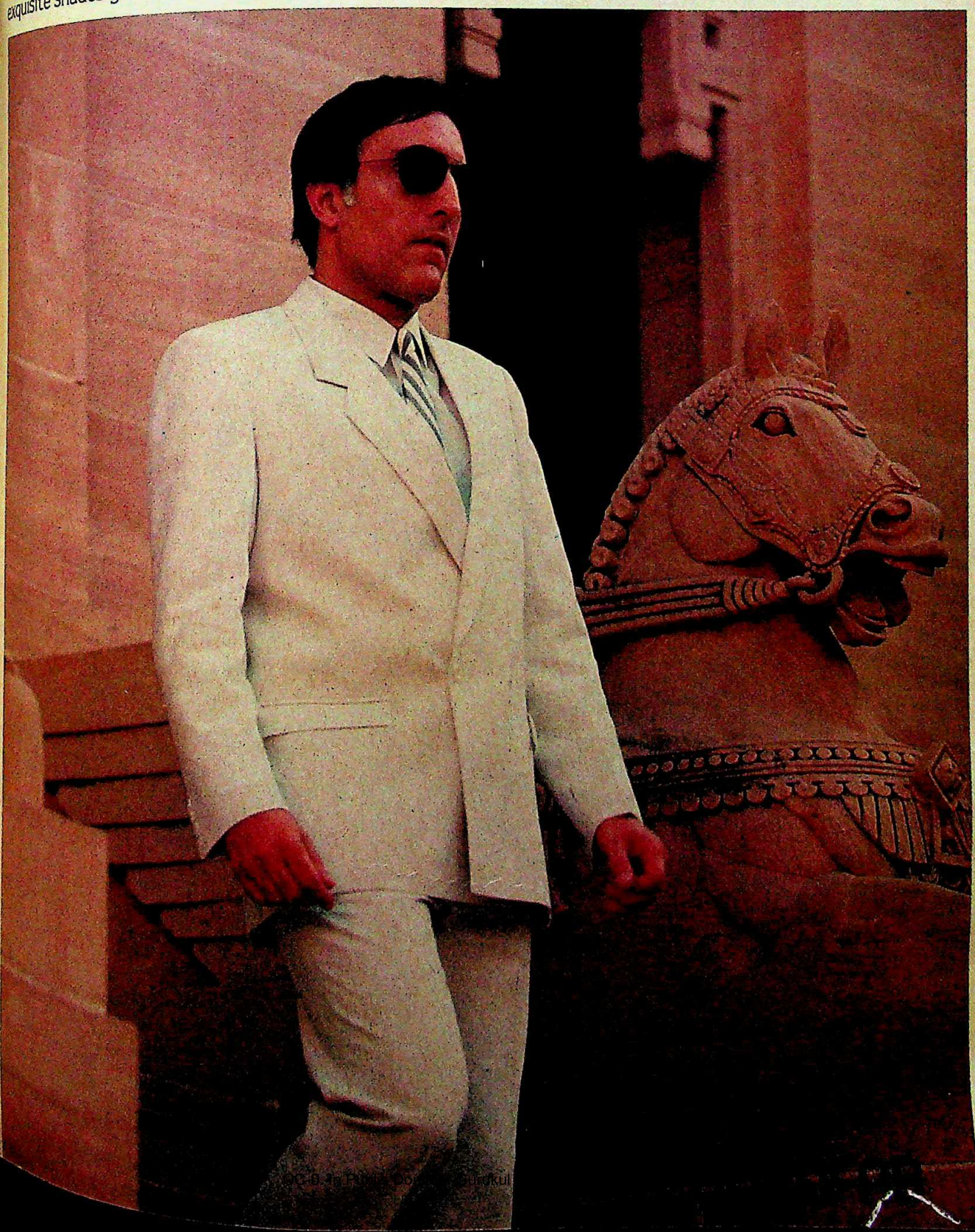

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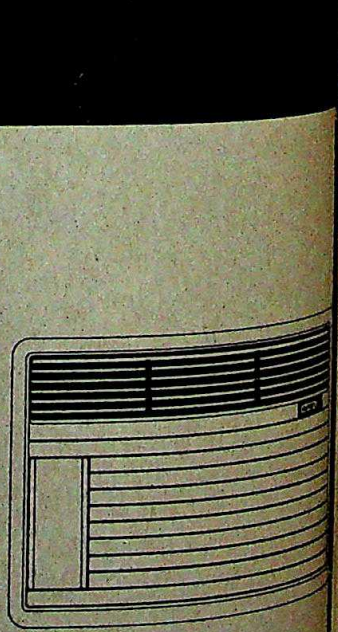

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Photographs by K.M. KISHAN

The Urdu Academy (left); and Magahi Academy: unholy mess

BIHAR

Foul Tongues

FROM a distance, Bihar seems to be immune to the language controversies that dog the rest of India. But nothing could be further from the truth. The state's language academies, nobly designed to promote language, literature and the arts, said state Education Minister Lokesh Nath Jha, "stink".

Last fortnight, when the Education Department launched a probe into the state of affairs in the language institutes—on which the Government spends Rs 50 lakh annually—it found an unholy mess. In most academies, chairmen and secretaries are openly feuding; grants meant for development of languages have been disappearing without a trace; and most of the 150-odd employees that staff these academies have not been paid their salaries for months.

The state Government has now announced a scheme that promises to streamline the institutions within three short months. The Urdu Academy, ironically the best of the institutes, is the first target. Set up in 1972 by then chief minister Kedar Pandey—with an eye on minority votes—it was pampered by successive governments with its annual grant soaring to Rs 12 lakh besides other favours from the Centre. Clearly, it had a special status and the chief minister was made its chairman. The academy's board is loaded with big names—journalists, intellectuals, literary figures, most of whom have solid political connections. But it was the only academy in the state that had some literary output.

There are, however, many more academies in the state and not one of them is doing well. Most were created in periodic bursts of enthusiasm to bring about national integration in the state.

State Education Minister Lokesh Nath Jha has announced a scheme to clean up the academies within three months.

In fact, barely two months ago, Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey promised a Punjabi Academy too. While the Urdu Academy may be first chosen for resurrection, the others are virtually in the morgue. There is the Hindi Granth Academy, the oldest, set up by the Centre in 1970, which was doled out a handsome grant of Rs 1 crore annually for the first five years. Then the Bihar Government took over and the grant was pruned down to Rs 3.8 lakh a year. The establishment costs Rs 10.75 lakh a year to run. Soon the inevitable deterioration began and the academy—set up to prepare textbooks for the universities—began compromising on its standards till in 1981, books worth Rs 50 lakh were dumped in its godown. Jha, who is its chairman, admits: "We still don't know what to do with these books."

The plight of the local language institutes is worse. Magahi is one of the major local languages of the area and is considered the mother of Hindi. The Magahi Academy was started in 1980 by the then chief minister Jagannath Mishra. But it soon became clear that it was going to be a political battlefield more than a language promotion centre. At every step Dr Kesari Kumar, the academy chairman and a Magahi lover, was opposed by Ramchandra Choubey, a government appointee. At one time, the director suddenly withdrew the chairman's stenographer, dismissed the entire staff and went off on leave himself. The chairman was never allowed to handle finances and was consistently overruled by the director.

Then there are the smaller academies: the Bihar Kala Academy, the Bhojpuri Academy, the Maithili Academy, the Bangla Academy. In each case, the story is the same although the lines may be different. The overpowering shadow of politicians looms large, staffers have not been paid wages for several months on end, there is no room to store anything, the state grants are erratic and unreliable, and some chairmen cannot even afford a phone. In some, like the Bhojpuri one, there is no chairman at all. In the Bangla Academy, the chairman is 92 years old. And in the Bihar Kala Academy, devoted to the arts, Chairman Bandhu Mahto did not know if Ravi Shankar was a musician or a singer.

Last fortnight, the Government was making new promises. Jha said uniform administrative rules would soon be formulated, chairmen would be selected according to literary prowess and it was proposed to set up a high-level coordination committee under the governor's chairmanship. "We will see that these academies are not politicised," said Jha. Famous last words, as the sceptic would say.

—FARZAND AHMED

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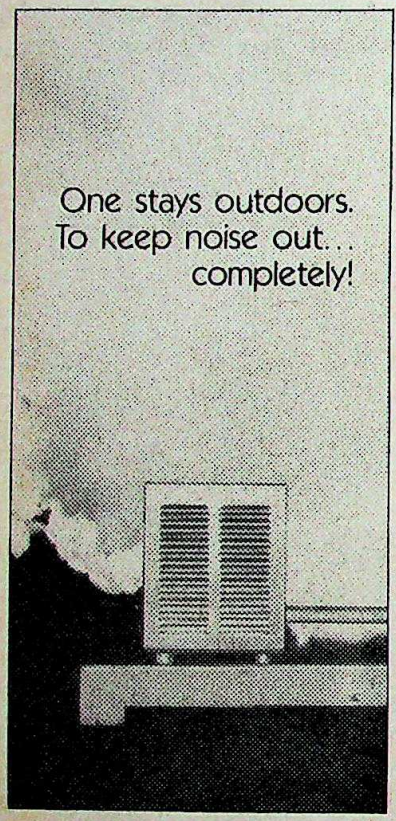

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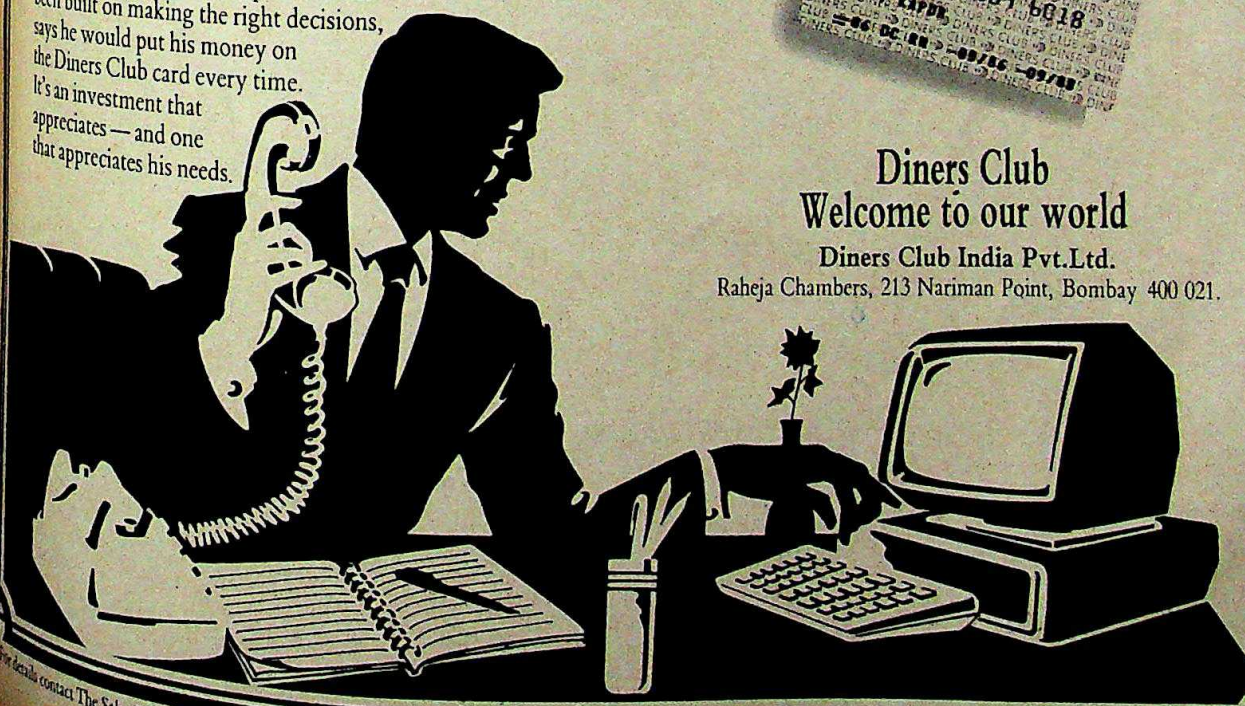

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BONDED LABOUR

Loosening the Knot

As she tended the ripening watermelons in his field last fortnight, Dundya Zipar Lathad, 21, was quite oblivious to the fact that he had become a cause celebre in legal history. A few years ago, the tribal lad was a farm labourer bonded to the biggest landlord in Adne village in Maharashtra's Thane district. Today, he was not only free but the owner of two acres of land and a bullock-cart. Further, the landlord who had enslaved him for life after giving him a loan, had been convicted under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 and sentenced to three months imprisonment and a Rs 2,000 fine.

The Lathad case marks the first time since the Act was passed that a landlord had been sentenced for keeping a labourer in bondage. Madhav Bhau Jadhav was found guilty of enslaving Lathad after giving him Rs 360, five saris, five blouses, two towels and a cap in 1983 at the time of Lathad's marriage. The case was tried summarily by Vasai Executive Magistrate D.M. Shringarpure who ordered that after the recovery of the fine from Jadhav, Lathad be paid compensation of Rs 1,050—Rs 5 for each day he had been bonded to the landlord, as stipulated under the Act.

Like many tribals in Thane district, Lathad was dragged into "Lagangadi" (bonded after taking a marriage loan), forced to work in Jadhav's fields for 14 hours a day and prohibited from working elsewhere. And his wife Rukhama also had to work with Jadhav for Rs 4 a day, much less than the minimum wage for agricultural labourers.

Fortunately for Lathad, seven months after he went into bondage, the Shramjivi Sanghatana, a social organisation begun by Vivek and Vidyulata Pandit, organised 300 bonded labourers into registering complaints with the Vasai tehsildar in a dramatic challenge to the local landlords and administration. Says Vidyulata: "We have been able to keep up the pressure on the administration and it has finally led to the first conviction in the country under the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act."

It is the efforts of such organisations in the district that have brought a major breakthrough in the struggle against bonded labour. The Gandhi Peace Foundation estimates that, of the 50 lakh bonded labourers in the country, about five lakh are in Maharashtra with Thane having nearly 5,000. "Till February this year," says Thane Collector Bhaskar Patil, "we have freed 828 bonded labourers, of which 641 have already been rehabilitated." The administration has also launched prosecutions in 245 cases.

Dundya Lathad: making legal history

Photographs by M. RAHMAN

"We have been able to keep up the pressure on the administration and it has finally led to the first conviction."

VIDYULATA PANDIT
social worker

For the Pandits, this is justification for years of struggle on behalf of the poor and landless labourers in Thane district. Giving up secure office jobs in Bombay, they began work in Dahisar village in Vasai taluka, about 80 km from the city, in 1979. They soon realised that rural reconstruction was not possible without launching a struggle for social justice, and set up the sanghatana in 1982. Among the issues they took up were those of bonded labour, minimum wages and land restoration. In spite of being beaten up publicly and threatened with death they refused to give up.

They found, expectedly, that none of the provisions of the Act were being implemented in the district. The act existed only on paper. A vigilance committee set up in 1976 had not held a single meeting though it was granted important functions in identifying, releasing and rehabilitating bonded labourers. In 1984, Vivek filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court, which appointed two commissioners to investigate the situation in Thane district. Their report was damning, pointing out that though the bonded labour system was widespread the identification of bonded labourers was being done by social activists; the state had done nothing to rehabilitate them; and that prosecution under the Act was dilatory and had not led to any convictions.

But in Thane now a large number of bonded labourers like Lathad have been released and rehabilitated. For the Pandits as well as for the bonded labourers, the conviction has come as another step forward in the struggle against an old and unjust system. —M. RAHMAN

AIRCONDITIONERS. Performance that speaks for itself.

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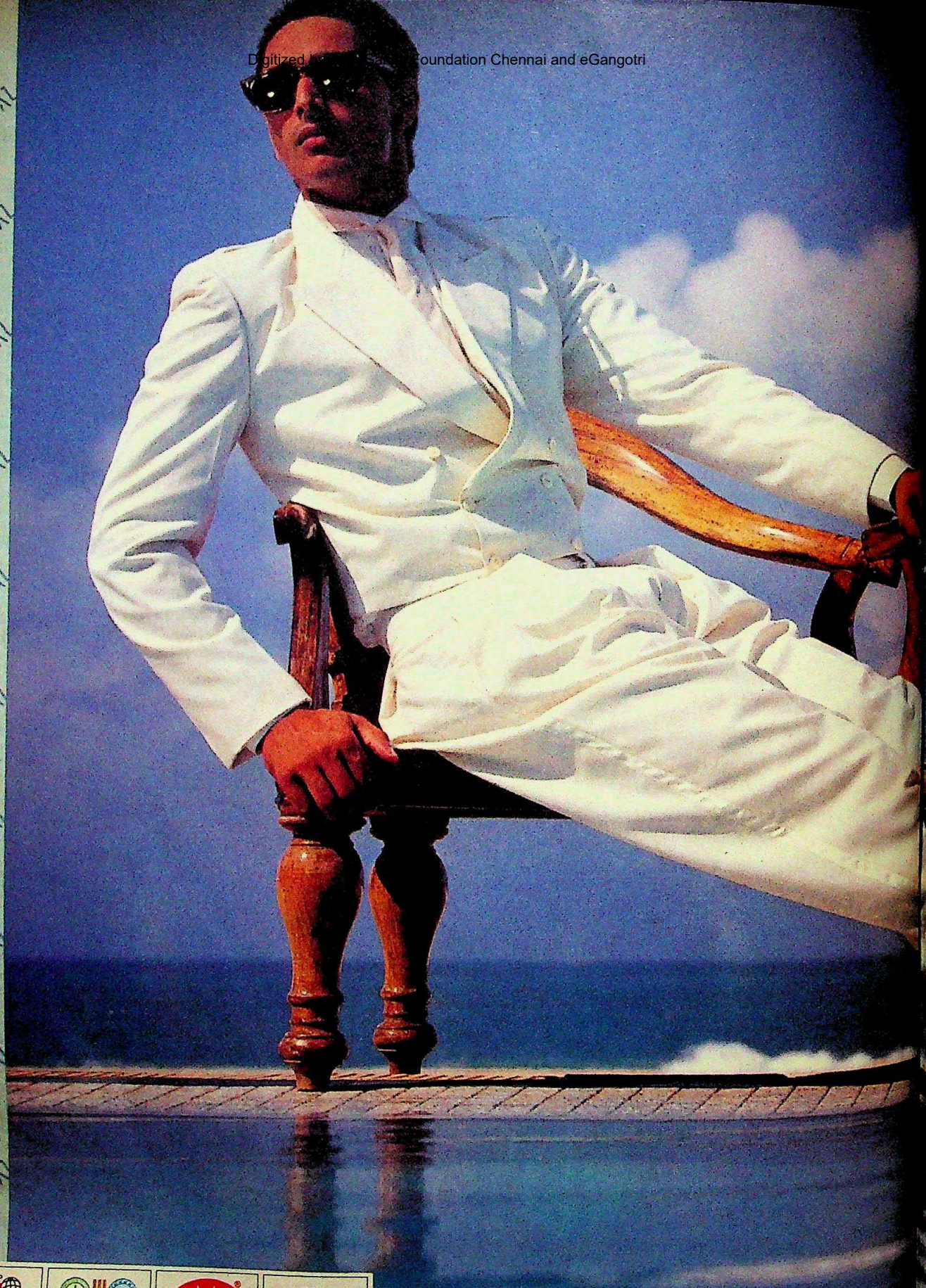

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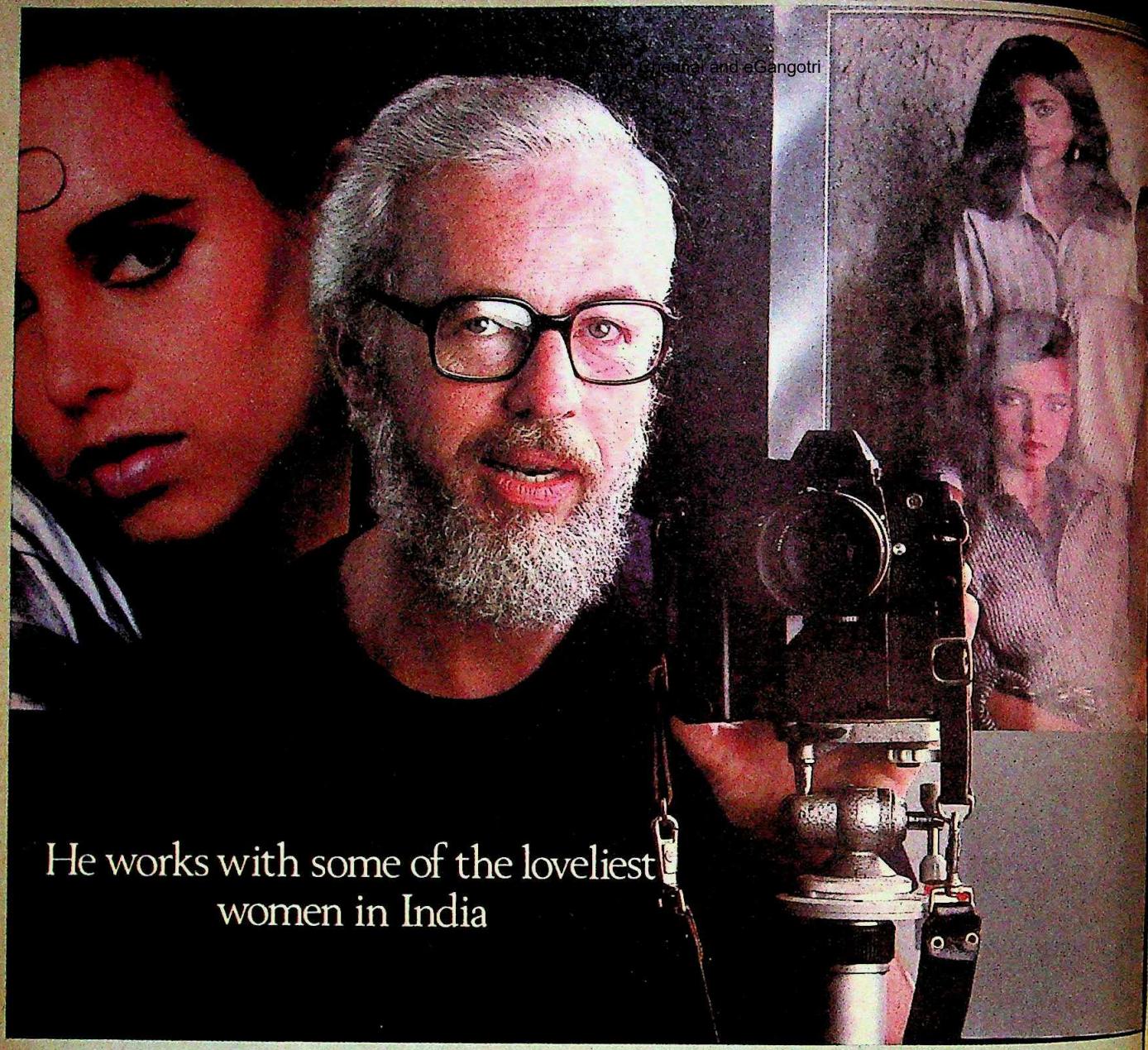

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I ask him how he finds Konica.

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I whistle softly. Glowing skin, soft red mouth, silken fabric... they look almost touchable. I leaf through the prints slowly.

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MADHYA PRADESH

Nun on the Run

THE affair of Induprabha, the runaway Jain nun who renounced her religious order earlier this year to live a normal life (INDIA TODAY, January 31) and earned the wrath of the influential Jain community, has now ballooned into a major political issue in Madhya Pradesh. Last month, the Government detained her friend and lover Radheshyam under the National Security Act (NSA), adding an unnecessary and explosive political element to the already volatile issue. Induprabha herself was forced underground in an attempt to escape from the administration seeking to hand her over to her community.

The administration's volte face on the issue was all too clearly because of political pressure. Earlier, it had filed an affidavit in the high court saying that the 20-year-old nun had gone with Radheshyam on her own. But now, it had ordered the detention of the 31-year-old milkman on the grounds that he, a married man with three children, had "kidnapped" Induprabha on January 4 and kept her in his custody. The administration also conveniently ignored the fact that it had given Radheshyam custody of the nun: the detention order said that as the affair had created tension among the Jains his arrest would help in maintaining law and order.

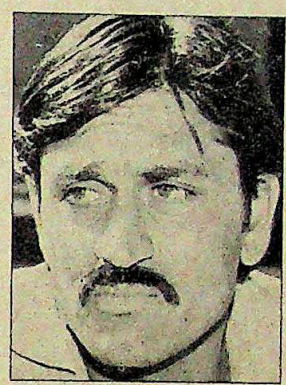
The detention stirred a hornets' nest. Several civil liberties groups and prominent Indore citizens denounced it as a blatant violation of human rights. Radheshyam's wife, mother and other women from Dudhia, marched to the commissioner's office with a memorandum demanding his release. The police, they said, had detained a man who has never been involved in a criminal case. Radheshyam's supporters have filed a writ against the detention order.

Meanwhile, a habeas corpus petition filed for Induprabha's presentation in court was turned down by the high court on the grounds that: "Induprabha was neither in the custody of the Government nor had she been illegally detained by Radheshyam." But the Jain lobby has now filed another petition in court as proof of their determination to get the former nun back into their fold.

Jain delegations from all over the country called on Chief Minister Motilal Vora, the prime minister and the President, complaining about the harassment of a minority community and the "mishandling of the case by the district administration". And a Jain priest, Abhay Muni, announced a fast unto death if Induprabha was not returned.

The threat worked and Vora decided to intervene. Indore's collector and the superintendent of police, briefed by Vora in Bhopal, called a meeting of prominent Jains and assured them that Induprabha would be "handed over". Announcements to this effect were officially made in Indore newspapers and at the venue of Abhay Muni's fast. The police brought Induprabha to Indore and asked her to "surrender" herself to the Jain priests and apologise publicly to the community. But the former nun refused to leave Radheshyam, threatening to commit suicide if forced to do so. Soon after, the couple absconded.

Bent on pacifying the orthodox group, the police issued a warrant for Radheshyam's detention under the NSA. Operating from Dudhia, they combed the adjoining jungles and raided the village every night—beating and abusing the local people—in search of the couple. In retaliation, the villagers decided to blockade roads if the offenders were not punished. Indore's superintendent of police was forced to institute an inquiry. Though Radheshyam was picked up from a relative's house on Indore's outskirts, Induprabha is still in hiding.



VIMAL GUPTA

(Above) Sood announcing probe at fast site; (top left) Induprabha; and Radheshyam: political drama

Immediately after the detention, Indore Commissioner S.K. Sood met Abhay Muni and informed him of the state Government's decision to hold a judicial inquiry into the "disappearance" of the Jain nun. To the administration's obvious relief, the muni called off his fast. The report, expected to be submitted in three months, will also look into the role of the district administration. But whatever the outcome, rather than the missing nun, it is the state Government that appears to be on the run.

—N.K. SINGH in Indore

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Shiva's Shadow

THE ENIGMA OF ARRIVAL
by V.S. NAIPAUL
Viking
Price: £10.95; Pages: 318

AT first there is this strange, dreamlike surrealistic painting by Giorgio de Chirico. Titled *The Enigma of Arrival*, it portrays a Mediterranean scene "depicting a sunlit sea journey ending in a dangerous classical city". In the enigmatic painting, there are two muffled figures in the foreground, one perhaps who has arrived, the other, perhaps a native of the brightly-lit port. The scene is one of desolation and mystery. The title of V.S. Naipaul's first novel in eight years is derived from this painting which is reproduced on its dust cover. It also almost inspired the protagonist-narrator in the "novel" to write a lustrous story based on the painting.

Naipaul's subject is his own arrival, as eternal stranger and writer, on English and other assorted alien shores, confident only of his own craft. *The Enigma of Arrival* is Naipaul's 20th book (11th novel). But can this complex work be described a novel as it states on the cover? Its composition has perplexed critics and the public alike since it follows no formalistic structures of a plot as in a novel. Instead, it is a deeply contemplative work, or more accurately, a meditative autobiography.

The narrator never identifies himself. But we are told he is of Indian origin, a Hindu born in Trinidad, mid-fiftyish, educated at Oxford. A globe-girdling writer. The veil of fiction is pellucid. Who else could this be but Vidya Naipaul? For a writer who has straddled the world's flashpoints from South America and the Caribbean to Africa, Middle East to India, this latest journey is quintessentially English: progressing from London's Earl's Court bedsitters to a rented cottage in Wiltshire in the heart of pastoral England. The narrative evolves in concentric circles. The outer story concerns the writer's special journey from the far off colony of Trinidad at the mid-point of the century. That story, Naipaul presents in his masterly style: the slow and painful development of the writer's way of observation.

Within that account is a "fiction" set in this richly endowed rural England, near the Salisbury plain, not far from Stonehenge. The characters arrive unhurriedly, observed scrupulously from a distance by the narrator.

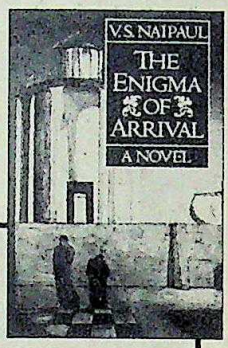
The radiant descriptions of the English countryside are evoked in spartan prose and in fastidious detail. Just as we are lulled with a sense of security into this seemingly rhapsodic world we are suddenly wrought with changes—and accompanying blight. With his almost unforgiving prose Naipaul deftly introduces death and despair into this entrancing rural backwater.

The book has been variously described as "sad", "melancholic" and permeated "by a sense of weariness and exhaustion". There is indeed a forbidding shadow of death over the book. It is dedicated to his prodigiously gifted brother Shiva who died at the age of 40 in London two years ago. A dearly loved younger sister Sati died and Naipaul attends the Hindu cremation rites in Trinidad. Watching the pundit, he says that he had discovered that his father had been intended by his grandmother and mother to be a *pundit*. Instead he became a journalist and his literary ambitions seeded the literary desires of his two sons. In the final section, "The ceremony of farewell," he writes: "My theme, the narrative to carry it, my characters—for some years I felt they were sitting on my shoulder, waiting to declare themselves and to possess me. But it was only out of this new awareness of death that I began at last to write. Death was the motif: it had perhaps been the motif all along. Death and the way of handling it...."

Although there is an indefinable air of despondency and melancholy in Naipaul's latest work, it is, however, a memorable achievement, parts of which make hypnotic reading. Each new work of Naipaul is heralded as a publishing event in Britain and the United States. A blue ribbon band of reviewers have hailed his latest, *Arrival*, with generally mixed reviews: "There is a haunting twilight about this book, an autumnal scent that presages a hard winter" (Bernard Levin). "It is one of the saddest books I have read in a long while" (Salman Rushdie). "It has great dignity, compassion and candour. Instead of diminishing life, Naipaul ennobles it" (Anthony Burgess) and writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, Irving Howe described Naipaul: "He resides in England. But no one could take him for an Englishman, what then is he? I would say: the world's writer, a master of language and perception, our sardonic blessing. For sheer abundance of talent there can hardly be a writer alive who surpasses V.S. Naipaul."

It almost seems an impercipient folly that even after the publication of such a stylishly crafted and elegaic work as *Arrival*, a literary Nobel prize could continue to elude him for so long.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN



EXTRACT

"In my late thirties the dream of disappointment and exhaustion had been the dream of the exploding head: the dream of a noise in my head so loud and long that I felt with the brain that survived that the brain could not survive; that this was death. Now, in my early fifties, after my illness, after I had left the manor cottage and put an end to that section of my life, I began to be awakened by thoughts of death, the end of things; and sometimes not even by thoughts so specific, not even by fear rational or fantastic, but by a great melancholy. This melancholy penetrated my mind while I slept; and then, when I awakened in response to its prompting, I was so poisoned by it, made so much not a doer (as men must be, every day of their lives), that it took the best part of the day to shake it off. And that wasted or dark day added to the gloom preparing for the night."

Naipaul: meditative prose

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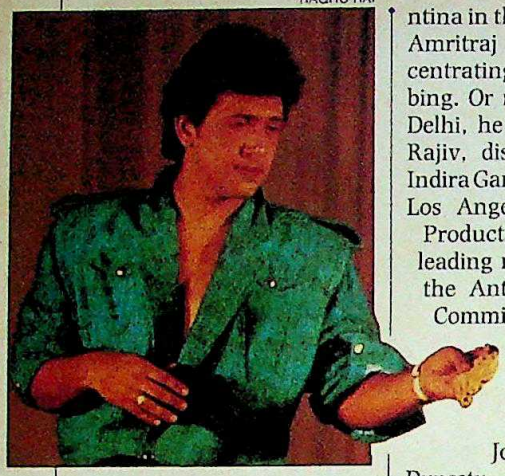
RAGHU RAI



Govinda: signs of acceptance

◆ He was dismissed as the poor man's Mithun Chakraborty. But no longer. **Govinda**, 23, has gyrated himself straight into the record books by signing a staggering 70 Hindi films, an unprecedented feat even by Bombay film standards. "I am a workaholic," he shrugs by way of explanation. But in tinsel town, it is a sure sign that the star has arrived and can now sell a picture on his very own. The hip-swivelling star is however, hardly content with resting on his laurels. Govinda is now planning on a new role—that of a producer, no less. He has just bought the Hindi rights to the Tamil hit *Poo Vizhi Vaasalile* and is ready to make his debut—with himself in the lead, of course.

◆ Tennis ace **Vijay Amritraj** is practising diff'rent strokes these days. Despite his smashing performance against Argentina in the recent Davis Cup, Amritraj is nowadays concentrating more on his lobbing. Or rather, lobbying. In Delhi, he scored points with Rajiv, discussing a film on Indira Gandhi produced by his Los Angeles-based Amritraj Productions, and his own leading role in the efforts of the Anti-AWACS Education Committee in the US to stop the spy plane sale to Pakistan. He has already roped in John Forsythe—of *Dynasty*—to help. Said Amritraj: "Knowing Reagan's past connections, the best way was to mobilise the entertainment community to send a message to the White House." He then came up with consecutive aces—he first met Secretary of State George Schultz for 40 minutes and then Democratic presidential contender Gary Hart to get his support. Hart needed help too. As he told Amritraj: "I've got problems with my backhand."

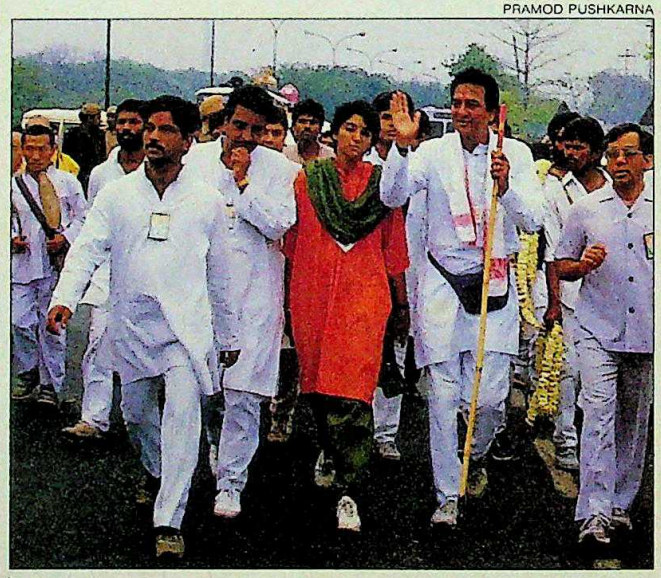
PRASHANT PANJIAR

Amritraj: lobbying hand

◆ By any standards, it is an exceptional feat. Or rather, feet. Actor-politician **Sunil Dutt** and his band of footsore fellow-marchers arrived in Delhi last fortnight to a tumultuous reception, before setting off on the final leg of their Bombay to Amritsar padyatra for peace in Punjab. Co-starring in the blistering walkathon was daughter **Priya Dutt**, 20, who missed her B.A. final exams because, as she says, she hoped to "learn more from the walk than by getting a degree".

But the real test is yet to come—they have already received threatening letters from terrorist groups. Still, the dogged Dutt is determined to reach the Golden Temple on April 13, Baisakhi Day. By then, he hopes, "it will become a call of the people".

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Dutt with Priya: miles to go

◆ It was, as the ad said, her crowning glory. But **Priyadarshini Pradhan**, 19, wasn't plugging soap. The 5 ft 8 inch tall part-time model was crowned Miss India '87, a title she accepted like a veteran. Which she is, having been Navy Queen runner-up and Jaycees University Queen. But behind the blase was modesty: what she wants is an MBA and "work in some silly office". Right now, she's off to Singapore with Air-India for a food festival and in April will bid for the Miss Universe title.

Jackie-Ayesha: happy ending

SHIRISH G. SEN

Pradhan: winning streak

◆ No wonder it's called the seven-year itch. The seven-year romance between film-star **Jackie Shroff** and model-cum-one-film-actress **Ayesha Dutt**, is finally headed for matrimony. After some false alarms, Shroff finally admitted last fortnight that the wedding would take place and also volunteered that D-Day is June 3, Ayesha's birthday—though that was not the only reason. Says Jackie: "My father's decided on the date because he is an expert astrologer." It's all in the stars, it seems.

Photographs by PETER MARTIN

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e Taming of V.P. Singh

nder orchestrated attack from members is own party, his role in the Fairfax tangle er judicial probe and revelations of a ious defence deal boomeranging on him, nce minister V.P.Singh finally quit office week with his image in disarray.

OVER STORY 28

New Terrorist Targets

Punjab extremists have launched a new campaign which is heavily laced with morality. Among other things, the militants are demanding a ban on liquor and meat shops. The key to the success of the strategy is however based on terror.

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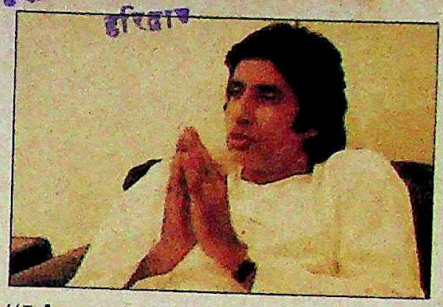

"I have been tainted for life"

Amitabh Bachchan claims that his enemies have cast him in the role of a villain in the Fairfax affair. In a long interview he answered some questions about his brother Ajitabh's Swiss residency and the controversy over his own closeness to the prime minister.

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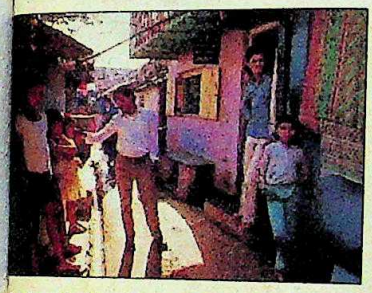

hite Collar Slum Dwellers

ombay's filthy slums also house a surpris- number of white-collar workers from the ated middle class. Though hating every ute of their slum existence, Bombay's e housing shortage leaves them with no ce.

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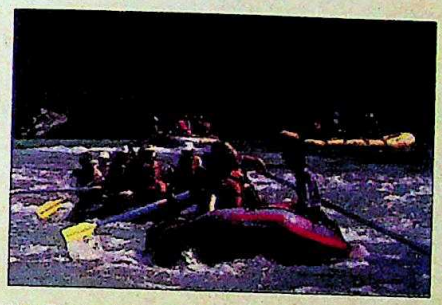

Riding The Rapids

A rafting festival down the Ganga gave a much-needed fillip to the exciting water sport in India. The participants also included a reporter and photographer from INDIA TODAY. A photo-essay captures the unique experience.

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Divine Sensation

Seldom has a television serial aroused such a phenomenal response as producer Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayan*. Reactions from all over the country testify to the kind of emotional and religious chord the serial has struck.

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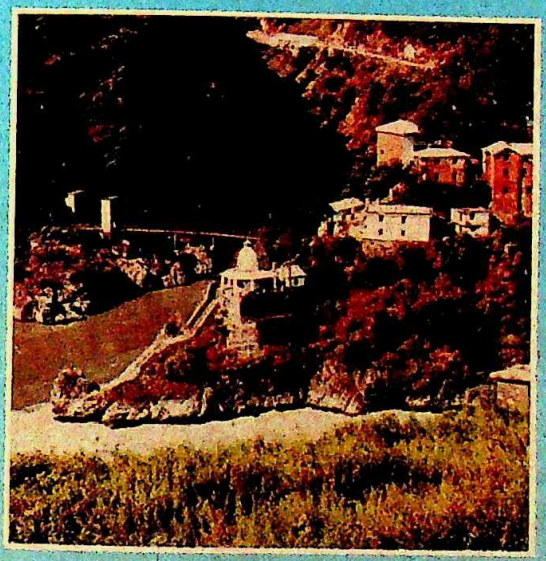

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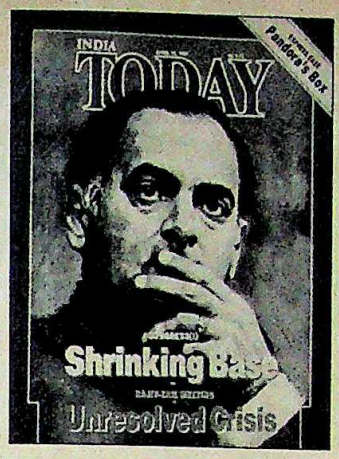

FALL FROM GRACE

The cover story ("The Crumbling Citadel", April 15) has brought to light how Rajiv Gandhi has failed to establish an image that can inspire the people. He has fought a lone battle in his election campaign in Bengal and Kerala hoping to achieve an impossible success. But he only impresses himself more than anyone else. Most of us realise he is doomed.

Calcutta PRAHLAD GHOSH

■ The prime minister's appeal has been rejected outright because his citadel has proved to be one only of rosy promises. It is obvious that a young and inexperienced hand should never have been catapulted to the top spot merely due to his family background.

New Delhi KANWALDEEP SINGH

■ Your objective cover story depicting the devastating defeat of the Congress(I) must make Rajiv realise that he should do his homework well before casting aspersions on political giants like Jyoti Basu and the educated voters of Kerala.

Calcutta U.S. SAHASRANAMAN

■ It is remarkable how a person who generated so much goodwill and optimism in the country can fall from grace in the space of a few months. The Rajiv Government has now acquired the reputation of being the Government that can do nothing right.

Hyderabad JAYSHREE GURURAJ

■ By rigging the elections in Jammu & Kashmir, the NC-Congress(I) alliance has lost the sympathy and good wishes of many people in the country. Even if the elections weren't rigged, they would have got a majority in the Assembly. A clean election would have been a triumph of Indian democracy. Now there has emerged a new youth force, angry and disillusioned by the election fraud.

New Delhi MAHESHWAR NATH KAUL

CHECK MATE

Your special report on the rift between the President and prime minister ("Unresolved Crisis", April 15) was an impartial analysis of the situation. It is true that Rajiv has not been complying with Article 78. But Zail Singh too is not above criticism. By disclosing his letters to the press and making public statements, he too is breaking conventions. Whoever might be responsible, the confrontation is sad and unfortunate.

Ahmedabad NILAY V. ANJARIA

■ By stating that "it was for the Government to decide what information was to be made available to the President", Rajiv Gandhi is acting contrary to the provisions of the Constitution. Had he made the statement as the president of the Congress(I) and not as the prime minister of the country, it could still have been overlooked. Rajiv should henceforth seek advice from an expert before making any statement.

Calcutta TARAK CHANDRA SAHA

UNDEMOCRATIC RAID

With reference to the special report on the *Indian Express* case ("Pandora's Box", April 15), we will now have to redefine widely used terms like 'official secrets' and 'public interest'. The present situation punishes sincere workers trying to expose law violators who are protected by the administration.

Ludhiana PUNEET MOHINDRA

■ The recent raid by the Government on the *Express* after the publication of the President's letter is perturbing: it is very akin to the commands of some tinpot dictator ruling a banana republic. Where is the freedom of the press? India may have come a long way as a democracy but it still has a long way to go.

Washington D.C. AMIR C.TUTEJA

COUNTER THREAT

Your report ("Pakistan's Nuclear Bomb", March 31) was an eye-opener. It is high time India took up concrete measures to counter the threat. The country cannot exist only by peaceful means when threatened on all sides.

Calcutta OJIT SINGH

■ India's efforts to prevent a nuclear

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arms race on the subcontinent have failed in view of Pakistan's adamant attitude to build a bomb. Now, India has to synthesise a new policy taking into account the fact that Pakistan has got a bomb. Opposition parties as well as the people will support a move for India to go nuclear for security reasons. However, I think India should negotiate with Pakistan on the nuclear weapons issue but not from a position of weakness.

Pant Nagar — ARUN SAXENA

■ Had our defence planners been smarter, then Pakistan's claim that they were about to acquire a bomb would have made no difference to us. We too should have joined this exclusive club when China went nuclear in the 1970s, instead of now being held hostage by the Muslim bomb. The Government should take a mature view of the problem and not act in haste.

Nairobi — K.K. SOLANKI

NEEDY OPPOSITION

Your Comment ("The Unbalanced System", March 31) was thought-provoking. It is unfortunate that today we don't have a political party that can be an alternative to the Congress(I) at the national level. The voter is therefore compelled to vote for the Congress(I). Lack of unity and mutual understanding among the opposition parties is chiefly responsible for this. Democracy will be in danger if no strong and viable opposition party emerges soon.

Vijayawada — S. ABDUL KHALIK

■ Your timely comment presents an accurate analysis of the state of our opposition parties which have failed to gain the confidence of the people. The constant failure of our leaders in arriving at a consensus at the time of elections has left us without any unified opposition to counter the political monopoly of the ruling party. As long as regional and linguistic chauvinists continue to stand as bottle-necks, the concept of a united opposition will remain a wild goose chase. A common commander capable of weaving an effective strategy is the need of the hour.

Lucknow — D.V.S. PRATAP

INSECURE FATE

Your story ("Trial by Terror", March 31) deals with judicial officers who deliver unfavourable judgements leaving their fate to God. Judges are demoralised not only in Punjab but also in Assam, where they are responsible for trying illegal immigrants.

While the Government promised to provide all sorts of facilities including tight security for them, it has done nothing. The judges are left to their own fate, without security guards, cars and at low salaries. The Supreme Court should, at the very least, look after its own people, especially those who are serving in sensitive areas.

Vishakhapatnam — MARELLA CHALAPATI RAO

WELCOME MOVE

The take-over of the Vaishno Devi shrine ("No Holds Barred Battle", March 31) by an independent board is the best step that could have been taken to eliminate corruption in this holy place. For the last six years I have noticed that the pujaris inside the cave temple are very swift in pocketing alms offered by the devotees. Kudos to Governor Jagmohan for taking such a drastic step.

Bombay — B.B. SHETTY

■ In the report on Vaishno Devi, the document filed in reply to the Dharmarth affidavit has been described as the Government counter-affidavit, thus giving the impression that it was filed by the Jammu & Kashmir Government. This is not correct. The state of Jammu & Kashmir has not so far filed any counter-affidavit.

The document, filed in the court, claims to be on behalf of Mata Vaishno Devi Board, of which the governor is chairman. As far as I am aware, the state Government was not consulted before the affidavit was filed. Further, the document was filed without consultation with me (I am vice-chairman of the board for life), and was not approved by the full board before its issue.

New Delhi — DR KARAN SINGH

The counter-affidavit is signed by the chief executive of the board. —Editor

NATIVE NEED

Regarding your story ("Path of Deviation", March 31), I was shocked to learn that IIT boys don't find any challenge in India. It is pathetic that they are supposed to be super brains. A brain that cannot work in one's own country is hardly a brain. Funds should not be diverted to institutes which can't produce engineers to work in India.

Sultanpur — SANJUL SAXENA

UNHOLY ALLIANCE

Your story on Chandraswamy ("The Political Search", March 31) made me feel that politics and religion are the worst cocktail which can ruin any society. It has already happened with devastating effect in Iran, Sri Lanka, West Asian countries and now in our own Punjab and Gujarat. The so-called god men are much more power hungry than the professional politicians and their alliance today must be broken.

Coimbatore — J.V.V. MURTHY

PEOPLE PLAYER

Every Indian must honour Srikkant ("Explosive Entertainer", March 31) for he plays for them. "Bang, bang" is his way of life, and he takes on problems with a wink, a shrug and a smile.

New Delhi — ASHOK VISWANATHAN

DOON DOOM

It might be a "Doon Boon" (March 31) but for Pachmarhi it will only mean doom. Setting up a Doon School might bring in revenue to the Government. But the sudden increase in population will irreparably damage the way of life of the people in this natural hill station. The 'Queen of the Satpuras' should be left alone.

Dehra Dun — RAJAT BAIJAL

■ It is sad to see the Madhya Pradesh Government bending backwards to give out 200 acres of land for another Doon School. The forest minister believes the forest area will not be disturbed in the project but this is possible only if the school is built on the trees.

Chandigarh — ARUN SAWHNEY

REALISTIC PORTRAYAL

Your article ("Rule by Whim", April 15) is an apt portrayal of Tamil Nadu politics. There is virtually one-man rule here. Opposing Hindi, free noon meal scheme, free chappals and free note books—these 'important' schemes occupy the government. Issues like unemployment, drought, the indiscriminate felling of trees or bureaucratic corruption are not recognised. And now the leader of the House has moved a resolution treating a magazine editor on par with a criminal. The Indian press must continue to play an impartial role in reporting the priority issues.

Madras — S. RETNASWAMY

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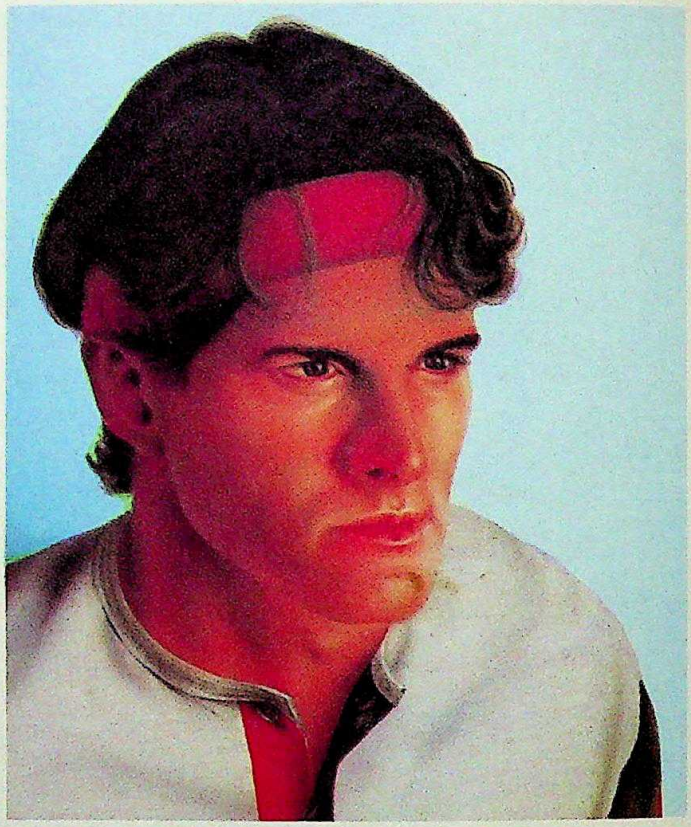

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Diversionary Tactics

THE appointment of the Thakkar Commission last fortnight is a classic case of how not to seek the truth, and how not to misuse commissions of inquiry. If the Government has nothing to hide vis-a-vis the Fairfax affair, the direct and straightforward way to handle the questions raised by it would have been to make a full disclosure in Parliament, and if necessary, to show clamouring MPs the relevant file(s), so that they could see for themselves that what the Government was saying was the full and unalloyed truth. There the matter would have ended, quickly and cleanly.

Instead, the subject has been referred to a two-judge commission of inquiry with terms of reference that smack, more than a little, of intra-government politicking. The circumstances in which the commission was appointed also point clearly to diversionary tactics, and an effort to buy time in the face of pressure from opposition MPs on the floor of the Lok Sabha. Buying time may be an acceptable objective in the context of a communal riot, when inflamed passions have to be cooled by the promise of a manifestly impartial inquiry. But when a similar strategy is deployed in wholly different circumstances, it amounts to a violation of the purpose that inquiry commissions are supposed to serve. Indeed, it might even indicate a certain contempt for the judicial process.

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

Even before this latest episode, such commissions had become an over-used (and somewhat devalued) weapon. The Kudal Commission went on for five long years with its nit-picking and pointless inquiry into some voluntary organisations, and gave every impression of being a witch-hunt. The commission had little reason to be appointed in the first place, yet it was given repeated extensions of life in a manner that pointed to the motivating force being political hostility to organisations linked with the late Jayaprakash Narayan.

The Sarkaria Commission—now in its fifth year—was another stratagem devised by Indira Gandhi to buy time, because she sought to defuse the increasingly contentious issue of Centre-state relations by referring the matter to a commission. This was in January 1983. But even as Justice Sarkaria has persisted with his labours, the political context has changed dramatically and his report—when it is finally ready—might well turn out to be irrelevant. Punjab, somewhat tellingly, has not even responded to the commission's questionnaire so far, although this was sent out more than three years ago.

Several other commissions, appointed in different circumstances, have been equally counter-productive. The Ranganath Misra Commission was set up somewhat belatedly to make up for the Delhi police not having acted decisively to first prevent the riots in November 1984, and then to bring the culprits to book. But the commission's report—submitted after nearly two years—is patently inadequate, lacks conviction and has served practically no purpose. The Mathew and Venkatramiah commissions were two other futile exercises. Both panels went into the question of land to be given to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh. One came up with no solution at all and the other turned in an unacceptable verdict. Both instances pointed to the basic lesson, that the Punjab issue is one that has to be sorted out politically, not judicially. In essence, it is after all a political problem.

This list can go on. Practically every communal riot is followed by the prompt appointment of a judicial commission of inquiry. But there is virtually no case where the report of such a commission has been followed by the booking of the culprits who set off the riot or fanned its flames. Such exercises may as well have not been undertaken for all the good they did.

There are several costs attached to this proliferation of pointless commissions. They take up building space, need secretarial staff, draw on people's time, and cost money. They also create a situation where people are tempted to prolong their tenure in order to continue drawing a salary and enjoying the perquisites of office. And a government that should be vigilant against this, has often chosen to turn a blind eye.

However, the biggest price to be paid will be through loss of credibility. Already, the amendment to the law last year—enabling the Government to withhold the report of any inquiry commission if this is deemed to be in 'public interest'—has by definition, devalued all commissions of inquiry. For how does one know what fate will greet their findings? But going beyond this, if it becomes routine to reject the findings of judges who sit on such commissions—either because the procedures were not properly followed, or because events have overtaken the inquiry process, or because the issues were too contentious in any case, or simply because political parties want to make capital out of a handy situation—then what was once seen as an exercise conducted from a respectable pedestal with wisdom and impartiality, will stand reduced to the level of street politics.

Indeed, if the latest Thakkar Commission has been appointed as a result of political manoeuvres, then it has willy-nilly become a part of street politics. Its findings may eventually be unobjectionable, but it can nevertheless become a target of political attack that will, once again, do no good to a valuable constitutional device that has already been steadily devalued.

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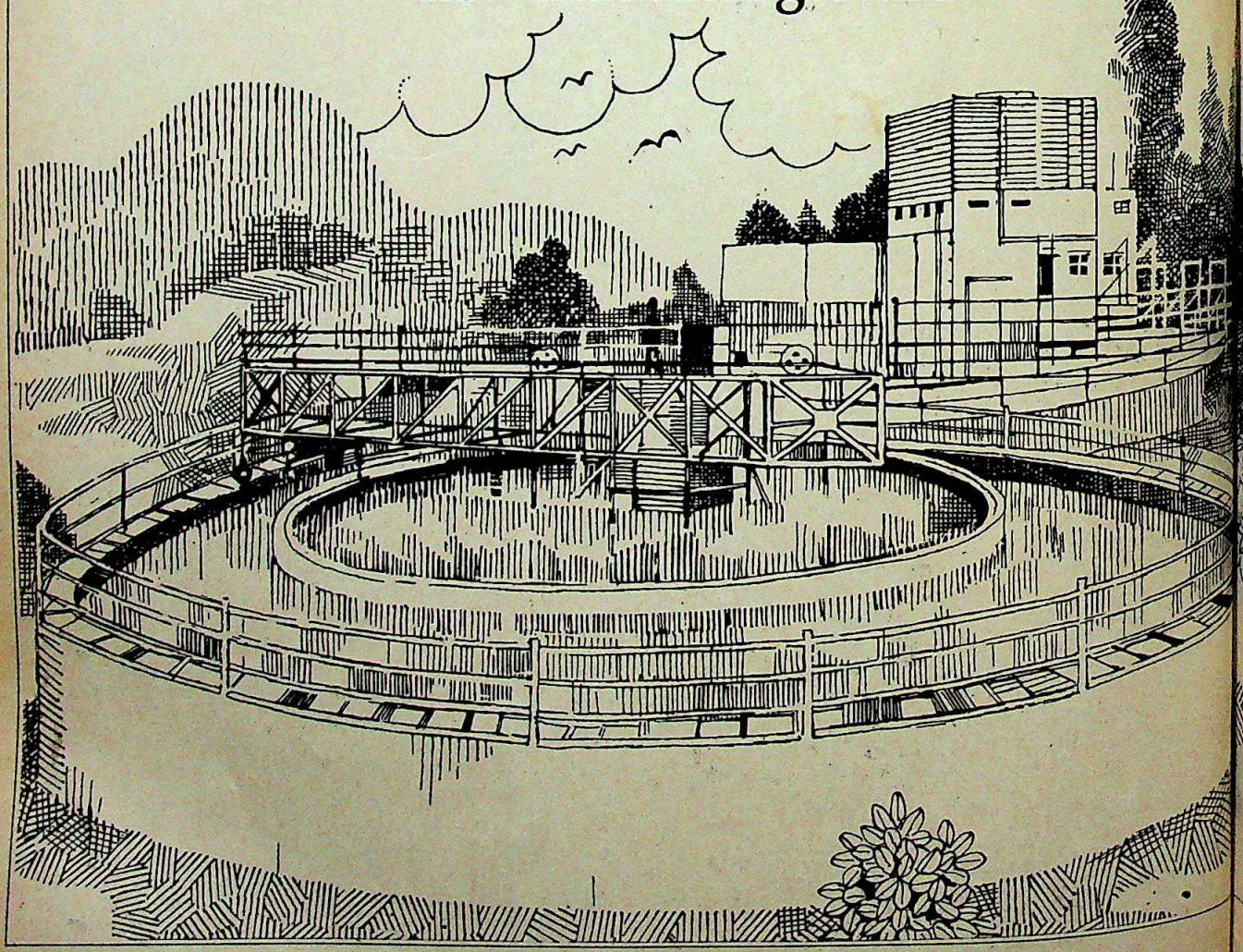

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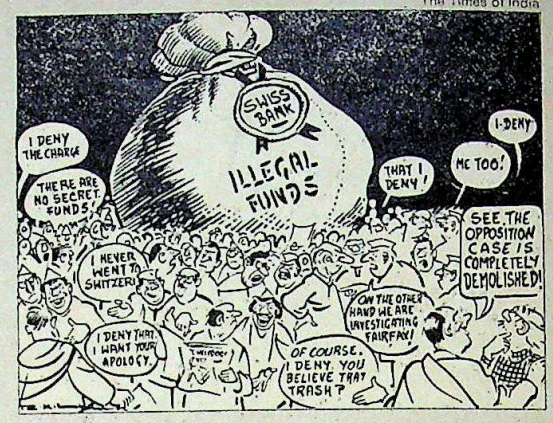

- *To use a jargon, it is sheer verbal calisthenics reeking of garlic from every pore.*
  ■ AMITABH BACHCHAN, refuting allegations against his brother and himself in the Lok Sabha

- *I am convinced that our investigation has hit a raw nerve. Consequently, someone is out not only to get Gurumurthy but us as well.*
  ■ MICHAEL HERSHMAN, president of Fairfax, in *The Telegraph*

- *I think Gianiji is too wise, too shrewd, too down to earth, too matter of fact for all of them (the Opposition). At the appropriate time, he will frustrate their evil designs.*
  ■ A.R. ANTULAY in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

- *Over the one hundred years that it (the Congress-I) has been in existence, it has developed a certain flabbiness.*
  ■ RAJIV GANDHI in *Newsweek*

- *I don't believe in the personality cult. Yet I know that the leadership quality of a person is very crucial if he is to guide the nation and take it ahead.*
  ■ ZAIL SINGH in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

- *I couldn't care less how well they (the MUF) do in the elections. I am still going to crush them—whatever methods I have to use. I am going to wipe them out.*
  ■ FAROOQ ABDULLAH in *The Sunday Observer*

- *Muslim ministers, open your eyes and your ears. Or I will have your kothis burnt. We will...break your legs.*
  ■ SYED ABDULLAH BUKHARI, Imam of Jama Masjid, at the New Delhi rally organised by the Babri Masjid Action Committee

- *These 53 days (of the peace march) have taught me more than 53 years of an actor's life.*
  ■ SUNIL DUTT in *The Sunday Observer*

- *I don't know how clean he (Rajiv) is. He started saying it but is he Mr Clean? Spending crores of rupees on his safety is not cleanliness.*
  ■ MORARJI DESAI in *Onlooker*

- *We no longer want to be ruled. We want to be the rulers in a society in which all will have equal status and self-respect.*
  ■ KANSHI RAM, chief, Bahujan Samaj Party, in *Indian Express*

- *Show me a professional who does things for love. I am a professional; I want cash for anything I do.*
  ■ SUNIL GAVASKAR in *Sportsworld*

- *My vocation in life was to be a nun. After I have had my share of men and films, maybe I will become one.*
  ■ KIMI KATKAR in *Cine Blitz*

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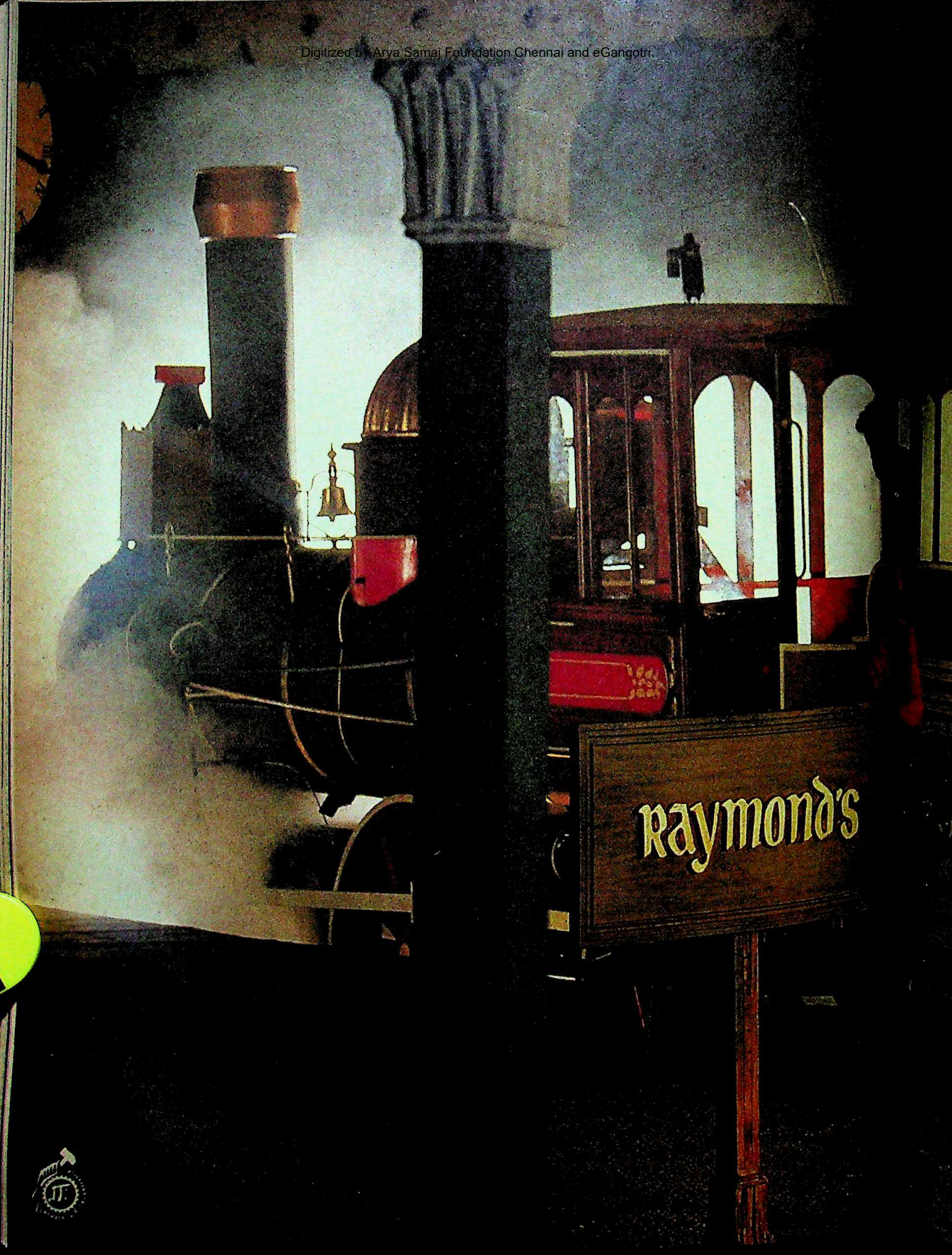

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CONMAN UNCOVERED

■ Clothes make the conman. But then, they can also unmake. Witness the beribboned gentleman in fatigues who decided to sell his services in a not so honourable way. Going by the premise that there is a sucker around every corner, the glib talker, with ramrod back and stiff upper lip and armed with forged receipt books and rubber stamps, went hunting for unsuspecting civilians. On cornering a likely mark, he would promise him access to military canteens where goods are available at prices cheaper than the market and take him there, ask for an advance, and make him wait outside since "civilians were not allowed in".

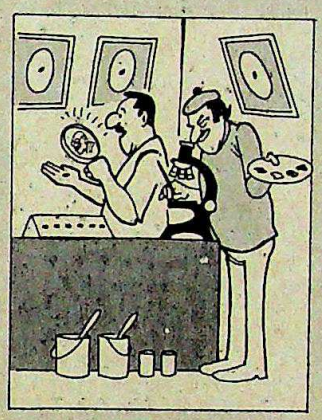
But while the customers were cooling their heels outside, the 'good samaritan' had already vanished—in search of another sucker, obviously. And he found many willing to part with their money and in various cities.

But it was his clothes that undid him. And his penchant for daredevil driving. Caught for speeding, it was the immaculately creased uniform beside him that aroused suspicion. The police discovered the man was a clever crook whose only contact with the army was the uniform he had obtained. Moral: not all officers are gentlemen.

MINIATURE MISSIVE

■ Engrained in this little kernel is a lot of substance. To be precise, 428 words. Gangaram Soni, an artist from Baroda, has written what ranks as the smallest letter ever written to date, and in the process, has turned what the average man would make a morsel of into a work of art. For this letter has been written on one single grain of rice, and addressed, quite appropriately, to the publisher of the Guinness Book of World Records.

The diminuitive epistle, which took its author more than a month to pen down, is supposed to be at least one hundred times smaller than the existing record-holder mentioned in the Guinness Book—a miniature which measures just 1.75 square inches.



But that is not all that appears to have flowed from the brush-strokes of the talented engraver. His unique gallery of miniscule art includes multi-coloured portraits of such diverse personages as Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi, Pope John Paul II, and Sheikh Khalifa Hamad Al Thane, Emir of Qatar—all etched on granules of rice or mustard seed. Seeds of a great talent, there.

DUNG STRUCK

■ It is rare indeed to find politicians trying to set the bureaucracy right. And those that use novel methods of persuasion to make their victims penitent are an even rarer species. An MLA from Maharashtra was, however, obviously inspired to such heights when he barged into the office of an accounts officer, notorious for his excesses, in the Maharashtra State Electricity Board.

Taking the law into his own hands and fired by the noble principles of defending his constituents' interests, the MLA then launched into a tirade against the startled public servant, asking him questions like: Why do people get bills for electricity they haven't used? Why did you tell poor so-and-so to get out? Why do you harass customers unremittingly?

The barrage of questions was met by an electrifying silence. And then the MLA let loose his parting shot. Producing a lump of cow dung, he flung it right at the official's face. "This isn't the last of the dung, if you don't reform your ways," he threatened the dung-struck official before stalking out. Last heard, the accounts officer was registering a police complaint, while the MLA was, presumably, collecting more of his deadly missiles.

FIERY FEUD

■ The gospel lays down the law: do not covet thy neighbour's wife. Or his house for that matter, as a hapless arsonist in Mancheriyal in Andhra Pradesh realised.

The fracas started in the guise of a mere difference of opinion over which party to vote for in the coming elections. When one hot-headed man asked his neighbour his preference, he discovered to his horror that the latter favoured the ruling party—which he strongly opposed. In decidedly unneighbourly tones clearly audible to all in the vicinity, the irate villager threatened to set fire to the neighbour's home if he voted for the ruling party.

Threats notwithstanding, the neighbour decided to stick to his political beliefs. After election day was over,

he proudly announced that he had voted as he pleased. His vengeful neighbour then started to shore up his determination with liberal amounts of liquor before carrying out his fiery threat. But when the deed was done, and the arsonist sat back to survey his handiwork, he discovered that the fingers that had been burnt were his own—in his inebriated state, he had set fire to his own dwelling.

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PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

The Report and Accounts of your Company including the Notice to Shareholders are already with you and I hope you have had the opportunity to peruse them. You would have observed that operating results, in the context of the paper industry's difficult environment, have again been satisfactory, enabling your Directors to recommend a step-up of the dividend rate.

In addition, I would like to draw your attention to three particular developments that are welcome. Firstly, the Government of Andhra Pradesh and your Company were able to arrive at a mutually acceptable basis of settlement on all outstanding issues of incentives and concessions. I would like to thank the Government for their willingness to engage in a dialogue, and their goodwill and objectivity in resolving these matters.Secondly, your Company's stand on depreciation treatment until the previous year has been validated by the Department of Company Affairs circular issued in May 1986, serving to set at rest related uncertainties. Thirdly, with the repeal of the Paper Control Order the prejudice that your Company had faced in recent years and was threatened with in the future, has now been removed.

Three years ago at such a meeting, I had touched on the paradoxical situation where your Company, despite sustained high productivity levels, was unable to create surpluses for distribution. I would like to assure you that with perseverence and continued productivity, that phase is behind us and your Company is now in reasonably secure financial health. I would like to thank you for your patience, understanding and support in the interim.

PRODUCTIVITY AND TECHNOLOGY

Productivity is the call of the nation. Much has been said about productivity in the recent past and much remains to be said. The Hon'ble Prime Minister, introducing the Finance Bill in the Lok Sabha in February this year has again expressed the Government's determination to provide a framework of sustained growth on the basis of modernisation of India's agriculture and industry. He has reiterated that "efficiency and productivity have to be increased. Existing technology has to be upgraded. New technology has to be absorbed and further developed indigenously." He has added "we are encouraging economies of scale in production, induction of modern technology and greater competition to increase production, reduce costs and improve quality."

The paper industry is one of the technology driven industries in the world. I would like to take a few moments of your time to share with you how much your Company has progressed through increasing production, reducing costs and improving quality by the use of science and technology.

Your Company recognises that technology is a form of resource endowment, a body of scientific and technical knowledge, an amalgam of know-how and know-why, that is available for the production of cost and value efficient goods of today and for tomorrow. It believes that technology can become the vital input for engendering growth, provided it can be properly marshalled and internalised, along with adequate stocks of human and physical capital, within an environment that creates the necessary conditions for optimum utilisation.

THE TECHNOLOGY MISSION

Accordingly, **the technology mission of your Company is premised on twin pillars of continuous technology assessment and dedicated technology management.** In outline, its thrust lies in:

Technologically oriented marketing, which means striving to visualise niches and gaps, designing or redesigning products with properties and uses both needed and wanted, and arranging the most fertile interface between customer requirements and product development.

Management of indigenous research and experimentation, with in-house efforts directed towards establishing modified process technology parameters using existing and alternative combinations of principal raw materials and inputs, for cost-efficient product quality assurance and enhancement, towards new product design engineering and in areas of energy conservation, pollution control and waste recycling.

Technical engineering and operating systems for optimum performance of high technology and expensive capital equipment, as well as augmentation of plant capabilities through additions, modifications, and balancing for improved machine performance and efficiencies, product line versatility and outputs, enhanced product quality properties and overall cost effectiveness.

Management of scarce national resources by conservation and substitution, and taking required initiative in their regeneration, where vitally important.

Technological intelligence and knowledge gathering for an ongoing assessment of upgradation needs and technology related opportunities, simultaneously with expansion of knowledge horizons and updating of technical skills of manpower on a broad front for productivity.

APPROACH TO TECHNOLOGY – PROJECT PHASE

The first expressions of BPL's approach to technology are to be found in the project phase of your mill at Bhadrachalam. The greatest attention was given to design, development, and process flow. Internationally proven technology was chosen for the pulp mill and the pulping process and facilities expressly adapted to accept mixed hardwoods, supplies of which were sent abroad for extensive laboratory tests and equipment manufacturers' pilot plant trials. The other noteworthy event was the selection of a combination paper making machine capable of producing grades of both paper and paperboard. This machine was custom-designed and adopted the most uptodate technological features at every stage for production versatility and quality manufacture. Care was taken to ensure that high performance main machinery and equipment did not suffer for want of support systems. Automation and sophisticated instrument control were given the highest importance. Energy conservation systems under the 'total energy concept' were designed as an integral part of the total configuration. Effluent treatment and discharge systems were developed at standards exceeding mandatory requirements.

Project management was entrusted to BPL's own technical and supervisory team. The project was completed three months ahead of schedule, enabling totally satisfactory technology validation and transfer during trial production by the equipment suppliers and transfer agents. The stabilisation of the combination papermaking machine in the manufacture of the grades of paper and paperboards for which it was designed in an incredibly short time, happily proved the efficacy of technology infusion in the plant design and successful induction at launch.

Technology management, as will be seen, was introduced at the highest levels possible at the time and laid on solid foundations for economic quality manufacture, within boundaries of capital cost and mechanical capability. Recruitment of technical personnel with experience as well as academically qualified personnel was completed ahead of time, training was imparted to semi-skilled and unskilled

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Harnessing Technology for Growth

Speech of Shri S. Ghosh, Chairman, at the 11th Annual General Meeting held on 25.3.87.

employees, machine crews and teams were established, thus paving the way for smooth and effective technology absorption.

TECHNOLOGY APPLICATION — OPERATIONS PHASE

With the commencement of commercial operations in 1979, the technology potential of the installation turned 'live'. **Business strategy had to be designed in order to attain economic viability in the shortest possible time and the power of technology had to be unleashed to subserve this objective.** It was clear that operational superiority compared to competition had to be established very quickly in order to overcome the financial burdens of a new plant at prevailing prices compared to fifteen year and older established mills with capital costs almost one third of ours.

The optimisation of operational superiority demanded that products for manufacture had to be chosen carefully, customer acceptance of competitive quality of each product had to be ensured at competitive prices, production of better quality products had to be cost effective through high capacity utilisation and maximisation of outputs, together with economic and efficient conversion of raw materials into finished goods.

By and large, natural growth in the market-place during the past seven years has been discouraging. Paper and paperboards are intermediate industrial products, and undergo further conversion into end-products for end-uses before reaching the marketplace. In a protected market within a high cost economy, customer demand has been unstable, and the market has shown very little resilience. Regular demand for sophisticated or substantial value added quality products has been narrow, when compared to acceptable quality of commodity grades on considerations of price.

In this scenario, BPL had to adapt its technology strengths to manufacturing cost efficiency and superior competitive quality of a wider product range than earlier envisaged. In addition, it undertook to vigorously pursue product development and probe the market with new and differentiated packaging products.

Product quality is governed by a string of property determinants, some physical and some cosmetic. The relative importance of each determinant varies from customer to customer, and is dependant upon his value addition process and his customers' end-use. The technological constituent of design is the marriage of raw materials with various stages of property providing process on plant and equipment. Since these multiple stages of property transfer to the product are not mutually exclusive, the essence of technology lies in obtaining an optimal balance.

Considerable investment has been made on the process line by your Company, subsequent to the original installation to enhance its property providing attributes, and has resulted in continuous technology upgradation. Milestone achievements include substantial expansion of capability to manufacture higher substance products economically. Stepping up successfully the output levels on a consistent, quality reliable basis has been another major achievement, as this has meant removal of the slightest operating limitation at each stage of the process line. Indigenous solutions have been found to complex problems, where imported solutions have been found to be impractical or uneconomic. Furnish management has been a third major achievement area. Under Indian conditions, a multiplicity of non-standard raw materials are drawn into use, posing unique problems of product inconsistency endemic to Indian industry. That your Company's products enjoy the reputation of high consistency is testimony to the technical answers developed after long hours of research and experimentation. Inevitably, such **technological upgradation has resulted in stable and standard product properties, coupled with higher outputs, minimal unplanned down-time and high operating efficiencies, all leading to tight manufacturing cost control.**

Founded on these achievements, product development has received great encouragement. Differentiated products with specific property parameters have been developed for existing applications and the level of consumer acceptance has generally been high. Some of these products have resulted in better economies for the convertor-customer. In some cases, new end-use opportunities have also appeared, and traditional paper usages for specific applications have been partially displaced. For large customers, dedicated programmes of joint development have been undertaken and some unique product configurations have emerged, which competitors have not yet been able to emulate. Not only have technical solutions been found for the customer, but sizeable gains been shared with him. Your Company has also come to the rescue of customers, whose source of supply for specific products have dried up, by developing viable alternatives, and thus exploited market opportunities. The impulse for improved products or new products have not always been generated from external demands. Initiative for the development of new products expected to substitute traditional usage of other materials have sometimes been triggered by market intelligence and forecasting. Launches of such products tend to expand the market, with obvious advantages to the first entrant.

TECHNOLOGY CAPTURE AND CULTURE

Your Company's attitudes towards technology have expressed itself in many ways. In the first place, it has believed in capturing technology in curbing inflation and arresting price escalation as a major step to enlarging demand. Secondly, by employing technology, it has sought to upgrade the floor level of quality in the Indian market and encouraged competition to follow suit in the belief that the Indian consumer too has a right to quality. Thirdly, it has embraced technology in the widest sense, including scientific knowledge and technical know-how, and sought to direct it in the application mode predominantly. Fourthly, it has integrated technology in the mainstream of management and anchored it in its rightful place within the totality of business activity. Fifthly, it has relied on the merits of technology development indigenously and in-house and sought to create conditions of enterprise, freedom to explore and facilities to experiment, and in short, set up a technology culture within which technological advancement flourishes. It uses international expertise to conduct technology audits and inducts foreign technology with discretion. And finally, it has tended to direct its technology focus more and more towards higher value added new and sophisticated products to realise the maximum potential of its upgraded installation in the shortest time.

However, your Company's pursuit of technology has not always been strewn with achievements. There have been failures and disappointments too. The important thing to remember is that the zeal of the mission has not flagged and we have been winners more often than losers. What better testimony than the achievement of being awarded the National Award for highest productivity in the paper industry, for three consecutive years, in addition to numerous awards at other levels and on other dimensions.

THE FUTURE TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

My statement to you would not be complete without mention of the future. It is well known that the packaging industry is poised for growth, and it is forecast that by the turn of the century, at least half the paper industry's output will be used for packaging purposes. However, the demand for paper-based packaging materials will fragment into mushrooming end-uses, each requiring technology-based special features. It will face stiff challenge from synthetic substitutes and cost-competitiveness will continue to exert a strong influence. Your Company is presently particularly strong in packaging papers and boards, and I can foresee greater technological concentration in this area. You will perhaps agree, that the Company's current programme of modernisation, capacity enhancement and product diversification into an even wider range of value added products, on the verge of completion, is timely. It will bring in its wake, another round of technological challenge. Add to this, the overdue thrust on plantation technology, and the technology picture is complete. May it prosper. May you prosper, too.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your kind attention.

This does not purport to be a report of the proceedings of the 11th Annual General Meeting.

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More Discord

● The Congress(I) high command, already uneasy about the malaise within its ranks, is doubly troubled over serious dissidence it will encounter from within another quarter of the party over yet another burning issue. A bill to enact a new uniform civil code is soon to be introduced in Parliament and, in view of the massive rally held at the Delhi Boat Club over the Babri Masjid issue at which inflammatory speeches were made, important members of the ruling party are in no mood, they say, to give in any more to communalists. Already the dissidents have begun to attack the incipient legislation, supported by the prime minister, as "pandering to minorities and religious fundamentalism," on the grounds that participation in the code will be optional. Critics of the legislation are insisting on the compulsory inclusion of all religious communities. And in this battle, the dissidents have as their leader veteran Con-

gressman Bhanu Prakash Singh, a former cabinet minister in Indira Gandhi's government. Singh has already dashed off several acrimonious letters to Rajiv warning him not to "appease the minorities" in enacting the civil code or to give in on the ticklish Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi issue. He wrote recently: "People are apprehensive of some of the decisions taken by you. This apprehension is reaching the level of alarm and hostility."

Closet Spies

● Now that the word is out that the Government of India—particularly the Finance Ministry—dishes out sack-

fulls of money to all shades of local and international "informers", a la Fairfax, for providing surreptitious leads designed to help in law enforcement investigations, a whole bunch of people have started knocking at government doors promising to shed light on Watergates yet unknown. And many of them are hanging around with outstretched palms demanding their pound of flesh for information they claim to have provided in the past.

But the most outrageous example is that of a prominent member of Parliament. This eminent worthy has now written a letter to the Finance Ministry demanding to be handsomely rewarded as an informer. He claims that on the basis of certain issues he raised in Parliament, the ministry's enforcement sleuths were able to crack a criminal case successfully. The ministry is quite Fairfaxed about how they should react.

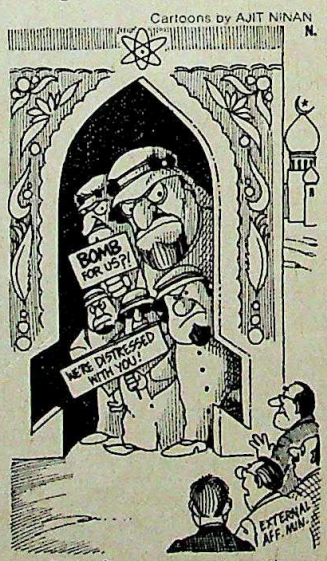
Desert Chill

● The Ministry of External Affairs has found itself in a quandary over the sudden chill that has crept into India's relations with the Arab states, thanks to the serious gaffe made by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi regarding Pakistan's nuclear bomb.

In an informal chat with Delhi-based American correspondents last fortnight, the prime minister made the rather insensitive, off-the-cuff remark that Pakistan's Islamic bomb was funded by Arabs and therefore would be made available to them.

The ministry's anxiety is understandable since India's excellent relations with the Arab countries are one of the high points of its foreign policy. The Arab countries have given India solid support during India's leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement and look upon New Delhi as a spokesman of the Third World. The Arab League has already come out with a strong statement condemn-

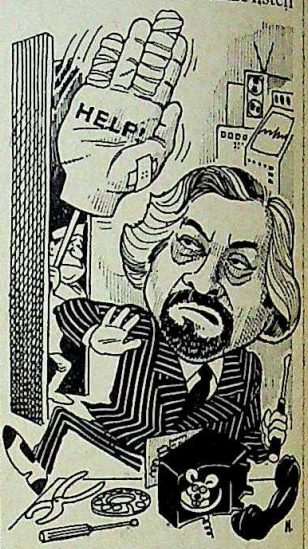
Cartoons by AJIT NINAN



ing Rajiv's statement as "uncharacteristically hostile, deeply disconcerting and particularly distressing" to the Arab world at large. The Arab League spokesman further added: "I strongly hope that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi will realise the damage that can be caused to Indo-Arab relations by these sort of unfortunate remarks." Sentiments which the Ministry of External Affairs understands and fervently shares.

Key Advisor

● The question everybody seems to be asking everybody else in the capital these days is: who is advising the prime minister? Whom does he listen



to? Who is the chosen one? Insiders say Rajiv prefers to depend now on fewer and fewer people; almost none of them are politicians and certainly no one belongs to the old guard.

So it doesn't come as a surprise that Rajiv has been leaning more and more of late on the advice of NRI telecommunications genius Sam Pitroda, who is here to help fix the country's dilapidated telephone system. Sam, it will be recalled, was recently called upon to advise senior government secretaries on how to make audio-visual presentations to the Prime Minister's Secretariat. Friends of Sam say that he is about to get a new assignment from the PM's office—helping draw up a blueprint on how to reorganise the Congress(I). This, even by Sam's standards, is a really tall order—he being no politician—and one which he is likely to politely refuse to obey.

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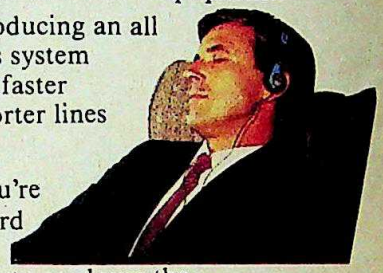

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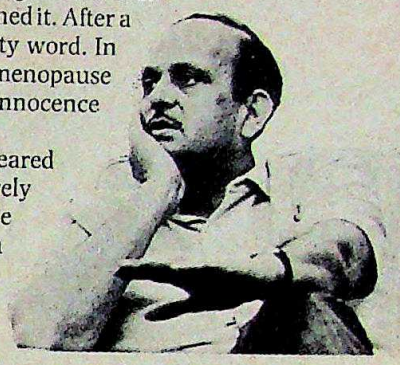
The Ides of April

A shadow of sadness seemed to have darkened the fortnight that was. Darkened it, and, in not inconsiderable measure, demeaned it. After a hiatus of hesitant hope, politics was once again a dirty word. In profile, the fortnight resembled nothing more than a political menopause in the life of the country, the dividing line between a certain innocence and calloused decrepitude.

Sunil Dutt's courageous odyssey into Amritsar was a timely testimonial to peace.

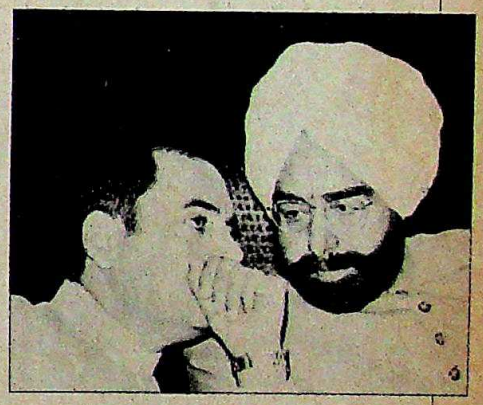
And, if the main events of the fortnight appeared somewhat melodramatic and staged, it was entirely in keeping with the mood of the moment—like watching the final act in a Shakespearean tragedy: an Indianised version of Julius Caesar. Betrayals and conspiracies, plots and counter-plots and decadent palace intrigue. "An honourable man" rendered impotent and some, like Caesar's wife, rendered above suspicion. And then, the final tragic scene punctuated with the plaintive cry of "Et tu Brute". Above all, in the bloody entrails of last fortnight's happenings lay dark prophesies for the future.



V.P. Singh's political emasculation was also the emasculation of Indian politics.

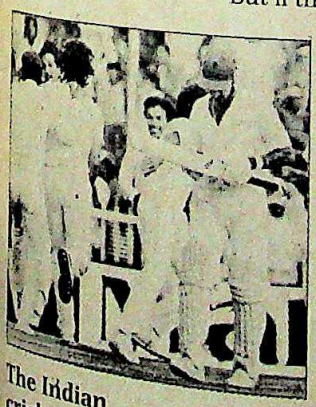
Not one member of the cast enacting the drama that dominated centre-stage last fortnight emerged untainted from the experience. Neither did the audience. The significance of that cannot but be alarming. For, in the end, it was a collective loss. India's loss. Vishwanath Pratap Singh was a sacrifice to appease an immoral God. His political emasculation was also the emasculation of Indian politics. However questionable and inept his own handling of the situation, he was a symbol of something positive, of honour and integrity and half-forgotten principles. *Vox Populi* Singh was an apt appellation. That his honour was eventually the weapon of his defeat is a stark and sorrowful comment.

In that context, last fortnight represented the most revealing signpost to the long and slippery road that stretches ahead. It marked an ignominious end to political pretence and brought the country face to face with the precipice of reality. That, ironically, may not be such a bad thing after all. There is—as recent events have indicated—no profit in harbouring false hopes and misplaced optimism.



The increased frequency of meetings between Zail Singh and Rajiv appeared forced.

But if the issues that dominated the fortnight were depressants, there was, fortunately, a measure of dilution. Amritsar, for a short and shining moment, seemed to revert to its status of a holy city as a courageous odyssey came to an end. The emotional outpouring to film star Sunil Dutt's entry into the state and finally, the Golden Temple, was a timely testimonial to the tendrils of peace that still flourish and flower in the battlefield of Punjab.



The Indian cricket team crashed to a demoralising defeat in Sharjah.

Much of last fortnight's headlines seemed obsessed with vindication and honour. In Karnataka, Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde found himself hoisted on an embarrassing petard when a commission of inquiry exonerated Congress(I) leader Veerappa Moily on the charge of bribing potential defectors. Hegde had made considerable political capital from the 'Moily Tapes' in 1983 which now seem to be playing a different song.

Equally off-key was the forced reconciliation between the prime minister and the President. Their meetings may have increased in frequency but the relationship still resembled a long-divorced couple making a futile attempt to live together again. And, in Sharjah, the Indian cricket team also flattered to deceive by crashing to a demoralising defeat, thus setting the seal on a fortnight that epitomised an exceedingly unappetising slice of Indian history.

—DILIP BOBB

Introducing a new column that will endeavour to summarise the major trends of the fortnight all over the country.

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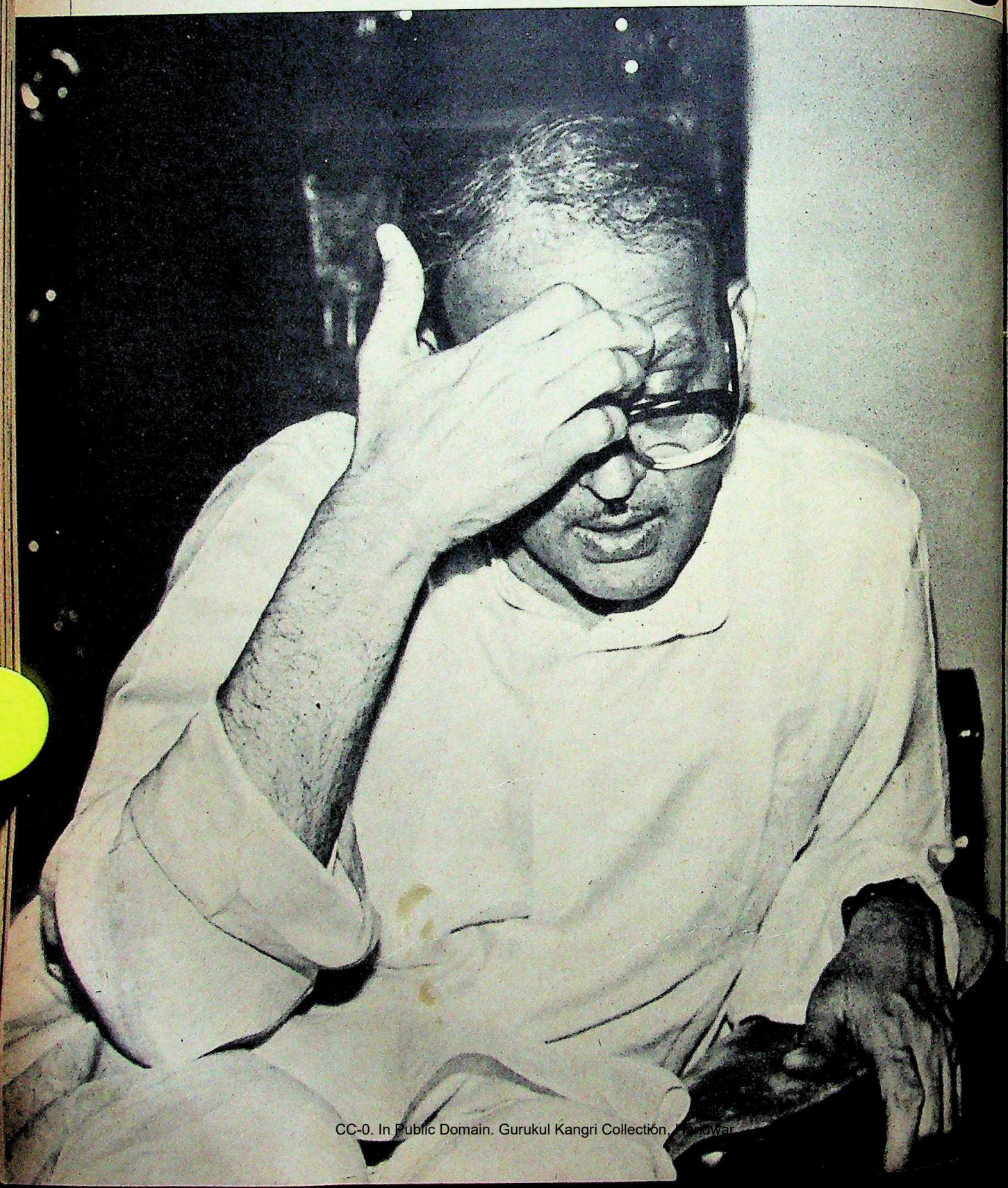
The Taming of



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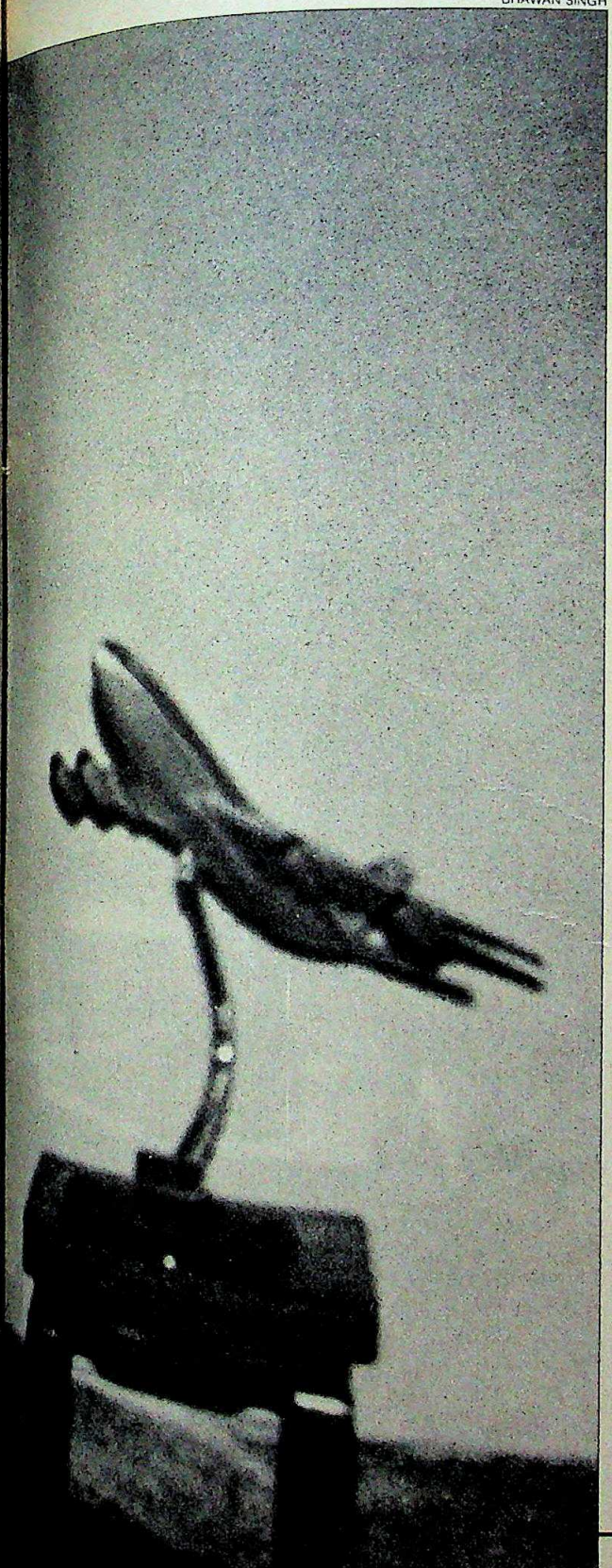
ng of V.P. Singh

BHAWAN SINGH



IT was a short four-minute drive, but it made instant history. Shortly after returning home from a formal dinner on the night of Saturday, April 11, defence minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh asked his son Abhay to drive him round the corner to the prime minister's residence. Singh had decided that his official Ambassador and its complement of gun-toting security guards would not be used for this particular journey.

Abhay took a break from his preparations for an MD exam and drove his father in their white Maruti van for the distance of 2 km, using the roundabout route made unavoidable by security roadblocks. The son already knew that his father's chequered political career was going into an eclipse. Because Singh carried with him a handwritten two-page resignation letter in a sealed white cover, marked simply 'Prime Minister'.

But the prime minister was out for dinner, and Singh left after handing over the envelope to an aide in the Rajiv Gandhi household. Two hours later, at midnight, Singh's multi-function telephone rang: Rajiv wanted to see him at 11 the next morning, an appointment that was subsequently re-scheduled for noon. When the two finally met for the last time as cabinet colleagues, it turned out to be an occasion for cleansing mutual suspicions and clearing the air—with the tone having been set by the defence minister's 'personal' letter. Singh was calm, Rajiv was 'gracious', and the two men whom no cabinet was large enough to accommodate together parted, seemingly, as friends.

If that was anticlimactic, after weeks of the most far-fetched and often bizarre political melodrama, it marked yet another milestone in the political evolution of Rajiv Gandhi. Another 'potential rival' had been cut to size, another once-trusted lieutenant had made his exit from the council of ministers, and after weeks of speculation about the prime minister losing control and support in the Congress(I), Rajiv Gandhi had once again shown unmistakably who was boss. Certainly, his reputation as Mr Clean took a severe beating, but Singh's failure to drum up support for his own crusade showed how little the issue mattered in Congress(I) politics.

THE RESIGNATION COUNTDOWN

January 24: Singh shifted from Finance Ministry.
March 12: Bhure Lal shifted from Enforcement Directorate.
March 13: Raid on *Indian Express* and Gurumurthy arrested.
March 14: CBI discloses it was looking into Fairfax affair.
March 21: Fairfax chairman declares he was engaged by government.
March 31: Lok Sabha debates Fairfax issue. Congress MPs attack Singh.
April 4: Rajiv announces a Supreme Court inquiry.
April 5: Singh reaffirms responsibility for appointing Fairfax.
April 7: Judicial panel with terms of reference loaded against Singh.
April 9: Singh announces inquiry into Rs 30 crore defence deal pay-off.
April 10: Buta Singh interrupts Singh during his statement in Lok Sabha.
April 11: Ministers criticise Singh in cabinet meeting for ordering probe.
April 12: Singh resigns from the Government.

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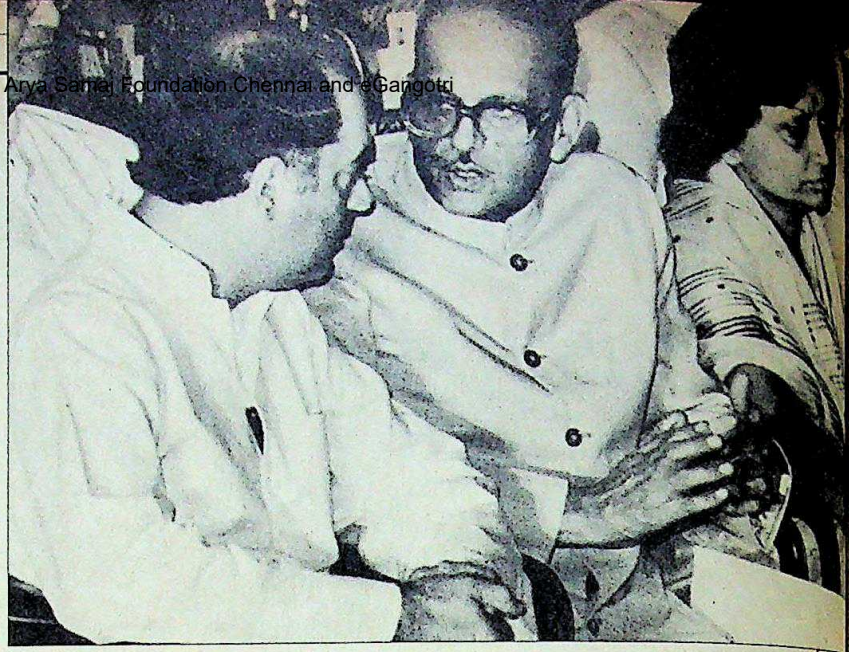
The prime minister may have still rated poorly on several counts, and a severe test lay ahead in the Haryana elections. But at least in this instance, he had effortlessly outsmarted V.P. Singh, shown himself to be a politician with some manoeuvring skill, and nipped in the bud any immediate challenge to his leadership and authority. As for those dreaming of a grand phalanx moving against Rajiv—V.P. Singh, Arun Nehru and perhaps President Zail Singh—their visions lay ground in dust.

V.P. Singh himself was a suddenly transformed man. Only two days earlier, he had been a tormented politician, wanting to fight but not sure of the best method to choose. Facing attacks from his own partymen (both in Parliament and outside), finding almost no one coming publicly to his side, his defence against Dinesh Singh proving abortive and his final desperate offensive—a probe into a defence deal—boomeranging ignominiously on him, Singh had come close to breaking point, the stress showing even as he swore unfailing loyalty to Rajiv Gandhi.



With Rajiv a day before resigning: drama and intrigue

Finally he capitulated, sooner than even his supporters and well-wishers had bargained for. And amazingly—after foreclosing all future claim to government office—he suddenly became a man at peace with himself, seemingly thankful that he had been spared ambition, power and the fight required to fulfil one and seize the other. To V.P. Singh, it seemed, it was more important to prove his critics wrong, even if it was at a heavy price to himself. In words that might come back to dog him in the years ahead,

INTERVIEW

"I've rightly resigned"

ONCE the battle was over—and had been lost—Vishwanath Pratap Singh was a changed man. He was at peace with himself, was behaving (and speaking) as though the battle had never even been fought. There was no evidence of bitterness. There was not even a sense of loss. He was either an extremely good actor, or perhaps he was happy with what he had done and had therefore no demons to battle with in his mind.

Yet, only days before that, he had been a tormented minister of defence, his brow furrowed, his eyes red, his voice breaking in mid-speech. There was desolation too, that partymen were not rallying around him. It was a battle that he found he had to fight alone, and he finally decided not to fight at all.

If his mood swung so sharply within the space of a week, his answers to questions just two days before and immediately after his anticlimactic resignation from the Union Cabinet were also often at variance. Earlier, he had insisted that the question of resigning just did not arise, that his continuing in government office was in itself a measure of the trust that the prime minister had reposed in him, that he would raise in party forums, the question of Congressmen attacking him, that he fully knew when to fight, where to fight and whom to fight, indeed that he still had the fighting instinct left in him.

After Singh resigned, however, there was no question of a fight (except with the Opposition), and despite his resignation, the core of his friendship with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi remained unaffected. Or so he felt.

Excerpts from the interview that Singh gave to INDIA TODAY *a few hours after the prime minister accepted his resignation from the Union Cabinet:*

Q. *You seem relaxed today, in contrast to your mood earlier.*

A. You do what you want to do and you're relaxed.

Q. *Nevertheless, you have been going through very difficult times.*

A. You are in a difficult situation if you don't know your mind.

Q. *Why did you have to resign? Did you do anything that was wrong?*

A. There was nothing I did wrong, and I've rightly resigned.

Q. *Isn't it a tragedy that you do no wrong and still you have to quit?*

A. What is the tragedy? It's no tragedy. One individual does not matter. I'm immaterial.

Q. *Did you have to resign because the hiring of Fairfax and the announcement of the defence probe embarrassed the Government?*

A. I do not contribute to the view that exposure of economic offenders and middlemen will in any way embarrass the Government or the party. The pursuit of economic offenders and middlemen is the policy of our party, doubly reinforced by the prime minister. This will increase the credibility of the party. How does this inquiry embarrass the Government or the party?

Q. *The charge against you is that you did not consult the prime minister or the Cabinet before taking the steps that you did, and that you therefore violated the principle of collective responsibility.*

A. Let the Government make a statement on this. What transpired between me and the prime minister is not for me to discuss with others.

Q. *But did you or didn't you consult the prime minister?*

A. There are nuances to this, and I don't want to discuss them.

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Singh said: "I have quit from office to nail the lie that I was over-ambitious and sticking to the chair. I hereby publicly declare that I will not hold any government office in my life."

Singh's exit from the Government, of which he had become the shining star, came after his crusade against economic offenders had reached a stage where it was beginning to test the system itself. In the end, he found himself ranged against powerful businessmen, the majority of his own partymen—who criticised him for trying to build for himself a holier-than-thou image at the cost of the Congress(I) and the Government—officials willing to do the bidding of their political masters and even a section of the press. Singh bowed out when his announcement of a probe into an apparently scandalous defence deal (*see box*) led to a rising crescendo of criticism for not consulting the prime minister and the Cabinet.

The day that Singh made the announcement, he faced the embarrassment of being decried in the Lok Sabha by Home Minister Buta Singh who said that V.P. Singh's spontaneous statement in the House was "unprecedented". Later that same day, he was pilloried at a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, with the attack being led by Buta Singh and Commerce Minister P. Shiv Shanker. Human Resource Development Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao maintained a neutral silence.

Then at a full meeting of the Cabinet, Singh was attacked yet again by his colleagues for not taking them and the prime minister into confidence on the defence deal probe. Singh stuck to his guns, arguing that those who said the probe embarrassed the Government or the prime minister were only providing grist to the Opposition mill. Through all this, Rajiv Gandhi did not extend support to a beleaguered Singh. By the end of the day, the Rajput raja from Manda was a shattered man, with not even psychological defences left. And some time that evening or night, he finally decided to resign.

THROUGH all this, Singh was unable to prevent the debate from getting deflected away from his own chosen mission: the rooting out of corruption. Although both the prime minister and the newly-appointed Minister of State for Finance Brahm Dutt made a point of stressing that the raids against economic offenders would continue, it was clear that this was one particular campaign which both the Government and the party felt should not be taken beyond 'reasonable' limits.

But as the Government showed divisions within its ranks—with even back-bencher Congress(I) MPs picking up the courage to speak against a ranking cabinet minister—the Opposition gleefully seized its chance, though only after hopelessly bungling during the debate on the Fairfax affair (by alleging, for instance, that Brahm Dutt had secretly visited Switzerland when he had not). On subsequent occasions, however, the Opposition was more effective. And when the Rajya Sabha reassembled after a three-week recess on April 13, a sustained bid by the combined opposition for a discussion on Singh's resignation sparked off pandemonium in the Rajya Sabha, compelling Chairman R. Venkataraman to adjourn the house twice and finally till

BHAWAN SINGH

"I will be in politics on my terms"

Q. *Why did you raise the issue of loyalty, which does not go well with the kind of image you have?*

A. It was not a loyalty question. It was a question of political faith.

Q. *But your harping on the loyalty business diverted the issue, didn't it?*

A. All sorts of things were being said. I was over-ambitious, I was scheming, the dissidents would split, I had passed papers on to the President...All kinds of nonsense. Now this is my reply.

Q. *But you were out-manoeuvred in this whole episode?*

A. I wasn't out-manoeuvred because I was not manoeuvring. The defence inquiry was not a manoeuvre.

Q. *But the details that have come out of how you called for this particular defence file and how you sat on it till the appropriate moment....*

A. They build up stories that I cannot deny. I can weather these stories.

Q. *Do you think it would have been better if you had resigned earlier?*

A. I was not weighing with weighing scales.

Q. *People now say that you are a paper tiger. Kalpnath Rai has called you that.*

A. Kalpnath Rai has called me worse things than paper tiger. He has called me one shoe.

Q. *But aren't you now proved to be only a paper tiger?*

A. It is according to the geometry you use.

Q. *Haven't you created a history of running away from the battle, and done so again?*

A. How am I running away from battle? I'll battle with the Opposition. I have chosen to be a party soldier.

Q. *Why did you have to declare that you will never accept government office again? Wasn't that overreacting to the situation?*

A. I will be in politics on my terms, and I will live my life. This is my way of communicating in politics. And on the mode of communicating in public life, there are no rules.

I need not have resigned, even as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. All the leading dacoits had been eliminated, and there was just another incident. It did not mean I had to resign. So it is a question of how you communicate: it's not just through

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April 15—when the Congress Parliamentary Party was scheduled to meet and discuss Singh's resignation. Clearly, the shockwaves created by Singh's exit would take a while to subside; indeed, pressure mounted in the party for Singh's expulsion.

MEANWHILE, the Opposition used the opportunity to try and tar the Gandhi Government. Said Jaipal Reddy, deputy leader of the Janata Parliamentary Party in the Lok Sabha: "Singh's resignation confirms that there is no place for an honest man in Rajiv Gandhi's Government. It is evident that Rajiv Gandhi has given up even the pretensions of cleanliness." Added Bharatiya Janata Party President L.K. Advani: "I think it is very difficult for any Congressman to be anywhere near the top and remain clean. I think Mr Singh has made a sensible choice."

The fact is that Singh had no choice at all. His days in the Government were numbered the day he was moved from the Finance Ministry on January 24 to take up the defence portfolio. Within hours of his departure from North Block, his trusted officials in the Finance Ministry were put under surveillance, and Singh's own actions as finance minister were confidentially scrutinised by the prime minister's aides. And once the Fairfax affair blew up in everyone's face, enforcement director Bhure Lal was swiftly moved out and revenue secretary V.C. Pande divested of his Enforcement Directorate charge.

As the Fairfax issue snowballed, the Government began to expose the divisions in its own ranks, failing to come together in order to face the Opposition unitedly. Singh was made to feel as if he had committed a crime, though the odd Congressman did speak out against this. Said former minister Arif Mohammed Khan, the fiery MP who quit last year over the Muslim Women's Bill: "Instead of defaming those who were chasing corrupt people, the Government would have done well if it had booked those who were committing crimes against the country."

Operation Bulldoze actually began against V.P.Singh with the forming of a strike force comprising Buta Singh, Shiv Shanker, Minister of State for Personnel P. Chidambaram and the prime minister's political aides Satish Sharma and Makhan Lal Fotedar, plus a few senior officials from the Prime Minister's Secretariat. Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K.L. Bhagat was also roped in. A few hours before the crucial Fairfax debate, a dozen Congress(I) MPs were selected to speak on the discussion. Among these were the former external affairs ministers Dinesh Singh (the man who inducted V.P. Singh into the Congress in the late '60s) and Bali Ram Bhagat. Their briefing in Bhagat's room was attended by Finance Secretary S. Venkitaramanan (who was not liked by Singh), the ubiquitous Buta Singh and Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Shiela Dixit Throughout, people favourably inclined to V.P. Singh were not given any role.

The party line was that none of them would defend Singh; instead they would raise questions about national security and how this was breached by allowing government information to pass into foreign hands. Dinesh Singh finally set the ball rolling

statements in the press.

Q. *Nevertheless, wasn't it a case of overreacting?*

A. Those who don't have the courage to act think so. Politics is not only office.

Q. *But why did you have to foreswear government office for life?*

A. It is not a resignation, it is a transformation of my way of life. I don't play games, and I am very clear what I want to do in life.

Q. *What will you do in politics, now that you have sworn not to accept any government office in future?*

A. I will continue doing my party work. The Congress(I) is a vast field; there are lakhs and lakhs of people in the party, and they are our strength. To be one of them is also a continuation of public life.

Q. *What kind of political activity will you participate in?*

A. I will identify and convey the problems of the people, farmers, the landless, the problems that the states have with the Centre.

Q. *You have sworn not to accept any government office. But will you accept a party post?*

A. The question is hypothetical. I haven't made up my mind...I don't think I'm inclined for a party post either.

Q. *Why?*

A. Because I am what I am.

Q. *Will you accept the presidency of the country?*

A. No.

Q. *In the last two weeks, what have been your saddest moments?*

A. As you can see, I am happy.

BHAWAN SINGH

"It is a transformation of my way of life"

Q. *Yes, but what were your saddest moments?*

A. I don't remember.

Q. *Whom did you consult before you took the decision to resign?*

A. On these matters the whole world doesn't matter to me.

Q. *Did you consult your wife?*

A. I informed her. She has got accustomed to all this.

Q. *What did your son say about your resignation?*

A. He is also resigned to what I do.

Q. *When did you decide to resign?*

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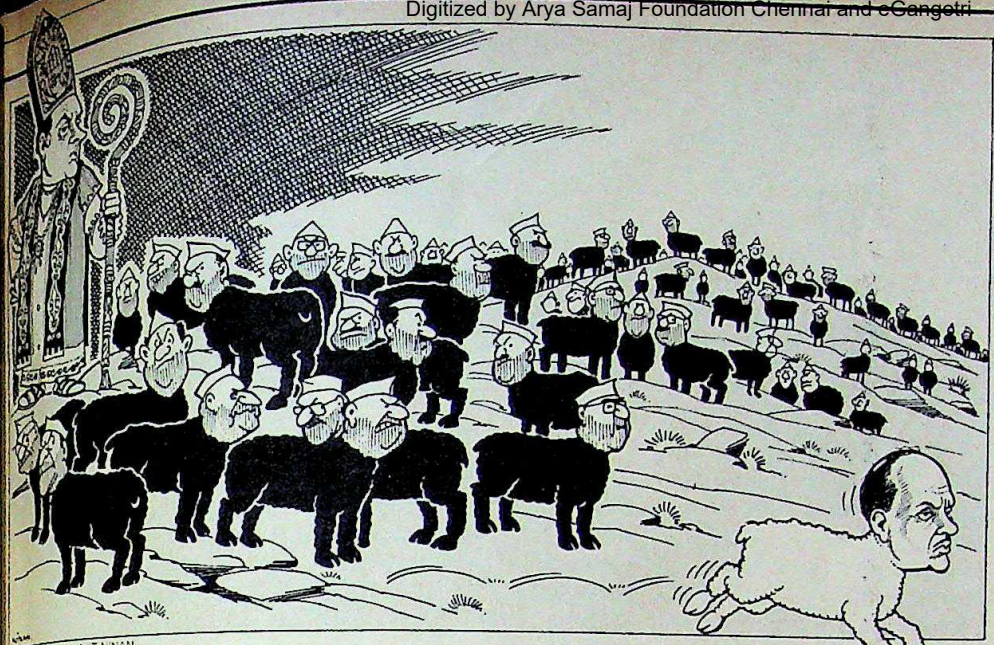

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

when he asked "whether the purpose of this agency was to go into any kind of economic investigation or prepare a political case against the Government, against the prime minister, against various other people?" Referring to the suggestion that the finance minister did not consult the prime minister before engaging Fairfax, Singh said: "Now this is a serious insinuation that he is making. That means that the finance minister was doing something behind the back of the prime minister which would embarrass the prime minister and he would not divulge it that time but would cook up a story at the end and present it to the prime minister as a kind of blackmail. This is a very serious insinuation."

Brahm Dutt himself told Parliament that the Finance Ministry never hired Fairfax, whose status was only that of an informer. But this seemed to contradict what Singh said, that he "shared responsibility"—a point that was quickly seized by the Opposition. But the prime minister continued to show trust in Singh. He used him for laying the foundation of his meeting with the President, with Singh meeting Zail Singh a couple of days ahead, almost like an advance guard. But when the intra-party

A. I decided day-before-yesterday (Friday, April 10), maybe even before. The process of thinking in that direction had started. Yesterday I wrote out my resignation. I went to the prime minister's house at 10 p.m. My son drove me in our Maruti. The prime minister was out for dinner. I left the letter for him.

Q. *If you decided to resign day-before-yesterday, why did you wait till last night to hand in your letter?*

A. Because yesterday was the investiture ceremony for defence officers, and last night I had to be the host at a dinner for the officers. I didn't want to upset these arrangements.

Q. *You have said in the past that you carried your letter of resignation in your pocket. Did you hand over this letter, or did you write a fresh one?*

A. I don't think I have lost the ability to write.

Q. *Was it a typed letter, or handwritten?*

A. All my resignations have been handwritten, as commerce minister, as Uttar Pradesh chief minister, and now.

Q. *Did it take you long to write the letter?*

A. No, but I made out a fair copy.

Q. *When did the prime minister get back to you?*

A. I got a call around midnight, asking me to meet the prime minister today at 11 a.m. Then it was pushed to noon. We met for nearly half an hour. We had a heart-to-heart talk, there were some very touching moments. He said we talk as Rajiv and Vishwanath. He has been very graceful. You feel it person to person.

Q. *Were you surprised by his reaction?*

A. I've never had problems with the prime minister. My problems have been elsewhere.

Q. *What did the prime minister say when you met him?*

A. Between a prime minister and a minister, what has happened can be public. But what transpires between two friends cannot. In all this humdrum, there is a corner of personal relationship....In the last two months a lot of water has flowed under the bridge, and gone waste.

Q. *Will you move out of this house, now that you are no longer a minister?*

A. I do propose to move to a house to which I am entitled to as MP. My son, who according to my critics is supposed to be abroad, is sitting for his MD examination in May. After that, I will move.

Q. *Will you go back to your office, to collect your personal effects?*

A. I have no personal effects there. I only want to pick up my clock, it is programmed to buzz four times in the day.

Q. *How will you spend your time now? Will you paint, and go back to your photography?*

A. I'm out of touch with painting, I don't think I can paint again. Photography, I don't know. Now it's just lingering on. I'll just read and write.

Q. *Do you sense greater support from your party people today, than before?*

A. I have never gauged my support. I have known how to do my job.

Q. *Do you think some of the measures you followed so doggedly will now slow down?*

A. My successors will do a better job than I.

Q. *Don't you think your resignation leaves the Government short of honest and efficient ministers?*

A. There are others there, and there is no dearth of talent.

Q. *How do you look back on your record in office?*

A. I'm fairly satisfied.

Q. *What do you think were your major achievements?*

A. It is just the general sense of satisfaction that I have.

Q. *And what were your failures?*

A. I don't have...Various problems have been attended to; it's not a question of success and failure, and one should not see

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Dinesh Singh asked if the purpose of Fairfax was economic investigation or to prepare a case against the Government.

Buta Singh led the attack against V.P. Singh for not taking his colleagues and the prime minister into confidence on the defence deal probe.

criticism continued, Singh finally reacted and told Rajiv that he would not tolerate criticism, either on the question of his loyalty to the prime minister or his nationalistic credentials. Interviewed aboard an Indian Air Force plane, he said: "Do I have to certify my loyalty to those who were out of the party when we were languishing in jail? I take full responsibility for the Fairfax affair. Anyway, since when has it become anti-national to nab economic offenders?"

But this did not help. Dinesh Singh was not prevented from continuing his diatribe. In fact, Singh spoke to Rajiv twice the same day about Dinesh Singh's attack through press statements and interviews. The prime minister told him to hold himself back and assured him that Dinesh Singh would be asked to stop. But the next day's newspapers carried yet another highly critical statement against Singh.

Meanwhile, when the Opposition heat began to singe the Government, the prime minister had to make a diversionary move. Rajiv then announced that a judge of the Supreme Court would look into the Fairfax issue. But when the terms of reference were finally made known a few days later, they turned out to be heavily loaded against Singh and his officials in the Finance Ministry. The commission was asked: "Was the security of India prejudiced in any manner in making such arrangements?"

The commission's report was to be submitted in three months—by which time the budget session of Parliament would be over. And by the time Parliament meets again for the monsoon session, another hurdle—the crucial presidential election—would be over too, and a 'probing' Zail Singh would be out of office. The prime minister had moved with consummate political skill and machination and the stage was set for Singh's eventual

it in individual terms.

Q. *What about your fight for honesty in economic activity?*

A. I will continue to fight on this.

Q. *What about the role played in the last couple of weeks by people like Dinesh Singh and Buta Singh?*

A. I have given my word to my leader that I will not comment on all this.

Q. *Will you appear before the Fairfax commission of inquiry?*

A. Most probably.

Q. *But hasn't your case become weak because of your resignation?*

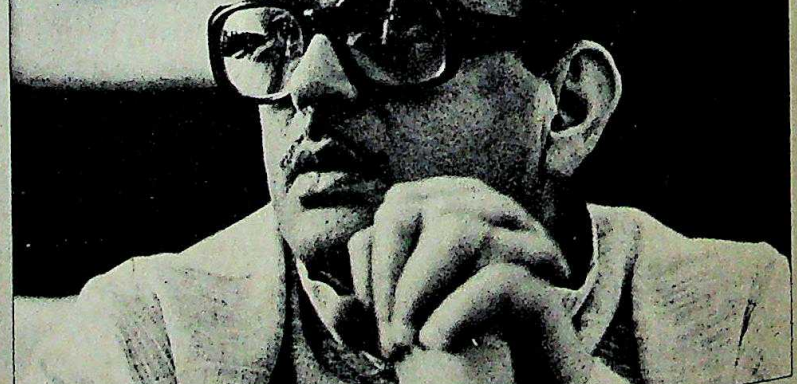
A. How can truth be weakened? People see through all the layers.

Q. *What do you have to say about the commission's terms of reference? Aren't they weighted against you?*

A. Now it is there, I will not comment on this....But I do think the central issue of economic offenders and their modus operandi should be exposed by the material we have, and we should doggedly continue—as the prime minister has said—in bringing them to book, because they're not only sapping the resources of the country but spreading their tentacles. Whatever be the dust and din of debate, the focus of debate should continue on the activities of economic offenders and the scrutiny of all rules and regulations and procedures that they violate.

Q. *But don't you think your campaign on this score brought about a crisis in the Government?*

BHAWAN SINGH



"I will do it again"

A. I don't think it provoked a crisis, because the prime minister has said the raids have continued. There is no crisis in government.

Q. *If you had to face similar situations again, how would you react?*

A. If I have to blow myself up doing the right thing, I'll do it again. I've blown one side of my political life, because I wanted to.

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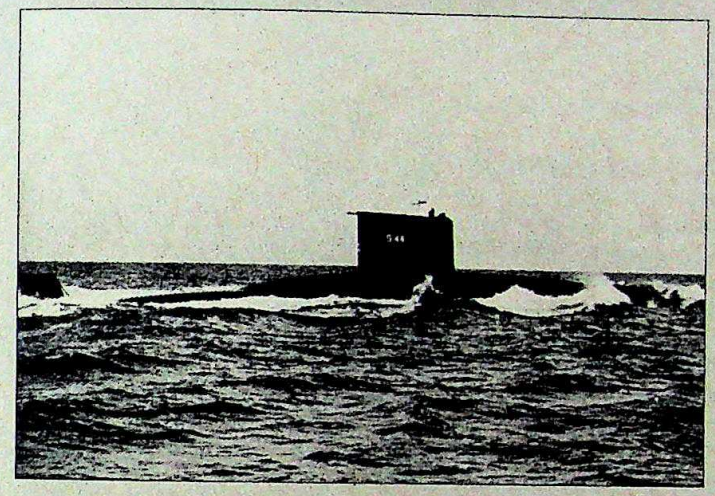
DEFENCE DEAL

Kickback Row

ON February 16, the then defence minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh slid athletically down the conning tower of *INS Shishumar* to mark the induction into the navy of India's first SSK (Submarine to Submarine Killer) built by the Howaldt Deutsche Werke (HDW) shipyard in Kiel, West Germany. In his speech, Singh remarked: "In politics too, one has to negotiate ladders. They too are steep and a lot more slippery."

Nothing could have been more ironical. The issue which appears to have finally torpedoed V.P. Singh was his hasty and seemingly suicidal anouncement of a probe into the very same deal signed with HDW for the supply and indigenous manufacture of submarines for the Indian Navy. The issue at stake, however, was not so much the acquisition of the SSK—which was in itself a controversial purchase—but the announcement that an Indian agent had been paid a staggering Rs 30 crore as 7 per cent commission on the deal.



The West German submarine in India: awkward questions

There is some mystery about the agent in question. The West German manufacturer, HDW, after a board meeting following Singh's resignation last week, issued the carefully-worded statement: "HDW states that it paid no commission to any person or firm in India in connection with the submarine contract." The key phrase is obviously 'in India'. INDIA TODAY contacted the Indian ambassador in Bonn who sent the telex regarding the Rs 30 crore commission to South Block in February. Ambassador Ajmani declined to comment, "since the matter is under investigation."

Indian newspaper reports of the time had mentioned the London-based Hindujas whose name was being circulated in defence circles at the time the submarine purchase question surfaced in April 1980 and throughout the tortuous negotiations which finally culminated in the agreement being signed in December 1981. The senior Hinduja brother, Shreechand P. Hinduja, was in Houston. His brother Gopichand was in Paris and refused to comment on the controversy until he received an okay from Shreechand on the telephone. He, however, denied that they were involved in the deal. "We totally deny that we had anything to do with earnings or any commissions on the reported submarine deal," said Gopichand.

The initial agreement was for two Type 1500 subs to be built at Kiel and two others to be built under the transfer of technology clause at Mazagon Docks. The total package, including spares, modifications and cost escalation, was to cost around Rs 450 crore.

What has churned up the political waters is the question of why Singh picked this particular deal which was signed when Mrs Gandhi was the prime minister. The implication explicit in the probe was that the Rs 30-crore commission was in turn used to pay kickbacks to key people involved in the negotiations. Even more curious is the fact that the man who represented the Defence Ministry in the final negotiations in Bonn on May 5, 1981, was S.K. Bhatnagar, the current defence secretary, who has been appointed to head the inquiry committee to probe the deal. Bhatnagar was then additional secretary in the Ministry of Defence.

However, Congress (I) members have accused Singh of trying to embarrass Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi directly by ordering the probe. The only connection that the Rajiv Gandhi Government has with the deal is that fresh talks are currently on with HDW for the purchase and construction of more SSK submarines to replace the ageing fleet of Soviet Foxtrot submarines. The new negotiations—offered as an option in the original deal—started late last year and a decision is yet to be taken.

In any event, the SSK submarine deal has been engulfed in controversy from the start. The decision to go in for more subs from western manufacturers (excluding the US) was taken in April 1980. In May, a defence team led by Bhatnagar and including the then vice-chief of naval staff and officials of the ministries of finance and law visited West Germany and Sweden. In West Germany, they visited the HDW shipyard in Kiel and the Thyssen Nordseewerke in Einden. In Sweden, they visited the Kockum shipyard. The delegation had, in fact, subsequently recommended the Swedish subs. The objection to the West German deal was that the diesel-engined subs were far too noisy, that HDW wanted major changes in the transfer of technology clause and was also not willing to give a written guarantee for supply of spares.

The deal ran into further snags when HDW representatives, who flew into New Delhi in September 1981 to finalise the agreement, announced that they were not prepared to sign the Memorandum of Understanding but instead preferred a 'Note Verbal'. This absolved them of the obligation for the supply of spares as well as modifications the Indian Navy had demanded, including reduction in the noise levels. A cabinet subcommittee was then formed to study the deal. The committee comprised the then foreign minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, finance minister R. Venkataraman and minister of state for defence, Shivraj Patil. And in December 1981, the agreement was finally signed. The Opposition had made serious allegations of kickbacks at that time and now, after six years, V.P. Singh has uncorked the genie from the bottle. But having resigned the day after announcing the probe, it is more than likely that any investigation will be consigned to the deep.

—DILIP BOBB

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"Instead of defaming those chasing the corrupt, government should book those committing crimes against the country."
ARIF MOHAMMED KHAN
former Union minister

"Our party is committed against economic offenders. All those involved must be brought to book."
ARUN NEHRU
former Union minister

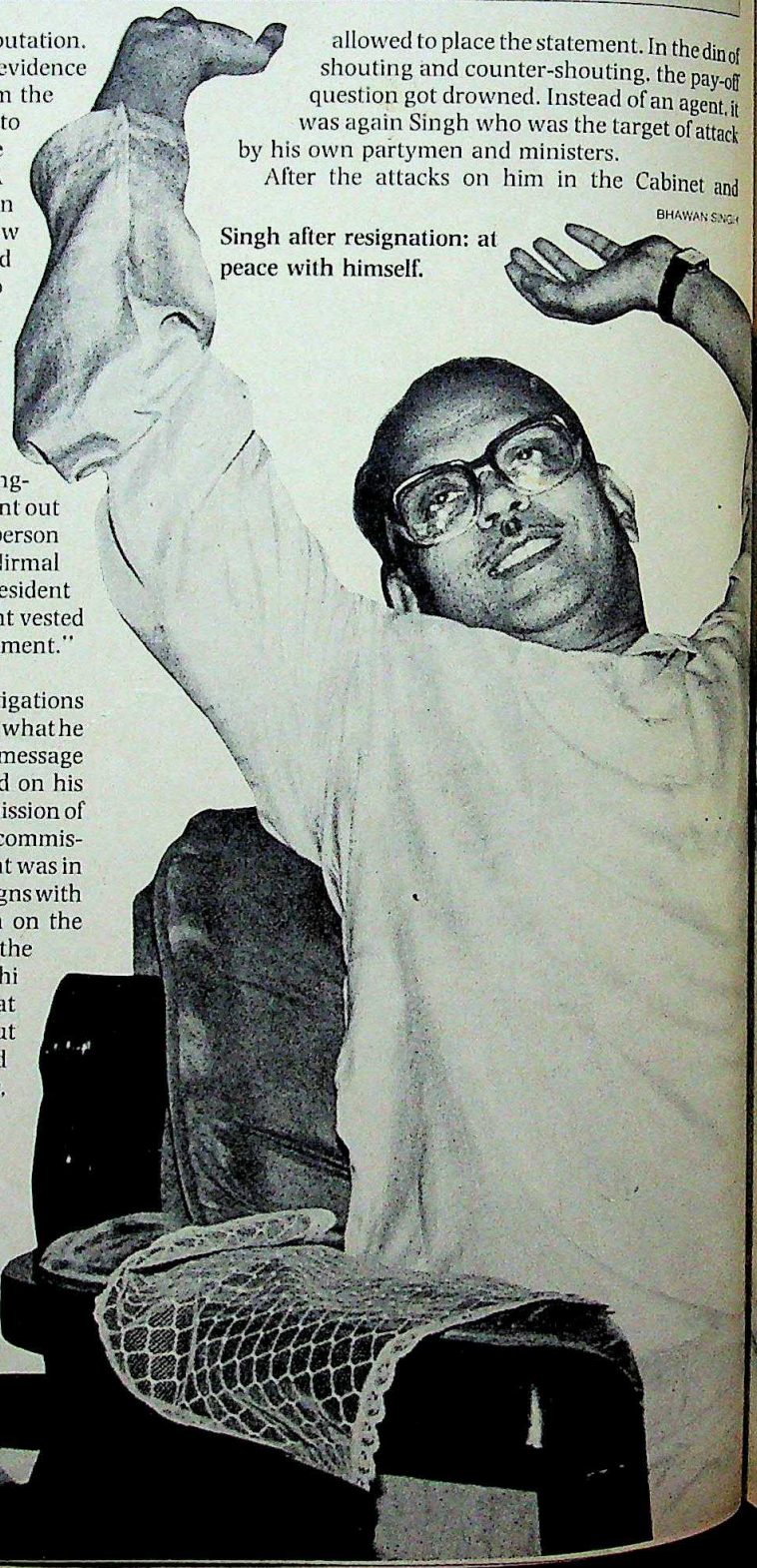
ouster. Every effort was made to tarnish Singh's reputation. Favourable international press clippings were cited as evidence of his being aligned with foreign powers. Sleuths from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) were unleashed to locate objectionable material about Singh, and income tax officials were directed to dig into his tax returns. A journalist who wrote a story in a Hindi magazine on Singh's trust was contacted for documents. A Lucknow newspaper alleged that the file relating to Singh's land holdings mysteriously disappeared after Singh's visit to Allahabad, suggesting that Singh was responsible for removing the files. Finance Ministry officials sacked by Singh were contacted by a senior CBI official and asked to hand over any incriminating information they had against Singh. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh was asked to study decisions taken by Singh during his chief ministership to look for wrong-doings. And it took a senior Uttar Pradesh official to point out the obvious: "It is childish to look into the deeds of a person who was suspicious of his own shadow." Added Nirmal Khatri, a former Uttar Pradesh Youth Congress(I) president and MP: "Those who are attacking V.P. Singh represent vested interests out to demolish the credibility of the Government."

MEANWHILE, Singh continued his own investigations in the Defence Ministry, and soon stumbled on what he saw as a major case of corruption. A telex message from the Indian ambassador in Bonn landed on his desk, saying that an Indian agent had been paid a commission of 7 per cent on defence equipment bought by India. The commission totalled a staggering Rs 30 crore. Since the payment was in violation of the agreement which any defence supplier signs with India—that no agent would be paid any commission on the deal—Singh followed up the matter and finally ordered the inquiry that boomeranged on him—with Rajiv Gandhi saying that there was nothing wrong with the deal, that he had not been informed, and that Singh had short-cut normal procedure. While sources close to Singh maintained that the vital telex from Bonn was sent to the prime minister, Rajiv's confidants say Singh kept the telex to himself.

But no sooner did the announcement appear in the newspapers than it was interpreted as an offensive by Singh against the prime minister and the Government: Legislative history was created the next morning in the Lok Sabha, when a minister tried to prevent another minister from making a statement in the house. As the opposition leaders rose to attack the Government, Singh offered to make a suo moto statement in the house. But Buta Singh asked the chair whether the minister was allowed to place the statement. In the din of shouting and counter-shouting, the pay-off question got drowned. Instead of an agent, it was again Singh who was the target of attack by his own partymen and ministers.

After the attacks on him in the Cabinet and

BHAWAN SINGH



Singh after resignation: at peace with himself.

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"This confirms that there's no place for an honest man in Rajiv's Government and it has many other skeletons."

JAIPAL REDDY
deputy chief, Janata Parliamentary Party

"It's very difficult for a Congressman to be anywhere near the top and remain clean. Mr Singh has made a sensible choice."

L.K. ADVANI
president, Bharatiya Janata Party

Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, the growing criticism in other party circles and the mounting (if orchestrated) media criticism, Singh finally decided to call it a day and quit office. The only comparable case of a politician virtually taking *sanyas* was Jayaprakash Narayan in the 1950s, at a time when many saw him as a rival to Jawaharlal Nehru. Narayan went into political oblivion for a decade-and-a-half.

One section of the ruling party believes that with Singh's ouster from the Government, a possible threat to Rajiv's leadership has disappeared. And certainly, some of the prime minister's friends had been worried at the possible clout of a V.P.Singh-Arun Nehru combine. But when the crunch finally came, not even half a dozen legislators came out openly in Singh's support. Nehru himself refrained from public comment, except when he made an angry remark against those who spoke in Parliament against Singh. Some Congress(I) chief ministers were also perturbed over the Singh episode. Said a chief minister from north India: "Singh's exit will cause a great deal of embarrassment to the party and the Government. It could have been handled more carefully." Nevertheless, Singh was clearly an isolated and beaten man.

Most Congressmen find it difficult to defend his resignation in public. And the Opposition is likely to use this against the party in the Haryana election. For though Rajiv may have emerged stronger within the party, the prime minister will find it difficult to counter the popular belief that Singh was pushed out of office because he was looking into the accounts of both Amitabh Bachchan and his brother Ajitabh, who shifted his residence to Switzerland last year.

Inevitably, there was some pressure on the prime minister to take some action against the Bachchans. Said Arif Mohammed Khan: "A large number of Congress(I) MPs are of the opinion that if the Bachchans are the real friends of the party and the prime minister, they should offer themselves for investigation. If they have nothing to hide, then nothing will come out in the probe as well."

Meanwhile, Singh is unlikely to keep quiet in case he is asked to explain his stand. Having failed to get support among his fellow-MPs, he has already decided to address public meetings, starting in Allahabad, from where Amitabh Bachchan was elected and which has been a sparring ground for the two politicians. Said Arun Nehru: "Our party is committed to take action against economic offenders. I am confident that the Government will take every step necessary to recover the money lying abroad and give the harshest possible punishment to those involved. If any companies or individuals, irrespective of their status or reputation, are involved in this they must be brought to book."

SOME of the party MPs are now planning to meet the prime minister and urge him to attack all tax evaders so that they can neutralise opposition propaganda in the Haryana election. But whether he does or not, V.P. Singh has made his unexpectedly early exit from high office. In the process, he has acquired the reputation of a man who runs away from battle, of a man who is so sensitive to criticism and to his image being tarnished that he bends over backwards to prove his critics wrong. As a result, he seems to lack the malleability and tensile strength that a politician requires to survive the rough and tumble of politicking, the ups and downs that are part of any political career. And the odd thing late last fortnight was that V.P. Singh did not seem to mind. He had determinedly turned his face away from one phase of his life, and was looking ahead bravely to a quieter way of life. Defying all logic and human psychology, V.P. Singh seemed happy. Whether he would stay that way was the question, as his critics continued to be active and gave notice that they would not rest till he was thrown out of the party. Pressed to the wall, and left with no option, Singh might well be forced to strike back.

Rajiv Gandhi, however, has a problem on his hands. Although he quickly allotted K.C. Pant the vacant chair in the cabinet room that Singh had left behind, that still left vacant another chair vacated last month by law minister Asoke Sen, while Tourism Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayed waited for his own resignation to be accepted. No full-time finance minister existed either, nor was there a regular steel and mines minister. If all this indicated the urgent need for a major cabinet reshuffle, it also pointed to the growing shortage of trusted and capable lieutenants whom Rajiv could call upon for their services. Arun Nehru was still out of the reckoning, and only Arjun Singh and Shiv Shanker seemed to have been partially rehabilitated after they were cold-shouldered in a cabinet reshuffle last October. But that was clearly not enough. And if Rajiv Gandhi had shown his political muscle over the last six months by cutting to size ministers who had become too big for their boots, and showing party dissidents where they got off, his next political challenge (after the daunting Haryana election) must be to find or build up a new crop of lieutenants who can shoulder responsibility and make for a broad-based government.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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PRESIDENT-PM

Shadow Boxing

THEY have met four times during the last fortnight. President Zail Singh and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi dined together as well, when Zail Singh played host to members of Parliament from Uttar Pradesh. Two days after that, Rajiv deputed senior ministers, P. Shiv Shanker and Buta Singh, to brief the President on the controversial defence pay-off deal of Rs 30 crore.

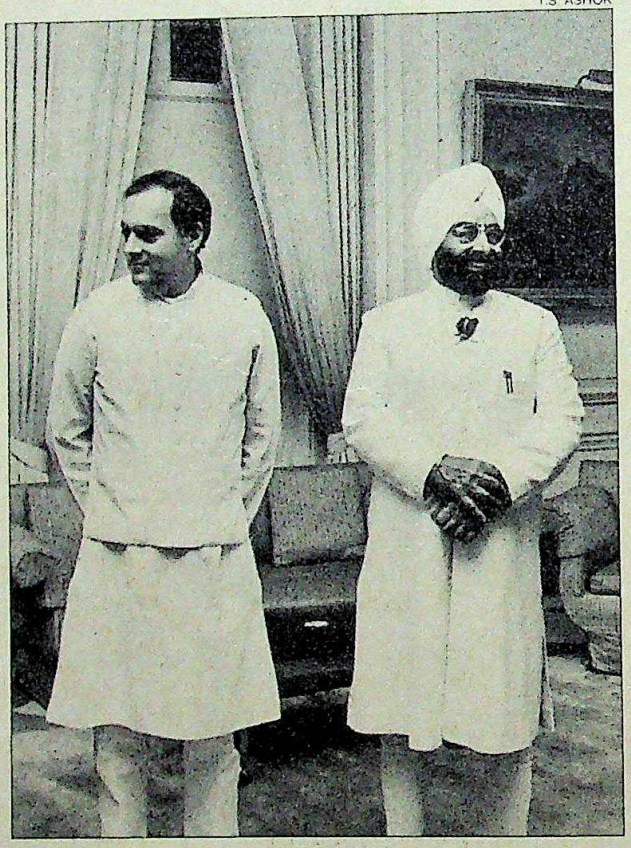
Despite this flurry of activity, however, a meeting of hearts and minds is still to take place. Both the President and the prime minister continue to suspect each other and refuse to yield ground on even well-defined constitutional provisions. And when they met for 45 minutes last fortnight, the question of the presidential right to be informed and briefed on all national and international issues remained unresolved.

The first sequel to the two-hour meeting between the two in late March was in the form of another presidential letter. The prime minister had promised that he would see the President regularly, but it was Zail Singh who wrote to Rajiv asking him for a meeting to take their discussions forward. And in another letter, Zail Singh formally asked the prime minister to officially contradict a defamatory report against him in a Bombay weekly, *Blitz*, which is known for its proximity to South Block. The report implied that the Thakkar Commission had recommended a probe into Zail Singh's role in the events leading to Indira Gandhi's assassination. The President told the prime minister that one of his aides may have 'planted' the report, and demanded that the prime minister either show him the Thakkar report or the Government write to the editor.

Zail Singh had raised the issue during their first meeting, and Rajiv had assured him that he would look into the matter. The letter was despatched when there was no follow-up action. Said a presidential aide: "On the one hand they talk of respect for the President, on the other hand they turn a blind eye when a highly provocative statement against the President appears in the press. On substantive issues Rajiv has not conceded anything to the President."

At the second meeting, Zail Singh once again asserted that he would not surrender his right to be informed. He made one concession when he agreed that it was for the prime minister to decide what was to be sent to the President. But he disagreed with Rajiv's contention that the Government could deny him any information or report even after it was sought by the President in writing. And going beyond the legal technicalities, Zail Singh protested that slander was being spread against him by Rajiv's aides and by journalists briefed by them.

T.S. ASHOK



Rajiv and Zail: playing games

Though Zail Singh did not insist on the Thakkar Commission report being shown to him, he told the prime minister that he would quit office if there was even an indirect reference to him in the report. And he expressed his annoyance to the prime minister that his close proteges were circulating rumours that if the commission's report was sent to Rashtrapati Bhawan it would be leaked to the press. Said a former minister in Zail Singh's cabinet in Punjab: "They want to hold the commission report over the President's head, like a Damocles sword. Why don't they show it to him and ask for his resignation, or stop playing games with the head of state?"

Besides the Thakkar Commission report, Zail Singh also discussed the pending Postal Censorship Bill with Rajiv, and suggested that he withdraw it voluntarily so that he would not have to refer it back to Parliament. Rajiv said he would consider the suggestion.

Following the meeting, however, an attempt was made by a senior party member and Rajiv's aide to mollify the President by indirectly suggesting to him that his daughter could be given a Rajya Sabha seat and even a ministership, while his proteges in the bureaucracy and politics could be rehabilitated. On top of everything else, Zail Singh was offered facilities to live in Delhi after his retirement. Observers interpret this as a move to keep the President in good humour so that he would not create further difficulties over the Thakkar report or the Fairfax issue. But the President angrily reacted to these blandishments and told his aides and some ministers that "some people are trying to belittle the office of the President by floating these rumours. The issue is not personal, and the prime minister realises that no one can insult and humiliate the President." Zail Singh also announced during a visit to Andhra Pradesh that he would not be a candidate again for the presidency.

Meanwhile, the prime minister's camp was worried about presidential moves that seemed to be aimed at trying to gauge the mood of the dissidents in the Congress(I), by meeting V.P. Singh in particular. Apart from a formal meeting they had in March, the President called Singh aside for a 20-minute private discussion after a defence investiture ceremony last fortnight. And from the President's side, it has been made known that Rajiv's trips to Rashtrapati Bhawan are seen as little more than public relations gimmicks. Clearly, the parleying between the two will continue for a while yet.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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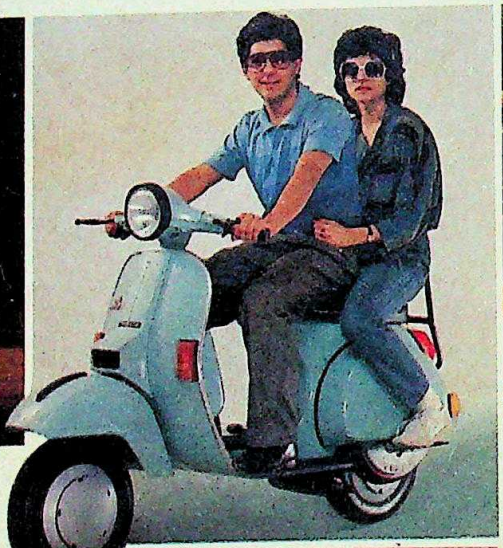

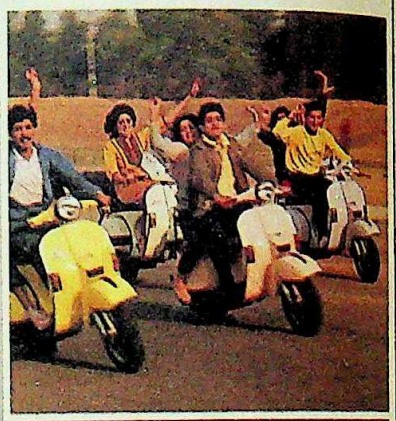

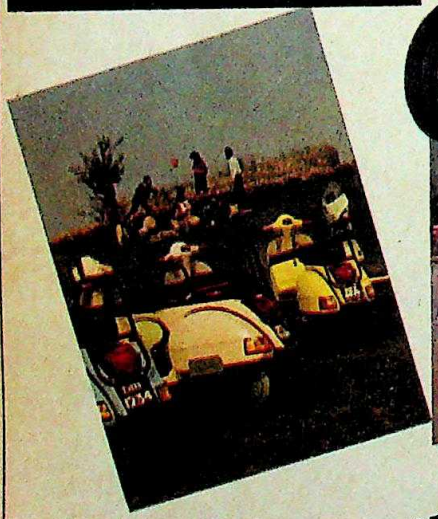

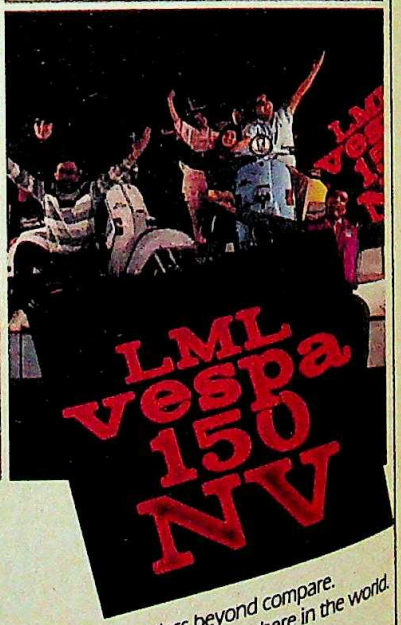

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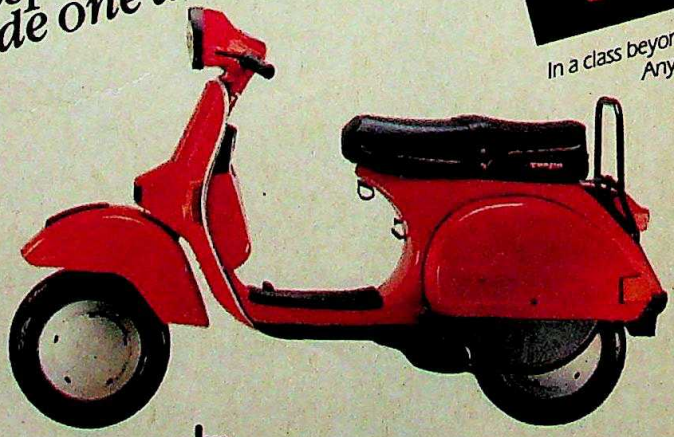

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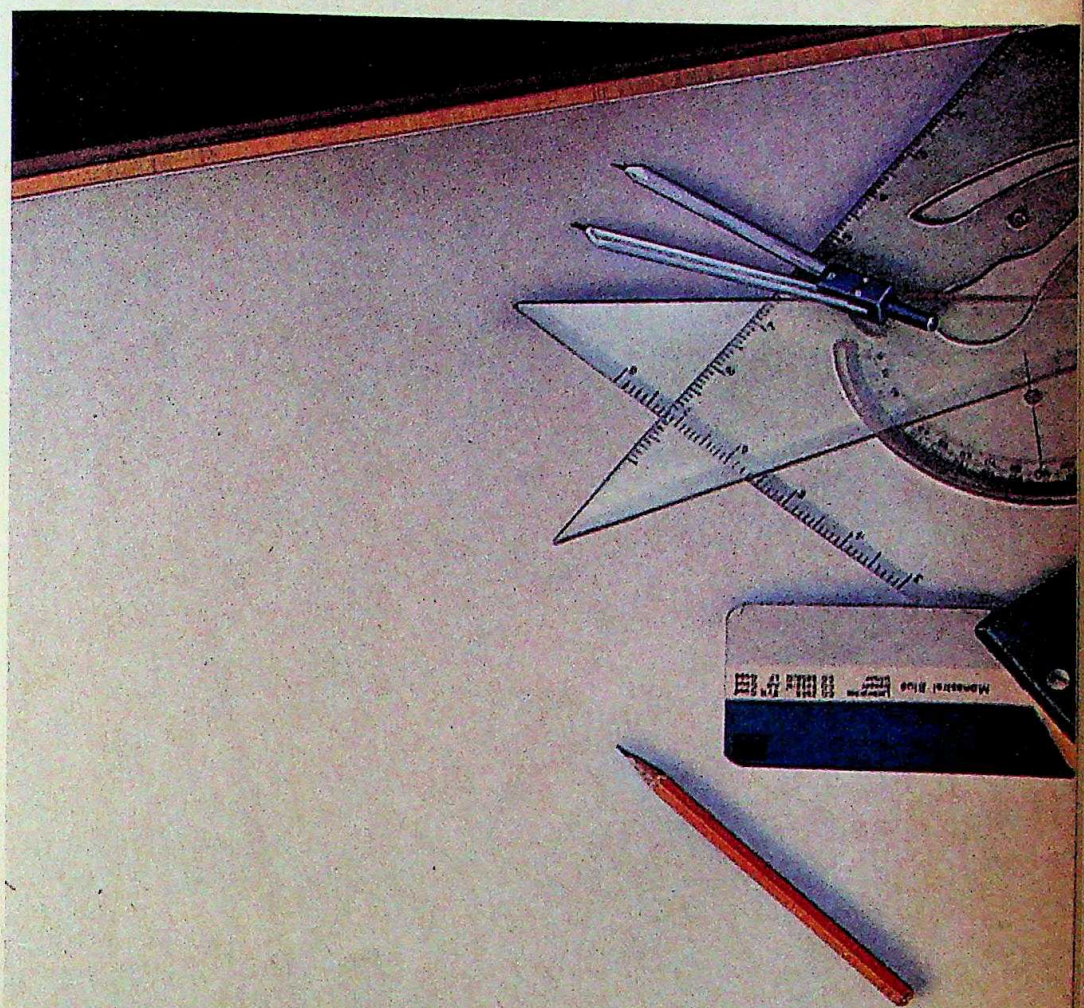

PARRYS

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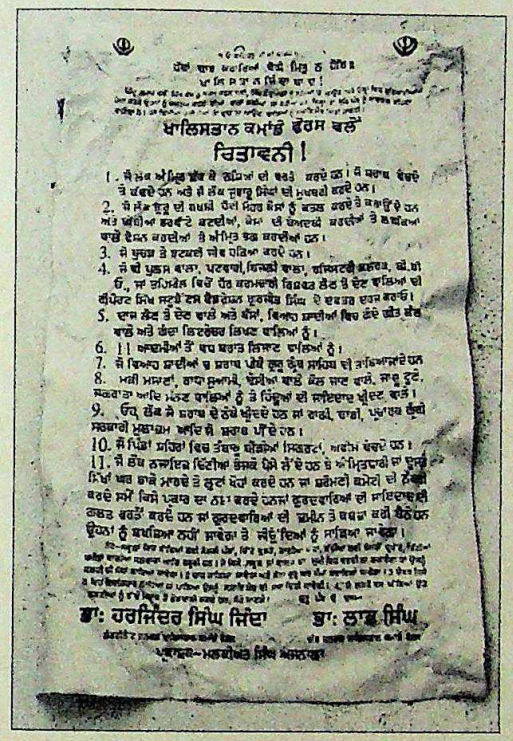
PUNJAB

New Terrorist Targets

THE boys appeared outside a liquor shop in Amritsar just as dusk was falling and shortly after a police patrol had done its round. Nobody paid them much attention and even the attendant in the liquor shop mistook them for customers coming for their evening supplies, till the revolvers were pulled out, and the diatribe began about the terrible consequences that would befall those who persisted in plying trades that were not permitted by the Sikh religion. Before anyone knew it, they had vanished and it was only then that the group of stunned spectators realised that they had just been witness to the beginning of a new phase in Punjab's terrorist campaign: morality through the barrel of a gun. In Kartarpur, two youths with naked swords and saffron turbans walked through the bazaar telling shopkeepers that if they wanted to live, they must find other things to do than sell meat, liquor or cigarettes.

The posters appeared as insidiously as the moralists and if there were those who saw the people who put them up, they were not prepared to talk about it afterwards. The posters, which have appeared simultaneously in the vicinity of liquor and meat shops throughout Punjab's 12 districts, list 13 points that constitute the terrorists new morality. They are signed by 'Lt-General' Harjinder Singh Jinda and 'Chief General' Labh Singh of the Khalistan Commando Force. They begin with a warning that the force will fight to death the 'Hindu samaj' which is trying to mislead Sikh youths. Then follow the 13 commandments: no drinking, no tweezing of eyebrows for girls or snipping of beards for boys, no selling or eating of meat, liquor or cigarettes, no dancing and music at weddings, no *baraats* that include more than 11 people, no participation in Hindu *jagratas* or all-night prayers, no fraternising with Radhasoami Sikhs, no school uniforms that are not saffron, black and white (for girls and boys) and no wearing (or making) of 'fashion clothes'. Those disobeying the commandments, the poster states clearly, will be burned alive and if there are those, it adds, who know of officials who are corrupt or take bribes would they please come to the All-India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) office (Gurjeet faction) in the Golden Temple with their complaints.

For a state whose people are famous for their weakness for the good life and where the good life is considered non-existent without *sharab aur kabab* (liquor and meat) the terrorist campaign has been remarkably successful. In the villages and smaller towns of the state there are few who dare to openly disobey the commandments. Meat shops have closed in rapid succession and the



ਖਾਲਿਸਤਾਨ ਕਮਾਂਡੋ ਫੋਰਸ ਵਲੋਂ

ਚਿਤਾਵਨੀ !

ਭਾ: ਹਰਜਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜਿੰਦਾ ਭਾ: ਲਾਭ ਸਿੰਘ

The poster (left); and a closed liquor shop: burning campaign

RAVI BHANDARI

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only liquor available is illicit hooch.

If the aim was to terrorise people into obedience then the extremists have more than succeeded. Even for a state which has in the past four years got accustomed to terror, a new heightened level is now almost tangible in the atmosphere. In Subhanpur Chowk, a small village on the G.T. Road, near Kartarpur, the liquor shop was open but the attendant had vanished. People said he had gone to the next village and had not been seen for a few days, ever since two liquor kiosks had been burned in the nearby village of Khilchian. When asked what they thought about the terrorists enforced morality, the group of youths (both Sikh and Hindu) fell silent and some began to move away. Finally a Sikh youth who refused to identify himself said: "If we say anything, can you guarantee that you will protect us when the boys come back? First you protect us then we will talk." Asked if the village sarpanch would be prepared to talk, the same youth replied that he was a Hindu and was even less likely to talk since he was afraid for his life. In other villages, the reaction was almost exactly the same. Some people were prepared to

SUNIL DUTT

Journey's End

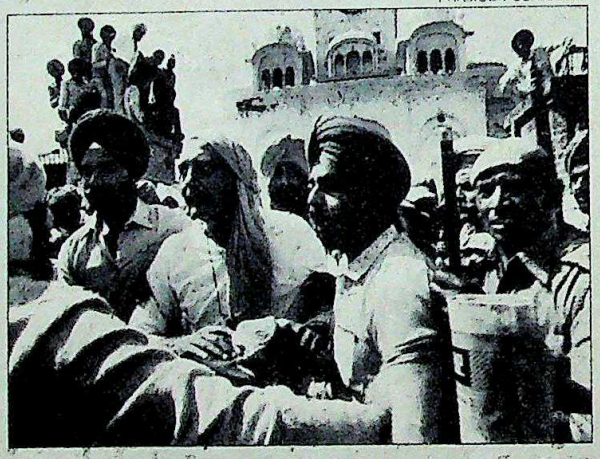
THE padyatra had shades of Bombay cinema right from the start. There was the actor himself setting out on a mission which, rather like the film *Guide*, could end up with his life on the line. Then there was his pretty young daughter, marching bravely in front with the Indian flag held aloft. And there were the motley collection of youths from Bombay, who spouted high-flown dialogue.

It was, in other words, easy to be cynical about the elements of melodrama in Sunil Dutt's Mahashanti Padyatra—until it crossed the border into Punjab last fortnight. It was then that the melodrama actually began. But this time, it had become real. Suddenly, the emotions stopped being celluloid and the 2,000 km of walking seemed to become purposeful and even necessary. Despite the sincerity of his endeavour, even Dutt could not have been prepared for the massive outpouring of emotion that greeted him once he crossed the border into Punjab.

Dutt was welcomed like a long-awaited messiah who could magically bring peace wherever he trod. Thousands lined the route and showered him with rose petals and garlands chanting, with the padyatris, "Bharat mata ki jai" and "jo boley so nihal", in one breath. Women fell weeping at his feet crying, *shanti, humko shanti chahiye* (we want peace), and held out their babies to be blessed. Without question, Dutt had touched a chord buried deep in the state's collective psyche—everywhere, there were as many Sikhs as Hindus—and this had resulted in a catharsis. Dutt's padyatra is the closest anyone has come to doing a *vox populi* in Punjab since the 1985 elections. And if the reactions are anything to go by, there is little doubt that everyone wants peace.

Dutt makes it a point to emphasise that he is not a politician. His padyatra is really his penance to purify himself. Talking to INDIA TODAY, while sheltering from rain in the shadow of a tubewell shed en route to Amritsar, he talked only of what he had learnt during the journey and how moved he had been by the response of the people. Said Dutt: "I am an actor. We are emotional people, perhaps more so than other people, and I cannot tell you what I felt when an old Sikh woman—she was 115 years old—told me she had waited two hours by the roadside to try and see me. I nearly wept when she hugged me and said that *Wahe Guru* would listen to me because I had walked so far for peace."

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Sunil Dutt in Golden Temple

He explained that he had started his journey because he had read about a disabled girl who had been killed by terrorists. The incident had shocked him so deeply that he felt the need to do something himself: to find out what had gone so drastically wrong with his home state. After meeting several Sikhs, he felt that somewhere along the line their honour had been profoundly hurt and they were unable to deal with the fact that people treated them with suspicion and questioned their patriotism. "This is very wrong and I cannot understand it," said Dutt. "But I also cannot understand the hatred among Hindus and Sikhs. How can Punjab forget that Guru Govind Singh, whose father and sons were killed by the Moghuls, never once uttered a word against Islam? His fight was only against the suppression of the freedom of thought."

Dutt had just then received news that the thousands of policemen who had protected him from the moment he entered Punjab, would be removed and he would enter the Golden Temple on his own. But this, he said, did not worry him. This was the most important mission of his life. So, no matter what dangers it entailed, it would not deter him from entering the Golden Temple.

All along the journey, especially on days when the blisters on his feet had hurt and the going had been rough, it was the image of the Golden Temple and the desire to pray there for peace that had goaded him to carry on. Last week, Dutt's incredible 78-day odyssey ended emotionally when he prayed at the Harminder Sahib and held discussions with the head priests and the militants. And though the discussions yielded little of note, Dutt had made his point. His entry into the Temple was greeted by tumultuous crowds joined together for that moment in a common desire for peace.

—TAVLEEN SINGH

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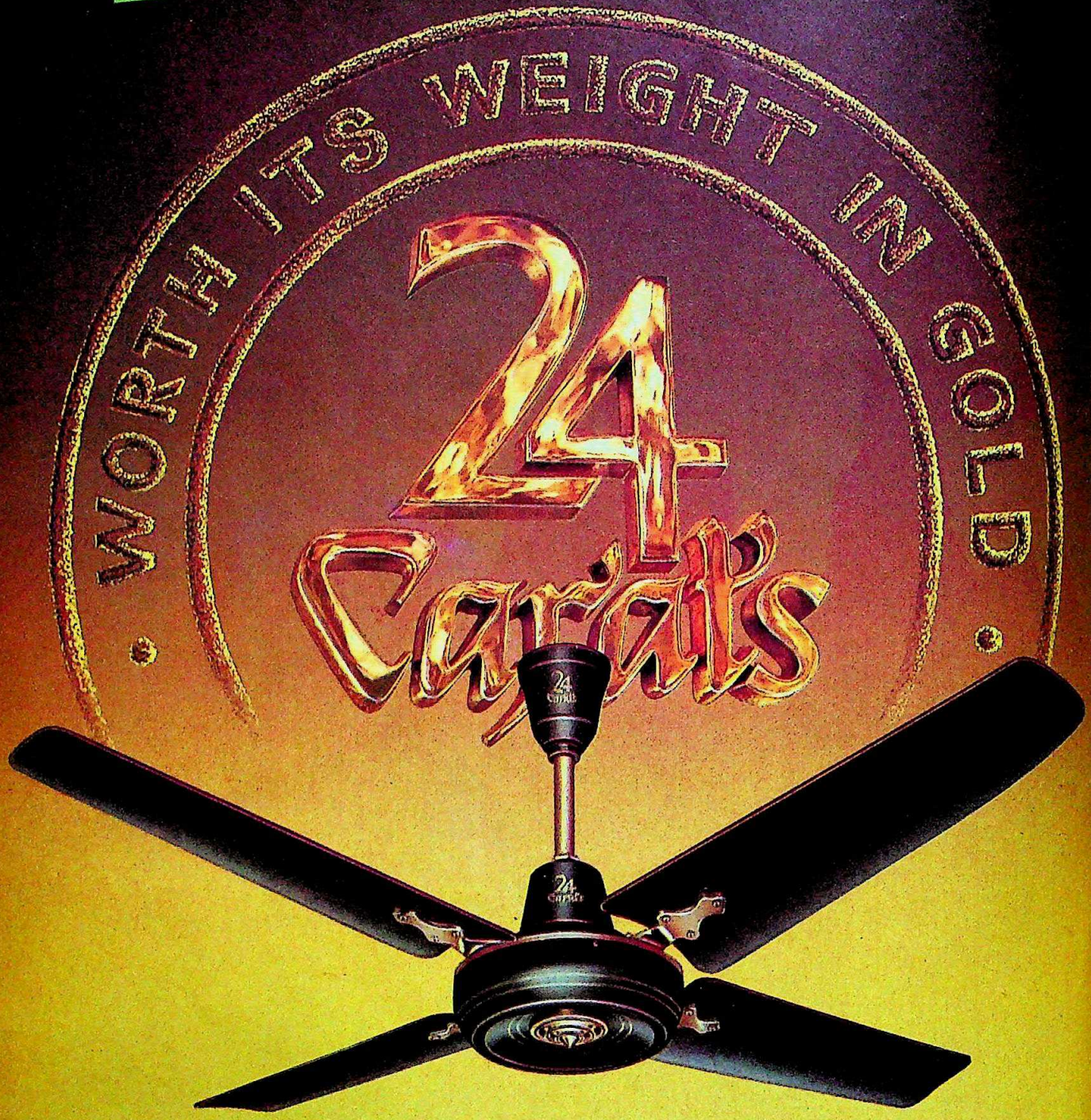

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express support but they appeared to do so out of fear rather than conviction, and everyone begged not to be identified.

Between Amritsar and Phagwara, a random survey revealed that there was virtually not a single meat or cigarette shop open anywhere along the G.T. Road. In Khilchian, a small roadside restaurant that used to be quite well-known for its non-vegetarian menu denied that it had ever served meat or chicken. The restaurant was situated directly behind the spot where two liquor kiosks were burned, but the owner denied having seen anyone or anything. "They came after 11 p.m. when the whole village was asleep," he said.

In the cities, shops selling liquor and meat have remained open, but this was because they had no choice. Said a butcher in Amritsar: "Only about 5 per cent of those who own meatshops in the city can afford to survive for more than 10 days without opening shop. Most people live on what they earn daily, so they face the choice of death by a bullet or death from hunger."

Since the extremists timed their campaign to begin immediately after liquor licences were auctioned, even the more prosperous liquor shop owners face the same sort of choice. A rich businessman who owns 12 liquor shops in Amritsar said that he had to pay the Government over Rs 12 lakh a month for the licence and in excise duty. Therefore, he could not afford to close. He admitted that if the terrorist call had come before the auction of licences he may have thought twice about taking on so many shops.

In the cities, shop owners are more vocal about their anger against the enforced new morality, and surprisingly, the most volatile reactions come from the Sikhs. Said the owner of a meatshop: "Even Guru Govind Singh didn't tell us to stop eating meat, so who are these boys to decide what we should do? Their whole aim is to make money, everybody knows that those who can afford to are paying them lakhs of rupees just to be allowed to stay open."

Most shopkeepers are naturally very bitter about their livelihood being threatened. Their bitterness is directed mainly against the police and the Government although they are unable to come up with any suggestions about what can be done. In Amritsar, over a hundred owners of affected shops met SSP Izhar Alam and suggested measures like deploying gunmen outside all endangered shops and increasing patrolling in the city. Alam pointed out that there were already 42 mobile patrols in the city at any given time and that it was simply not possible to provide armed guards at every shop. The only solace he could offer was that licences would be provided at double speed to those shopkeepers who wanted to keep their own weapons in their shops. Said Alam: "Our biggest problem all along has been that people refuse to give evidence against the terrorists. We have even come across situations when sons refuse to identify their fathers' killers."

Another problem, according to A.S. Siddiqui, additional deputy inspector general of police in Jalandhar is the fact that the campaign does have widespread support in the villages. "Women seem to be pleased with it," he said, "and there is also the fact that the AISSF has been on a massive recruitment drive through their *amrit prachar* (baptism into Sikhism) meetings. There is one meeting a day in the state, and after every meeting an estimated 200 youths pledge themselves to the service of the panth."

There is evidence of the recruitment drive even at the AISSF (Gurjeet) office which these days is crowded all day with youths seeking to become members. There is also an air of smugness. As originators of the morality campaign (this group is closely allied to the Khalistan Commando Force), they are justifiably pleased with its success. Nirmal Singh, an AISSF office-bearer, said that the campaign was popular because it was right. "No avatars, Hindu or Sikh, ever did these things. To eat meat is the job of *rakshasas* (demons) and we don't want people to become *rakshasas*."

The Punjab Government has responded to the campaign by arresting nearly 500 AISSF activists. However, with the new recruitment drive, the arrests will make very little difference since there are thousands of new recruits all eager to win their colours in the service of the panth. Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala has condemned the campaign in the strongest terms saying: "They are talking about meat and liquor but they have no qualms in quenching their thirst with human blood. What they are trying to do now is to distort a very progressive (Sikh) religion, and they will not be allowed to do so."

However, there are not too many bright ideas around on how this can be done. The Akali Dal plans to counter the move through their own propaganda. The Amritsar police have already made a beginning by introducing to the press youths who claim to have witnessed instances of torture and sexual perversion in the Golden Temple. Whether this eventually succeeds or not, it will seriously affect the state's economy if liquor shops continue to lose business since the state collects over Rs 200 crore a year from the trade.

—TAVLEEN SINGH in Amritsar

RAVI BHANDARI

A closed meat shop

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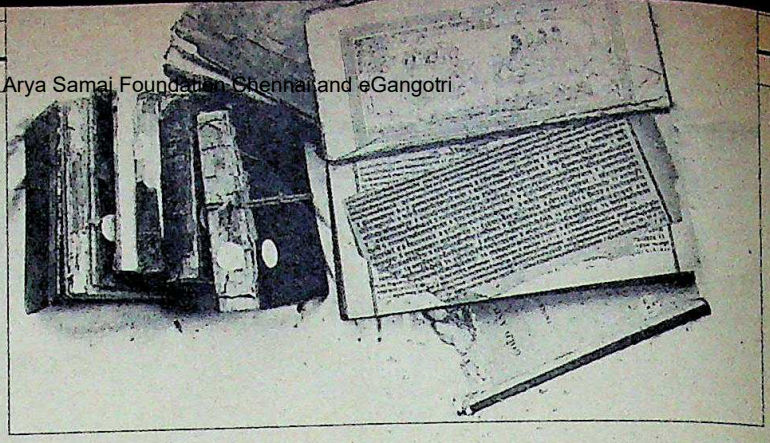
HARDAYAL MUNICIPAL LIBRARY

History Lesson



A tussle for control, a squeeze on funds, procedural wrangling and petty controversy—a sure-fire recipe for the death of a 100-year-old library, a treasure-house of thousands of invaluable manuscripts, some dating back to the 17th century.

The politicking over Hardayal Municipal Public Library, the oldest in Delhi, is creating a flutter in literary circles as it houses some of the rarest texts in Asia, including: *History of the World* in five volumes by Sir Walter Raleigh (1676), *A Voyage Around the World* by John Francis Genielli Careri (1705), *Tezkereh Al Vakiat* (Private Memoirs of Mughal Emperor Humayun) by Charles Stewart (1828), *Travels in India* by William Hodges (1794), *Rigveda Sanhita* by H.H. Wilson (1854), *Woman in India* by Mary Frances Billington (1895). The library also houses rare Hindi texts like *Satik Mahabharatha* (1879), *Satyartha Prakash* by Dayanand Saraswati (1881), and thousands of Sanskrit, Prakrit, Urdu, Arabic and Persian texts, as also historic paintings and sketches of 19th century India.

Secretary Seth and Mayor Saathi

The politicking over Hardayal Municipal Public Library, the oldest in Delhi, is creating a flutter in literary circles as it endangers some of the rarest texts—some dating back to the 17th century—in Asia.

And today it is slowly crumbling under the dust raised by the office of the mayor of Delhi in a tirade against the secretary of the library's managing committee. Mayor Mahinder Singh Saathi, as ex-officio president of the library, has directed the Secretary, Dr R.K. Seth, not to hold any more meetings of the managing committee and has held in abeyance allocation of grants to the library—already a pittance—for 1987-88. The library, which runs entirely on grants from the municipal corporation, is yet to receive any intimation of the funds, even for the first quarter, April-June.

The secretary, in turn, has stopped virtually all expenditure on the library besides payment of salaries since the last week of March. In an explanatory letter to the mayor, Seth wrote that this had been done "to avoid any further scope of misunderstanding by any inadvertent action on our part". As a result, even day-to-day work like payments for periodicals, binding, repair, photocopying and fumigation has been affected.

The dispute is petty enough, and the mayor's main grouse is that the secretary has not been inviting the six nominees of the municipal corporation on the library managing committee for its meetings. Seth says it is up to the mayor to call a committee meeting. Saathi has also wanted to have his way in appointments, but Seth has resisted. And in recent months the mayor has been blocking grants on minor issues, ordering appointments, summarily summoning records, membership lists, rulebooks, alleging neglect without elaboration and springing surprise audits. The torrent of notes from his office to the library have created a wave of terror among the library staff.

Before the conflict erupted, Seth had been doing well for the library, whose membership grew to over 2,100 from just 184 in 1970, and the collection of books from 42,000 to 1,32,000. Seth and his team also screened and reclassified each and every book to begin a separate Rare Books Section, which could then be taken special care of. Nearly 12,000 rare texts were discovered—dated 1900 and before—lying neglected in various corners of the library.

But even before Saathi began withholding grants, the funds for the library had been inadequate. The annual grant was Rs 6 lakh six years ago, and today it is about Rs 7 lakh—unchanged for the last three years. The salary bill alone works out to Rs 6,76,500 annually, after the Fourth Pay Commission report. So the library has little left for preservation after routine payments for periodicals and establishment expenditure. A detailed demand note presented by the library seeks Rs 12 lakh. But in the absence of such a sanction, Seth says they should at least be provided project-specific grants for preservation.

Despite the financial squeeze, a thymol chamber was created to fumigate the rare books. Two special mobile steel storage systems were procured for dust-proof storage. But thymol can only check fungal infestation. To prevent decay, the manuscripts need chemical processing or lamination and binding. Microfilming and photocopying would preserve the matter—although not the original text. But they do not have the money for any of this.

In a letter to the mayor last year, Seth wrote: "Hardayal Library is in urgent need of additional financial resources. The non-availability of additional resources will not only cripple the institution, its valuable, rare books section—an extraordinary collection in India—

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may also be lost in due course and that shall be a colossal national loss."

But the mayor has remained unmoved. Seth says he is willing to compromise for the sake of the library and has again requested the mayor to fix a time for a meeting of the committee and to provide the names of the nominees of the municipal corporation. "I have no objections to the mayor taking interest in the library. After all he is my president. I am only concerned about the interest of the library," he says.

But the mayor says he is trying to work out plans for either the library's take-over by the corporation or tighter control. Going by the track record of other corporation libraries, this could well mean the final nail in the coffin.

—TANIA MIDHA

AUROVILLE

Clean Chit

THE Central Government's controversial take-over of the international township of Auroville near Pondicherry is starting to resemble a ride on a hungry tiger. Last month, P. Prabhashankar, the chief judicial magistrate of Pondicherry, acquitted the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS) of the charge-sheet filed against it of misappropriation of Auroville funds by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). This was the third criminal case filed by the CBI regarding SAS administration of Auroville that had been dismissed by the lower courts.

The CBI and Central Government had a vested interest in proving the cases against the SAS. The Centre had taken over Auroville—managed by the SAS—through the Auroville (Emergency Provisions) ordinance on November 10, 1980 which became an act a month later, on the grounds that funds meant for Auroville were being diverted for other purposes. The take-over was initially for two years, but was later extended to November 10, 1987. Though the Supreme Court upheld the act, CBI and the Centre were honour-bound to prove that the stated grounds for the take-over were at least superficially tenable.

The judgement delivered last month on the CBI's criminal complaint that the society had no account of some Rs 18.74 lakh of Auroville money—indirectly suggesting that the money had been misappropriated—squarely indicted the CBI and fell just short of calling the criminal prosecution a motivated witch-hunt. Delivering the judgement, Prabhashankar declared: "The irresistible conclusion is that the prosecution did not want to look into the accounts since the scrutiny would prove that money is properly accounted for. I am in perfect agreement with the contention raised on behalf of the defence that the prosecution in a truncated manner refused to take into account all the accounts submitted by the accused."

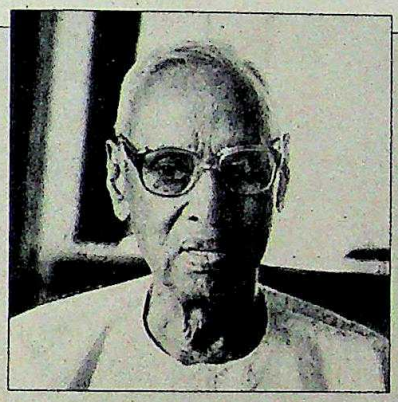
Elated by the judgement, Ajay Virmani, the young SAS activist who has been handling the court battles on behalf of the society, commented: "The judgement knocks the bottom out of the Auroville (Emergency Provisions) Act of 1980." The damage to the CBI's reputation was even more damning because it came quick on the heels of the verdict made last year on another case which had cleared the society of a charge-sheet filed by the intelligence bureau for wrong utilisation of a Rs 2-lakh donation the Orissa Government had made to Auroville. Earlier, the first CBI case had also been dismissed as the judge did not find even "a whisper of evidence" to suggest that SAS had made a double payment for a piece of land in Auroville.

The judgements have cast a serious slur on the credibility of the Government's taking over of Auroville. The CBI has filed appeals in the Madras and Orissa high courts against the earlier two lower court judgements. While the Orissa High Court is yet to admit the appeal, the Madras High Court has. Meanwhile, there are hopes of a possible patchwork agreement between the society and the Aurovillians. This augurs well for the future of the 2,200-acre project after the Central Government possibly steps aside in November this year. "The Government has not announced that it is going to withdraw from Auroville in November, but there is nothing to suggest that the Government is not going to withdraw," says L.P. Nigam, who has been appointed administrator by the Central Government. The society has suggested to the Government that the project could be managed by an independent committee of representatives selected from amongst residents of Auroville, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the Central Government and SAS. Aurovillians are not averse to the idea. Alain Bernard, one of the 12 members of the Auroville Executive Council, says: "We have no objection to working with the society if the members of the society also live and work in Auroville with us."

As things stand, it looks as if the Government, which had intervened in favour of the Aurovillians and against the society, might ultimately be left in the lurch. As K.K. Tewari, member of the Auroville Executive Council, said: "It is now for the Government to decide which way to dismount the tiger."

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

Photographs by SHYAM TEKWANI



"Though it has not said so, there is nothing to suggest that the Government is not going to withdraw from Auroville in November."

L.P. NIGAM
Central Government administrator

"The judgement (aquitting the SAS of charges of misappropriation of funds) knocks the bottom out of the Auroville Act of 1980."

AJAY VIRMANI
SAS activist

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TAMIL NADU

Arresting Affair

IT was a caricature of Tamil Nadu politics. The controversial arrest, detention and subsequent release of S. Balasubramanian, editor of *Ananda Vikatan*, a popular Tamil weekly, last fortnight marked yet another messy episode in the battle between the press and the Government headed by M.G. Ramachandran.

The furore raised by the latest sequel has escalated the battle to a higher plane. A cartoon, of a couple of villainous-looking individuals, published on the cover of the 59-year-old weekly (circulation: 2.5 lakh), incurred the wrath of the state Assembly. It did not show a specific state Assembly, but the people's representatives were not amused. The provocative caption stated that the one who looks like a pickpocket is a member of the legislative assembly and the one like a dacoit is a minister.

Assembly Speaker Paul Hector Pandian lost no time in taking cognizance of a protest lodged by a Congress(I) member and directed Balasubramanian to publish an apology. But when the latter refused to do so, the leader of the Legislative Assembly, Finance Minister V.R. Nedunchezhiyan, moved a resolution to sentence the editor to three months' rigorous imprisonment. It was passed, thanks to the majority of the AIADMK in the Assembly.

Within three hours, Balasubramanian, 51, was picked up from his farm-house in the city suburbs and lodged in Madras central prison as a 'B' class prisoner. But what the Government was not ready for was the ferocious uproar by the fourth estate. For the first time in the history of Tamil journalism, the entire press corps boycotted the Assembly for a day. The editor of the satirical *Tughlaq*, Cho Ramaswamy, called it: "a cowardly act of blackmailing the press". Madras Reporters Guild Secretary N.V. Sankaran charged: "If what was published in a lighter vein could be viewed as offensive by the speaker, serious and concerned reporting could be considered worthy of the death sentence."

Political parties voiced equally strong denunciations. Said DMK leader K. Manoharan: "Magazines like *Punch*, periodicals and newspapers poke fun at ministers, legislators and politicians, but they are taken in the right spirit by the subjects of the cartoons. But this harsh sentence constitutes a grave violation of freedom of the press."

Even the Congress(I), whose legislator had sparked off the row, felt it necessary to redress the party's image. Explained TNCC(I) President M. Palaniyandi: "Our party did not realise that the speaker would come down so heavily on the editor." Even Union Minister of State for Home P. Chidambaram, a reader of the magazine for 25 years, tended his apologies on the editor's behalf.

The next day Pandian announced that the chief minister, in all his magnanimity, had requested the house to reconsider its sentence. And in deference to MGR's request, he was using his residuary powers to free the editor. But it was only too obvious that it was not MGR's magnanimity but the public outcry which brought about the volte face. There was also little doubt as to who orchestrated the arrest. Said Cho Ramaswamy: "In this case the real culprit is MGR himself and not Pandian."

Balasubramanian was not exactly MGR's favourite editor. He had incurred MGR's displeasure earlier by publishing the name of DMK leader K. Karunanidhi twice on an invitation card for the 1980 golden jubilee celebrations of the magazine while MGR's name figured only once. To display his ire, MGR had not shown up at the function which he was scheduled to inaugurate. He had also not taken kindly to criticism aired against him in the magazine's columns.

The Balasubramanian episode is, however, seen as yet another manifestation of the MGR Government's attempts to browbeat the media. Earlier, it had earned notoriety for denying government advertisements to publications which did not toe the leader's line. In 1980, MGR, in an imperious gesture, forbade officials from talking to the press. Two years ago, the assembly speaker sentenced the editor of the Tamil trader's journal *Vaniga Otrumai*, A.M. Paulraj, to two weeks' simple imprisonment.

The list is long and damning. Even now, the privileges committee of the Assembly is said to be considering motions of breach of privilege against *Tughlaq* and a Madras fortnightly, *Aside*, for their daring expose of the goings-on in the Assembly, the calibre of MLAs, and shady happenings in the MLAs' hostel in central Madras.

The latest episode has, however, rattled the normally docile Tamil press, which is now talking about codifying legislators' privileges. Says Balasubramanian: "Considering the extent of illiteracy in our country, vesting so much immunity in our assemblies is dangerous." Adds Ramaswamy: "We should breach the privileges of the legislature as long as they threaten the freedom of the press." With the press in a fighting mood and the MGR Government's record of media-baiting, this latest affair is obviously not the final round.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

MGR (left); Balasubramanian; and disputed cartoon: unsavoury episode

BHAWAN SINGH

SHYAM TEKWANI

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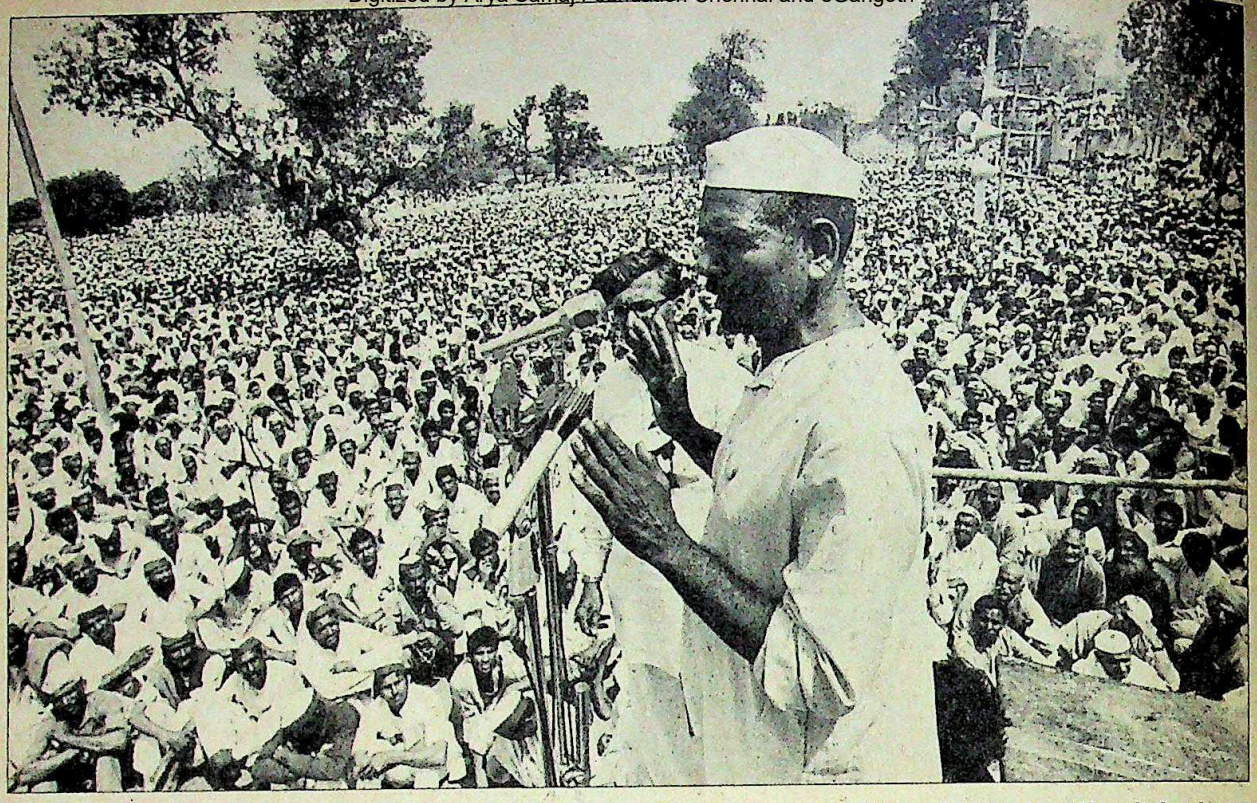
BHAWAN SINGH



Mahendra Singh at Shamli: battle cry

UTTAR PRADESH

Show of Strength

CHOWDHRY Mahendra Singh Tikait, 52, is the perfect portrait of a Jat leader. A proud, fearless man, who stands over six feet tall in his sandals, his family has ruled over 84 villages in Muzaffarnagar district in western Uttar Pradesh for generations. By last fortnight, he was standing even taller—at the head of a snowballing farmers' agitation that poses a major threat to the chief ministership of Bir Bahadur Singh.

"We will not allow the people sitting in Lucknow or Delhi to decide our fate. We will do it ourselves." With that battle cry, Mahendra Singh and his Jat brethren have launched a protest movement that has already seen three lives lost—two farmers and one police constable.

That the farmers were in no mood for compromise was only too evident. The agitation was originally launched in protest against the hike in power tariffs from Rs 22.50 per horsepower (hp) per month to Rs 30 per hp per month. But even a downward revision ordered by the state Government (from Rs 30 to Rs 25) failed to cool their militant mood. Last fortnight, in a massive show of strength, over three lakh Jats poured into Shamli in Muzaffarnagar district at the call of Mahendra Singh, who has emerged as the most powerful Jat leader in western Uttar Pradesh.

The meeting, described as the largest-ever by officials, had ominous overtones for the state Government—and confirmed the kind of power Mahendra Singh is capable of wielding. Says Major Ishwar Dayal Tyagi, former president of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), the organisation under whose banner the agitation has been launched: "His orders are gospel for the people here. If he says that we have to fight till death, the people here will do it."

A further measure of his influence is the fact that Mahendra Singh spurned offers of support from the political elements that profess to control the Jat vote. Lok Dal (A) leader Ajit Singh and Lok Dal (B) leader Virendra Verma, who approached Mahendra Singh with offers of help, were bluntly told to first resign from their respective parties and then join hands. Offers of monetary help were also refused.

Significantly, the farmers' agitation has gathered momentum only after Mahendra Singh stepped into the picture on January 14 this year—the day when chowdhries (heads) of 18 Jat clans, representing some 40 lakh Jats in the eight western districts of Uttar Pradesh and some areas of Haryana met. The unique 'panchayat' was held in Sisauli village, Mahendra Singh's home town, some 17 km from Shamli. There it was decided to fight for their rights.

The first major confrontation came on March 1 when, during a dharna at Shamli, country-made bombs were hurled on the police and shots fired. The violence resulted in three casualties. Jat farmers then turned Sisauli into a fortress. A 24-hour patrol was mounted by the farmers armed with lathis and spears, who ran a parallel administration for almost a week. The sight of policemen was greeted by the blowing of 'ransinghas' (war bugles).

But what gave legitimacy to the movement was the April 1 gherao of Shamli sub-station. The town was inundated by overloaded tractor-trolleys flying the green-bordered white flags of the

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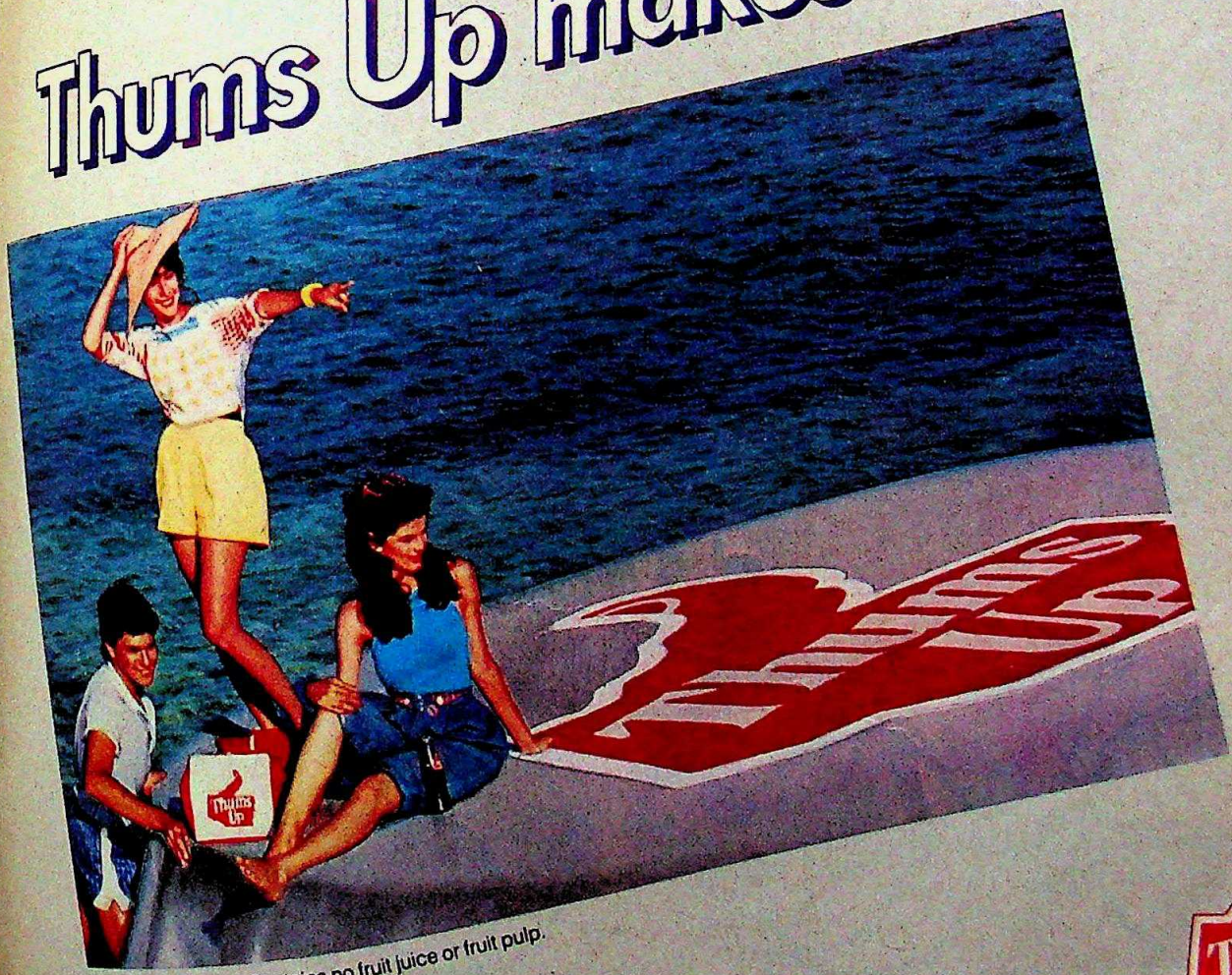

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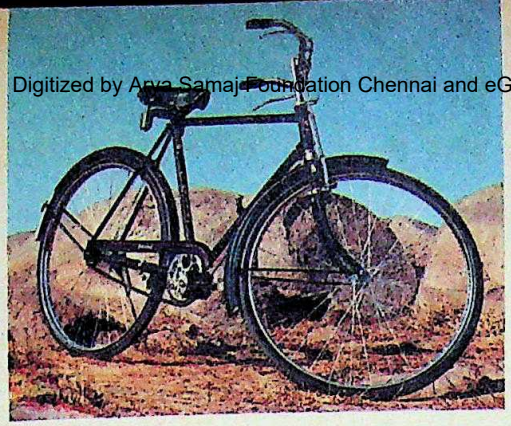

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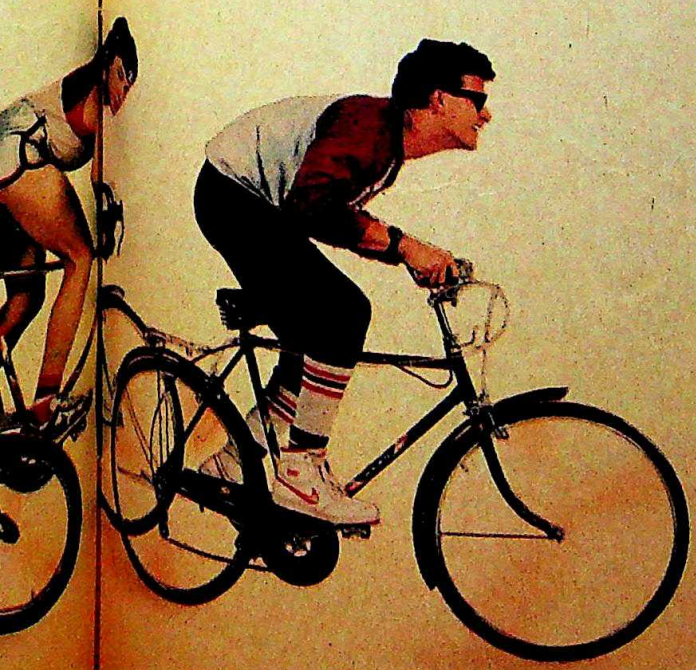

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BKU. All vehicular traffic along the town's border was blocked by volunteers wearing green caps. And as the Chowdhry, who walked on foot most of the 17-km from his village, arrived there was thundering ovation. His earthy stance seemed to strike a common chord. He would come on the stage whenever he felt like and say *ab meri baat suno...tali mat peeto, baat suno* (Now listen to me. Don't clap, just listen). And the crowd would listen with rapt attention.

Their collective grouse is the power situation. Stated Atar Singh, a small farmer of Morana village in Muzaffarnagar: "We have been paying a flat rent for years without getting power for the money we pay." All the farmers complained that power is not available for more than two to four hours even during the peak irrigation periods or threshing time, though industries seem to be getting power on a continuous basis. Said an agitated Sukhvir Singh Barot, a Jat chowdhry: "The industries keep running round the clock but our tubewells remain dry for most days."

Even Uttar Pradesh State Electricity Board (UPSEB) officials in the state capital concede that much of the power meant for the rural areas is being illegally diverted into the industrial sector. According to them, however, the hike in power tariff had become imperative as the per unit cost of supplying power to rural areas had gone up from 63.80 paise in 1982 to 83 paise today. The farmers, in contrast, were paying only 23 paise per unit (at the rate of Rs 22.50 per hp per month)—a difference of 60 paise per unit. Even with the hike to Rs 30 per hp per month the farmers would have been paying a meagre 33 paise per unit—a loss of 50 paise per unit for every unit consumed in rural areas. Now with the Government having moderated it to Rs 25 per hp per month UPSEB's hopes of tiding over part of its losses have been further eroded. As Energy Minister Sunil Shastri stated: "The revision of the rates is going to cause a loss of Rs 25 crore per year to the UPSEB."

But it has already caused the Government considerable loss—of face. The farmers are obviously in no mood to let up on their agitation, which shows signs of getting even more violent. So far, the threshing season has prevented them from coming out in full force. But if Mahendra Singh were to decide to go on the warpath, even that preventive would no longer be available to save the state Government from more embarrassment.

—DILIP AWASTHI

LAST WORD/RAJINDER PURI

The Dynasty

THESE days the real money for writers is in television serials. So I went to work and produced what I thought was a masterpiece. Armed with the manuscript I called on Doordarshan and met with the director. "You realise of course," he said with a worried voice, "Doordarshan is very particular about quality! We entertain only high, realistic scripts."

"That's exactly what I've brought," I said confidently. I've called it *Dynasty*.

"The hero is a former airline pilot who belongs to the most distinguished political family in the country and becomes PM!"

"Oh," he said with disappointment. "One of those dull political stories, is it?"

"Not a bit," I said quickly. "It has lots of glamour. You see, the hero is married to an Italian girl whose family lives in Europe. And the President of the country is an old family friend! In spite of that, the prime minister and the President fall out. Meanwhile the hero appoints a finance minister who is zealous about uprooting corruption!"

The director stifled a yawn. "What next?" he said.

"Well, the President and the prime minister start a fierce constitutional crisis, at the same time the finance minister falls out with the PM because he hires a foreign detective to look into the accounts of corrupt businessmen."

"I don't get it," he said with a puzzled voice. "What has the constitutional crisis got to do with corrupt businessmen?"

"There are two sub-plots going on simultaneously," I said impatiently. "The foreign agency stumbles on the misdeeds of a famous film star who is a close family friend of the prime minister and has also entered politics to help his friend."

"Wait," he exclaimed. "To which sub-plot does the film star belong—to sub-plot one or two?"

"Neither," I said irritably. "This is sub-plot three of the same story. However, the prime minister takes advantage of a war threat from a neighbouring country to get rid of the zealous finance minister."

"Hold it," he screamed. "What war threat? Is this sub-plot three?"

"You are disturbing my train of thought," I complained. "The war threat belongs to sub-plot four. Anyway, it soon disappears, but relations between the prime minister and the former finance minister are ruined. And they get worse when the foreign detective speaks out of turn to make the parliamentary privilege crisis more acute."

"Stop!" he shouted, tearing at his hair. "What parliamentary privilege

crisis? Is this part of sub-plot one or three?"

"Don't be dense," I said irritably. "This is sub-plot five. Now listen to this, we approach the climactic sub-plot six of my drama serial..."

"Don't, please don't," he wailed piteously, placing his hands over his ears. "You are wasting your time. One serial with six sub-plots! An airline pilot-turned-politician, Italians, film stars, a constitutional crisis, a war threat, foreign detectives—you must be crazy! Doordarshan could never run a serial like that, we believe in projecting real life!"

"Give me a chance," I pleaded. "You've no idea how hard I worked."

"You can try some Bombay *masala* film makers if you like," he said coldly. "But I doubt if even the most daring among them would ever buy such a wildly impossible story...!"

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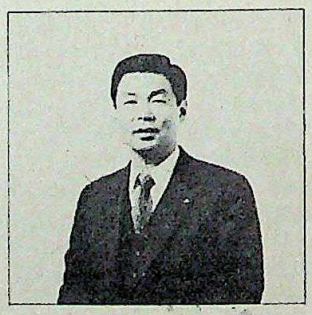

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WEST BENGAL

Red Ahead

LEFT Front big brother, the CPI(M), is exhibiting a new-found jauntiness in West Bengal having been returned to power with an overwhelming mandate: it alone has a brute majority of 187 MLAs in the state's 294-member assembly and faces a relatively weaker ruling party at the Centre. Not surprisingly, the Marxists returned to their cubby-holes of power, last fortnight, with more confidence and determination to tighten their stranglehold over all aspects of life in the state.

One of the first Marxist moves was to whittle down the importance of its smaller Left Front partners, while at the same time ensuring that this move did not evoke any major revolt as it did after the 1982 assembly elections. In the new 32-member ministry sworn in last fortnight, as many as 22 were from the CPI(M), four from the Forward Bloc, three from the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), two from the CPI and one from the West Bengal Socialist Party. The three smaller front parties, the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI), the Marxist Forward Bloc and the Democratic Socialist Party were not even invited. A smaller ministry, the CPI(M) leadership claimed, would be more effective and easier to handle.

Next, the Marxists rearranged important portfolios, with the crucial ones like commerce and industry and higher education being taken by Marxist Chief Minister Jyoti Basu himself, who today controls a host of critical departments, including home, hill affairs (Darjeeling district), public undertakings, housing and industrial reconstruction. This shift, according to CPI(M) insiders, indicates the new priorities. A principal concern is to provide employment by increasing industrial investment in the state and in the process, consolidating the party's influence over the politically volatile urban unemployed. Surprisingly, however, controversial RSP Minister Jatin Chakraborty was allowed to retain the Public Works Department with the additional responsibility of looking after jails and social welfare. And, the high budget department, irrigation, was left to RSP Minister Debabrata Bandyapadhyaya.

Some Left Front leaders believe that the CPI(M)'s preferential treatment to some parties is directly related to their electoral performance. West Bengal Socialist Party leader Biman Mitra, for instance, says: "We were given a berth in the Cabinet because we won all the four seats we were allowed to contest."

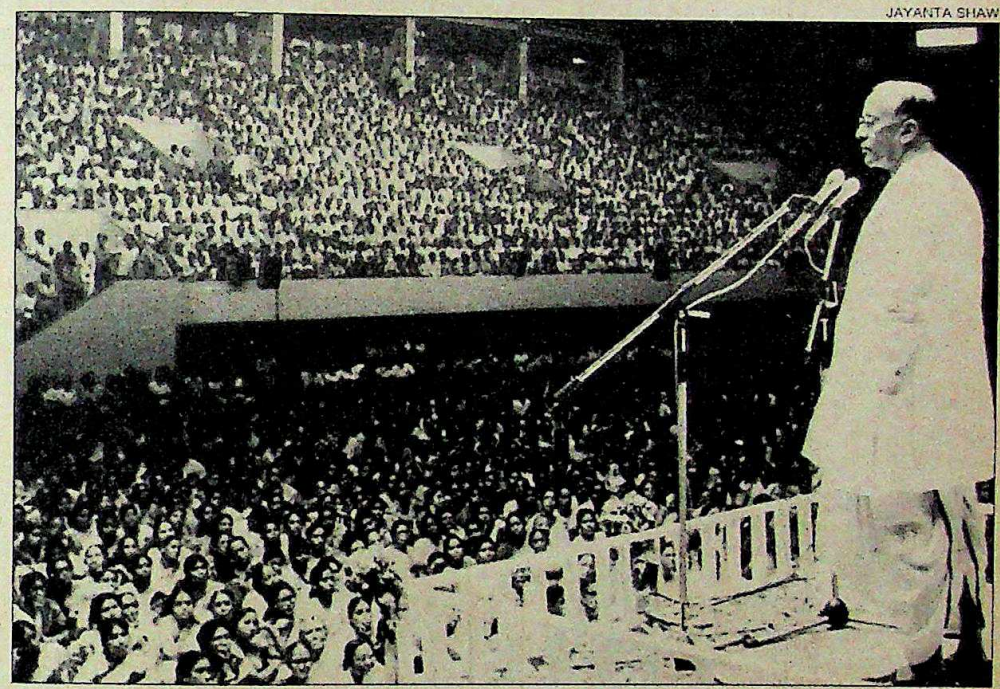
Unlike their Kerala counterparts, the West Bengal Marxists are determined not to stop at land reforms to maintain their support among the peasantry that swept them to power for a third term. An important new Marxist slogan today is to unite the different streams of movements in rural Bengal and build up a common monolithic *"krishak"* movement, that will include sharecroppers, small and marginal peasants, fishermen, artisans and craftsmen. Simultaneously, the state Government has launched an ambitious and potentially radical plan to decentralise planning and execution of village projects right down to the panchayat level, where a vast army of newly-trained technical workers will work in tandem with the 56,000-odd elected panchayat representatives. As the CPI(M) party newspaper, *Ganashakti's* Mridul De puts it: "The idea is to build an unbreakable bond between the state Government and the krishak (kisan) movement."

At another level, the Left Front is expected to step up its pressure on the Centre to wrest major concessions on long-pending demands. It now realises how well its alliance with the largest parliamentary opposition party, the Telugu Desam, can pay off. The chief minister is likely to press for certain demands soon, including greater devolution of resources to West Bengal; the scrapping of the freight equalisation policy on iron and steel; reversal of the decision to lower interest rates on small savings tapped by state governments; and assurances that the Centre will not consider scrapping sales tax which contributes about 60 per cent of total tax revenues to the West Bengal exchequer.

While these postures appear positive, the ominous aspect of the Marxists' new jauntiness is their concentrated power. And the first target has been the press. At a student rally in Calcutta on April 6, CPI(M) central committee member and state organisation man, Biman Bose threatened to gherao Doordarshan and All India Radio offices until they adopted a truly "neutral" and "unbiased" newscasting style. While the Marxists' ire at the media is somewhat understandable, their new found capacity to retaliate against the press—at times even physically through their supporters—presages an ominous future. For this presupposes that "red" is always good and will be so in the next five years of West Bengal's Marxist era.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

JAYANTA SHAW



Basu at a meeting: renewed vigour

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AYODHYA

Communal Confrontation

ONCE again last fortnight, communal claws were bared as Hindu and Muslim organisations staged massive shows of strength in New Delhi and Ayodhya. And what caused more than the usual concern was the blatantly aggressive postures adopted by the leaders of the two opposing armies. On April 5 in Ayodhya, over two lakh Hindus pledged their lives for the cause of Ramjanmabhoomi. In Delhi, an equally large number of Muslims swore to secure Babri Masjid. Underlying the muscle-flexing was an uglier message: neither of the communities would stop short of an actual physical confrontation.

The message was rammed home in no uncertain terms. In Ayodhya, the attitude adopted by Hindu fundamentalists was no less militant. Shouting provocative, and at times even abusive, slogans, large groups of rallyists roamed the streets of Ayodhya before assembling for the public meeting on the shores of the Saryu river in the afternoon. The leaders of the groups were armed with trishuls, spears or axes and among the slogans they raised were *Hum hain Hindu saath karod, haddi pasli denge tor* (we are sixty crore Hindus, we will break your bones).

Even the Hindu leaders made no effort to cool passions. Almost all, including Jagatguru Shankaracharya, Swami Vishnu Devanand, Mahant Avaidya Nath, Paramhans Ram Chandra Das and BJP leader Vijaya Raje Scindia, called upon the Hindus to shed the last drop of their blood to protect Lord Rama's birth place. Said Mahant Avaidya Nath, president of the Ramjanmabhoomi Mukti Yagya Committee: "Who is more important for India? Ram or Babar? If the Muslim leaders make a mistake in realising who it is who comes first, they will be doing a great disservice to their community and will pay a high price for it."

To give the rally emotional overtones, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), had selected April 5—the day on which the traditional festival of Ram Navmi begins—to hold the rally. Such was the enthusiasm that the actual devotees were totally engulfed by the crush of slogan-shouting VHP activists.

Meanwhile, in Faizabad, Ayodhya's twin city, Munir Ahmed Qureshi, convenor of the district unit of the Babri Masjid Action Committee, stated: "It does not belong to them and we are not going to give it to them. If the Government does not intervene, the day is not far when Muslims all over the country will assemble in Ayodhya and will be compelled to offer a mass *namaz* in the Babri Masjid." Said Karamvir Singh, senior superintendent of police of Faizabad: "In such a situation even the slightest provocation can spark off trouble."

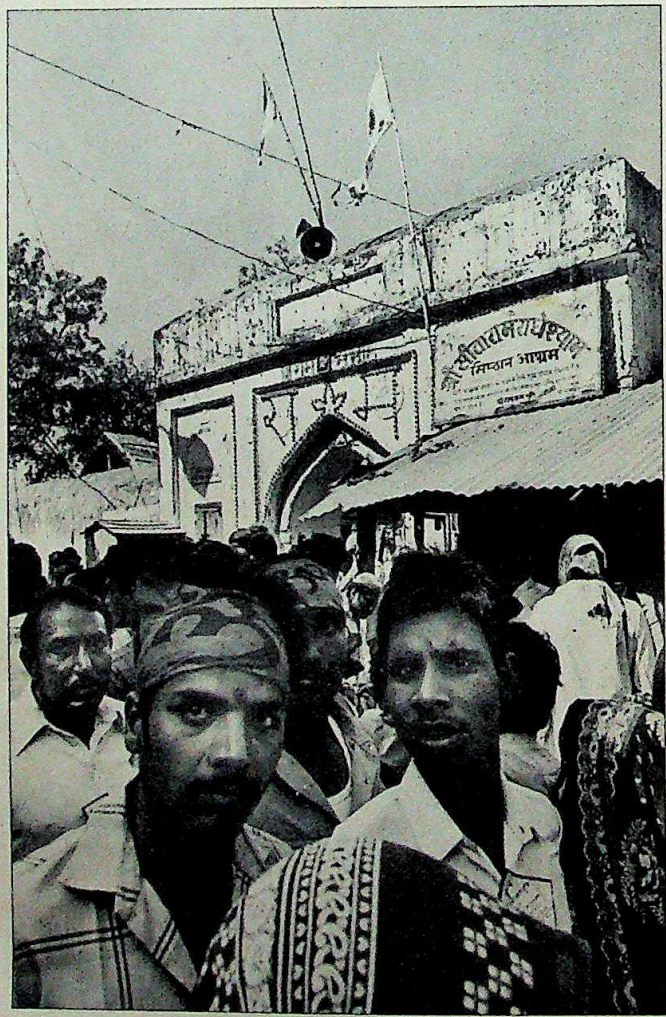
Qureshi seemed to reflect the tone adopted in the Delhi rally organised by the Babri Masjid Action Committee. There, the Shahi Imam, Maulana Abdullah Bukhari, and Janata leader Syed Shahabuddin had exhorted the Muslims to be prepared to fight to death. At the end of his vituperative address to the Delhi gathering of Muslims, Syed Abdullah Bukhari, the imam of Jama Masjid, warned: "Muslim ministers, open your eyes and your ears. Or I will have your *kothis* (houses) burnt. We will break your legs."

Hindu and Muslim organisations staged massive shows of strength in New Delhi and Ayodhya...

With every fourth Muslim in the country living in Uttar Pradesh, the tension was palpable all over. Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh convened a meeting of top officials a day before the VHP rally and ordered a special vigil in 14 ultra-sensitive districts in the state.

Much of the state Government's apprehensions arose from the response that the March 29 bandh called by VHP had evoked. Though special vigil was mounted following intelligence reports that communal riots may break out, trouble did erupt in half-a-dozen districts. The most serious of these was in Kanpur, where the army had to be put on alert following a pitched battle between the two communities. The bitterness gained a new edge when an unscheduled bandh call was given by the Muslims the day after the VHP bandh.

And in the sensitive city of Faizabad, this bitterness was most evident. The city, for the first time, witnessed a communal flare-up on the day the VHP had organised the state-



VHP rallyists outside the disputed shrine in Ayodhya: mood of militancy

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR

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wide bandh. Later, green flags were raised provocatively against the saffron flags of the VHP. It was not before the night of April 3 that they were finally taken down. Even more serious was the intention of one section of the Babri Masjid Action Committee to hold a meeting in Faizabad on the day of the rally. It was only on April 4 that the meeting was called off. Though Qureshi explained that "we decided to call off the meeting as it would have caused ill-feeling between the two communities", the secular waters of the district had been muddied too much by then.

With both the Ramjanmabhoomi Mukti Yagya Committee and the Babri Masjid Action Committee refusing to back down, the state Government finds itself in an unenviable situation. Moves to initiate an across-the-table dialogue have met with blunt rebuffs. While the Babri Masjid Action Committee leaders want a restoration of the situation prevailing before 1949, the Hindus want possession on the grounds that the Mughal Emperor Babar had destroyed the temple to build a mosque.

The Ramjanmabhoomi Yagya Mukti Committee is therefore demanding that the control of the shrine be handed over to the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas, a trust set up by the committee, headed by Ramanandacharya of Varanasi, and that the Government receivership should end. On the other hand, the Babri Masjid Action Committee has demanded that the Government should intervene and transfer the case from the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court to any southern state. Home Secretary Mata Prasad, while ruling out any state intervention, says: "It was a court decision and we will let the issue be sorted out by the judiciary."

Ironically, it was a judge who had unwittingly let the communal cat out of the bag about five years ago. The then district judge of Faizabad, K.M. Pande, had ordered the opening of the locks of the shrine on February 1, 1986, after hearing an application by a local advocate, Umesh Kumar Pandey. But he had no inkling of the kind of religious monster that he would be unleashing.

In fact, the disputed portion of the shrine had been under government lock and key since December 23, 1949, when an idol of Lord Rama was discovered in the inner-most chamber of the building, which was being used as a mosque by the Muslims. At that time, the Muslims held charge of most of the building, but for a cement platform known as the "Ram Chabutra" near the entrance. However, following the controversial appearance of the idol of Lord Rama, the then district magistrate confiscated the property and appointed a government receiver. Neither the Hindus nor the Muslims were allowed to enter the disputed part of the property. But the Hindus, however, were allowed by the concerned authorities, to hold *kirtans* on the Ram Chabutra, take *darshan* of the idol from a specified distance and take *parikarama* (walk around) along the outer ring of the building.

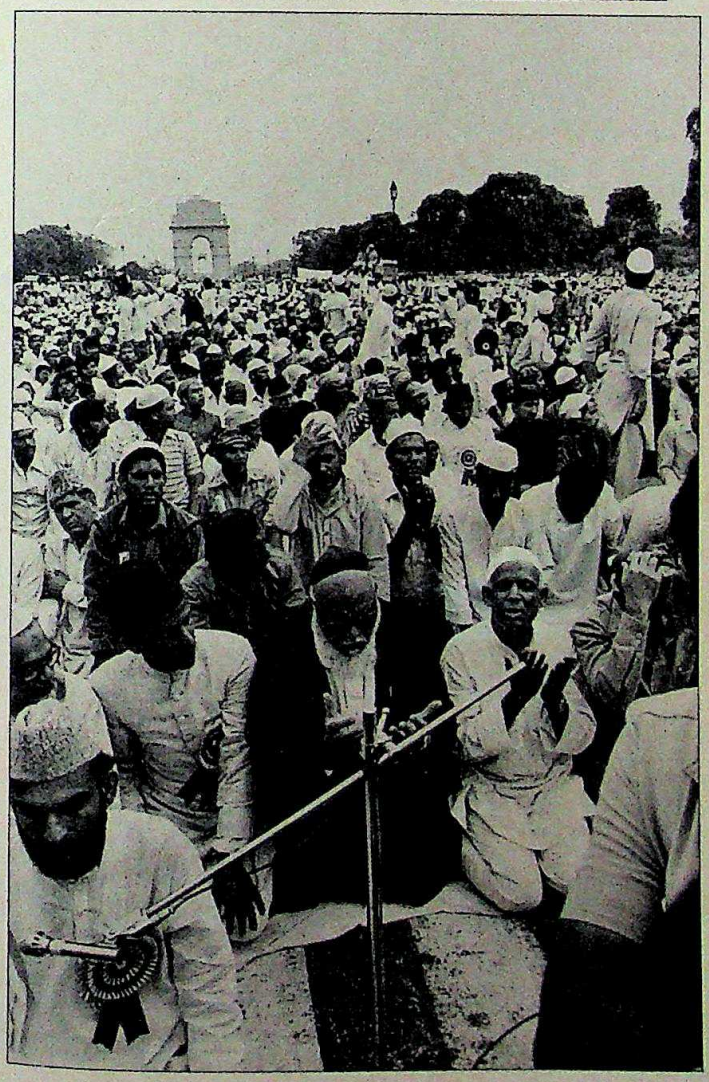
The Ramjanmabhoomi Action Committee, which came into being on October 7, 1984, launched a *Tala Kholo* (open the lock) agitation on the same day. The first major step by the committee was to organise a 130-km march from Ayodhya to Lucknow on October 8, 1984, where a memorandum was presented to the then chief minister demanding the opening of the locks of the shrine. On October 15, the committee launched a 'Rath Yatra' to mobilise the community. The Yatra was discontinued when it was near Delhi following the assassination of the late prime minister Indira Gandhi on October 31. But it was then revived from 25 spots in Uttar Pradesh on October 23, 1985, and continued for 119 days, during which donations over Rs 3 crore were collected and the masses were educated about the struggle.

...The underlying message was that neither would stop short of an actual physical confrontation.

The Rath Yatras were finally banned by the state Government following communal clashes in nine districts that erupted on March 27, 1986. One of the major reasons for the clashes was that the Babri Masjid Action Committee, which launched its agitation on February 14, 1985, had also stepped up its activities.

But after last fortnight's show of militancy by both sides, the situation has assumed alarming proportions. Says Uttar Pradesh Home Minister Gopinath Dixit: "Unless leaders of both the communities realise that a communal outburst is imminent, it will prove quite difficult for us to control passions for a long time." But with both Hindu and Muslim community leaders themselves showing no signs of restraint in the near future, belling the communal cat will require much more than vocal official warnings.

—DILIP AWASTHI



Imam Bukhari and Shahabuddin lead the namaz in Delhi: aggressive postures

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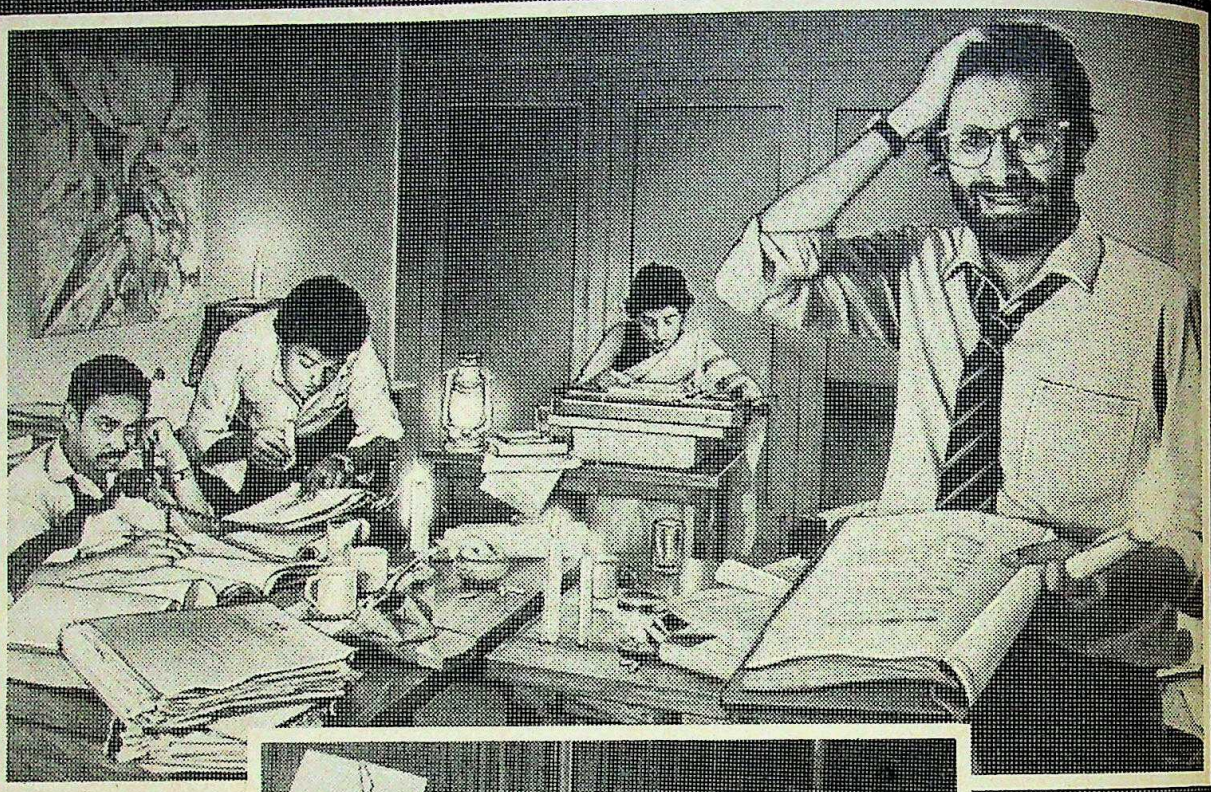
"Another contract gone with the lights," cried Joshi



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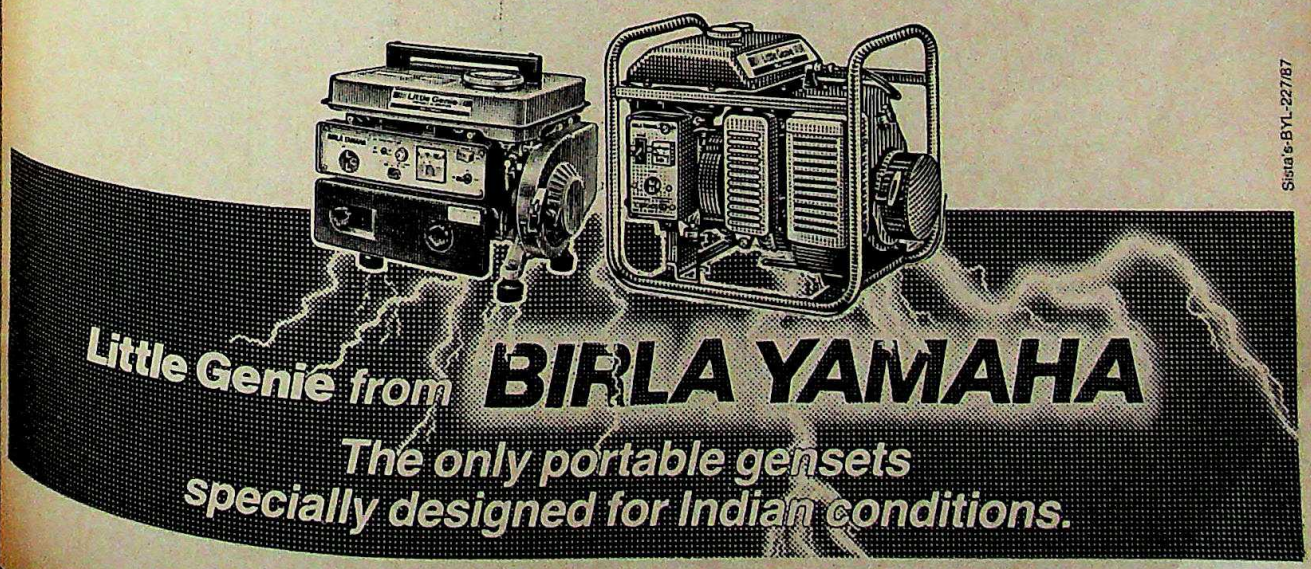

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BIHAR

Fun with Figures

ON paper, and if the latest public pronouncements of Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey are to be believed, Bihar has become a model of fiscal discipline and economic progress. Last fortnight, the "state committee of Congress(I) parliamentarians" headed by Krishna Pratap Singh, MP, took special note of these achievements at a special meeting in New Delhi and showered praise on the Dubey administration for having managed to boost the state's per capita income from Rs 929 in 1980-81 to Rs 1,547 in 1985-86.

Dubey quickly followed suit by patting himself on the back and displaying an even more impressive set of statistics. State resources: up from Rs 650.8 crore in 1985-86 to Rs 891.6 crore in 1986-87; plan outlays: raised from Rs 851 crore in 1985-86 to Rs 1,150 crore in 1986-87; per capita income: up from Rs 1,285 in 1984-85 to Rs 1,547 in 1985-86. But the moral of this story is that behind the statistics bandied about by politicians often lies the more sordid truth of failure.

And such is the case with Bihar. The state started with a surplus in 1985-86 of Rs 96.6 crore. The year ended with Rs 500 crore lying unutilised in the Reserve Bank of India and another Rs 250 crore spilling over into the next plan period. The truth is that with all this money lying idle in the banks, Bihar still has the lowest per capita income in the country and the lowest per capita investment in such vital areas as power, communications, and industry. And when asked by opposition leaders, that considering the worsening job situation, what his statistics on the per capita income rise were based on, Dubey could offer no explanation. Dubey's political foe, former chief minister Jagannath Mishra, an economist, was quick to pounce on his rival and criticise him for not having even the basic knowledge of what he was talking about.

While Dubey reasserted these successes in his budget speech in the Assembly, neither he nor his aides have yet been able to explain why there is no physical evidence within the state of these "financial achievements". In fact, Mishra, who believes that the official statistics have been deliberately designed to cover up evidence of financial bungling which has taken a heavy toll of economic growth in the state, shot off a letter to Rajiv Gandhi. He demanded a high-level inquiry by experts from outside the state to go into the reasons for the "gap between physical and financial achievements".

The figures themselves smack of statistical jugglery. According to official figures, the state spent Rs 500 crore on various schemes until last December—the first nine months of the fiscal year. But between January and February, which had only 27 working days in view of the 32-day-long crippling strike by over six lakh employees, the Government claimed to have spent Rs 374 crore, and by March-end, another Rs 147 crore of the total budget. This last-minute spending still left Rs 250 crore to be transferred to the new year. According to official explanations this idle money is the result of the state's "poor absorptive capacity".

But these glib explanations cannot wipe out glaring examples of mismanagement. The Government failed to spend even the requisite amount of money on vital anti-poverty programmes. According to a report of the cabinet sub-committee on the implementation of Rural Labour Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), Rs 65.57 crore was allotted to Bihar for 1985-86 for rural link roads, but only Rs 13.75 crore could be utilised. Likewise, Rs 105 crore was earmarked for 1986-87 for rural road construction. The utilisation till March 15 this year was only Rs 13.15 crore.

Again, under RLEGP's minor irrigation programme, Rs 13.46 crore was allotted for 1985-86, but financial achievement was only Rs 4 crore. For the last financial year, it was to the order of Rs 25.32 crore and utilisation was just Rs 2 crore.

In the high-sounding Harijan welfare component of the plan, Rs 84.25 crore was sanctioned for last year but only Rs 6 crore was utilised. In the previous year, Rs 67.68 crore was sanctioned and Rs 29 crore used.

"Achievements" and "successes" like these, Dubey's crit-

Dubey: statistical juggling

K.M. KISHAN

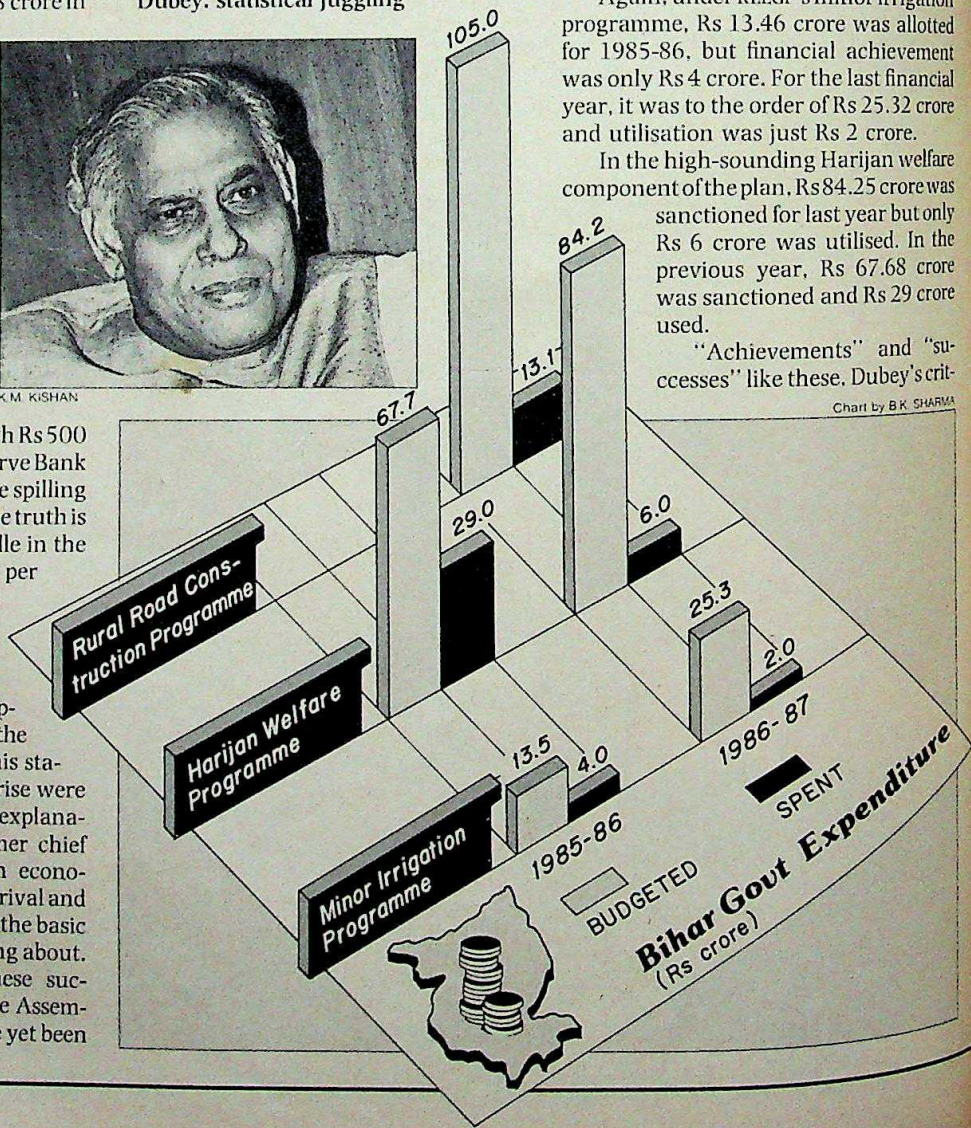

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

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ics point out, sarcastically, hardly lend credence to Dubey's fantastic claim that the state had achieved more than 100 per cent of the plan outlay. And on the basis of this claim no one believes that the Government has approached the Planning Commission to consider enlarging the size of its current Rs 5,100 crore seventh plan.

Despite the state Government's regular claims that plan targets have been exceeded, the fact is that the very schemes in which these targets are supposed to have been exceeded remain unimplemented. During last year's budget speech, Dubey had announced that work would start on a Ganga bridge at Bhagalpur, specific development schemes would be launched in the Kolhan region of Singhbhum district, a Rs 5-crore fund would be created for the upkeep of universities and colleges buildings, and one with an equal sum created for the maintenance of medical colleges and hospitals in the state. None of these projects have so far been implemented, except on paper. And the new industrial policy announced recently hasn't taken off the ground. If anything, things are worse. New private sector investment in Bihar is lower than what it was more than a decade ago.

Bihar-watchers point out that one of the main reasons for financial mismanagement is Dubey's inability to energise the bureaucracy and administration. During the last two years, more than five commissioners have gone in and out of the 20-Point Programme Department. Reckless transfers and postings of IAS and IPS officers has left district-level administration in a shambles. In most of the districts, IAS collectors are on the verge of retirement. With uncertainty at the secretariat level among the senior officials and most of the collectors just whiling away time awaiting retirement, work has ground to a standstill. And most of Dubey's initiatives at securing accountability and efficiency from the bureaucracy—through the creation of "sectoral heads," and new monitoring procedures—have failed to show results.

In this atmosphere, Bihar can expect to be financially torn asunder in the coming years. Dubey's friends have been advising him to get rid of his present financial and administrative advisers, break the convention of "paper achievements" and set up a team of impartial experts to monitor the financial and physical achievements. "This is the only way out if Dubey is really interested in ushering Bihar into a more prosperous era," said a senior Finance Department official.

—FARZAND AHMED

SHATRUGHAN SINHA

Shotgun Blast

LIKE his illustrious peers in the Congress(I) the man they call the 'Bihari Babu' is backpacking the political trail. And though Shatrughan 'Shotgun' Sinha takes pains to dispel any political motivations, the cinematic villain-turned-hero's actions speak otherwise.

Last fortnight Sinha travelled to Arwal, where barely a year ago the police had massacred "extremists". The ostensible reason for the visit: to commiserate with the victims. In reality, the meeting fits into a much bigger matrix. The stocky star has been hitting the road with metronomic regularity, chatting with the rural poor, sharing their woes, eating at roadside *dhabas*, and lashing out at the Bindeshwari Dubey Government.

Before Arwal, he toured through the poverty-stricken districts of Palamau and Gaya, addressing 10 to 15 meetings at both places. Said Sinha: "The tour is to contact the masses and create a sense of Bihari pride among them." Almost all his meetings attracted 40,000 to 50,000 people, most of them starry-eyed fans.

At one meeting in Gaya, Sinha came closest to taking the lid off his real motives. Said Sinha: "The whole purpose of my travels is to prepare a blueprint for my future career in consultation with the masses." The star, who was bestowed with the title of "Bihar Ratna" and "Jana Nayak" by his enthusiastic fans led by youthful Janata leader Subodh Kant Sahay, plans to launch a movement in Palamau to liberate the bonded labourers. Even more ambitious is his plan to launch a padyatra across the state to see the plight of the people and lead the students and youth *a la* Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan. To further prove that he means business he has despatched a team of doctors to launch a door-to-door campaign in Deogarh as part of his call to people to observe 1987 as "Year of Constructive Work".

Sinha's sudden outburst of populistic zeal is being attributed largely to his desire to level scores with state Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey. Sinha came into conflict with Dubey in 1985 when Dubey withdrew support to a Filmstars Nite planned to raise funds for a hospital in memory of Sinha's father B.P. Sinha. Dubey also went back on his promise to provide land for the proposed hospital. Last year Dubey transferred the district collector of Siwan for "allowing" Sinha to unveil the bust of the late President, Dr Rajendra Prasad, despite reports of the then chief secretary and the divisional commissioner that Sinha had not unveiled the bust. He had only garlanded it.

K.M. KISHAN

Sinha addressing meeting: suspense drama

To observers, however, Sinha has always been an enigma as far as politics is concerned. He has openly praised Bharatiya Janata Party leader Atal Behari Vajpayee, joined Janata leader Chandra Shekhar's padyatra but has also made no secret of his friends in the Congress(I). Even more significant is the support that has always been extended to him by the Kayasthas, who want him to champion their cause. Now with the Janata Party ardently wooing him and his fans waiting with bated breath for their star to make the official plunge, it is up to Sinha to deliver the punch line in his carefully-crafted and suspense-laden script.

—FARZAND AHMED

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Clean Crusader

MAJOR Vijay Singh Mankotia, a Congress(I) MLA in Himachal Pradesh is a somewhat quixotic character who, taking the promises made by his party of ensuring a clean government in deadly earnest, has been tilting at the windmills of local corruption for the past three years. His lance, blunted by past forays against the state's timber mafia, was pointed last fortnight against his own party and plunged the Government into somewhat of an embarrassment. Having worked for and developed a solid base of ex-servicemen as his supporting cadres, Mankotia recently organised a "clean government" rally, to which he also invited Chief Minister Vir Bhadra Singh, which was attended by a staggering 50,000 people in Bilaspur. This turnout naturally sent waves of jealousy coursing through ministerial ranks.

HARI OM GULATI

Mankotia: lone battle

But what fanned this envy into outright hostility was Mankotia's speech in which he said that in order to ensure honesty at the lower rungs of government, the highest must begin an immediate house-cleaning. This process should begin with ministers who had been misusing their offices for personal gain, and top bureaucrats who have been acquiring expensive property and who, on transportation and official petrol bills alone last year, chalked up an expenditure of Rs 7 crore.

Party members began to howl for Mankotia's head and have been urging Vir Bhadra Singh to take disciplinary action against him for anti-party activities. Mankotia offered to resign voluntarily but the chief minister, who personally has a clean image and has taken tough measures against the forest mafia in the past directly persuaded him to remain. Says Mankotia: "I don't see how this can be construed as anti-party. I am simply attempting to fulfil our party's campaign pledge—given by the prime minister himself—of a clean and open government."

Double Faced

THERE are different rules for different land grabbers. At least that's the way it appears in Gujarat. When Rajkot Collector Rajiv Takru recently arrested some BJP leaders and prominent supporters of that party for alleged illegal acquisition of land worth crores of rupees in the city, Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary backed him to the hilt and countered heavy criticism from the BJP-controlled Rajkot Municipal Corporation that the action was politically motivated, as so much nonsense.

JAYESH CHAUHAN

Takru: cleaning up

But now the shoe is on the other foot. During the last few weeks Takru has been closing in on Congress(I) leaders, corporators, financiers and workers for the same reasons. Among the party stalwarts arrested are corporators Darji Parsana and Manuben Sugarwala and well-known workers, Hardasmal Motwani, Jivabhai Mori, Vasram Lamba and Chonda Rude. And Choudhary is livid. During the past few weeks he has been spending a lot of time obtaining the release of these party people on parole, even against suggestions by the Home Ministry that they be detained for further questioning.

Paper War

A family feud within *Bhaskar*, the fast expanding newspaper chain in Madhya Pradesh, is threatening the existence of the Jabalpur edition of the Hindi daily. In a bizarre move, *Bhaskar* proprietor Ramesh Chandra Agarwal has moved an application in the court of the district magistrate, Jabalpur, under Section 8 B of the Press and Registration of Books Act, seeking cancellation of the declaration filed for the Jabalpur edition of the daily and requested an immediate ban on its publication.

In his complaint Agarwal alleged that his uncle, Bishambhar Dayal Agarwal, made a "false declaration" at the time of launching the edition nine months ago, and that he had been indulging in "unauthorised" publication of the daily without obtaining the authority from the owners of the title.

दैनिक भास्कर

फेयरफेक्स को जांच कार्य नहीं सौंपा था- ब्रम्हदत्त
प्रधानमंत्री ने जांच से इंकार नहीं किया-वी.पी.सिंह

ब्याज दर: बैंक ऋण पर कम, जमा पर ज्यादा

मुस्लिम नेताओं के उत्तेजक भाषणों

A copy of *Bhaskar*; (inset) B.D. Agarwal (left) and Ramesh: family feud

This is the first sign of serious trouble inside the Bhaskar group which has been expanding at break-neck speed in the past few years. The chain has blossomed into five editions, with plans to start a sixth edition from Raipur by year end. Plans to bring out English and Urdu publications are also in the pipeline. It has acquired sophisticated, computerised printing facilities and its Bhopal headquarters is probably one of the most futuristic and best designed newspaper offices in the country. But the simmering family feud threatens to tarnish this bright future.

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I said Eurocolor
Papa said Hi-tech
I said Hi-gain
Papa said TV
I said Telerama

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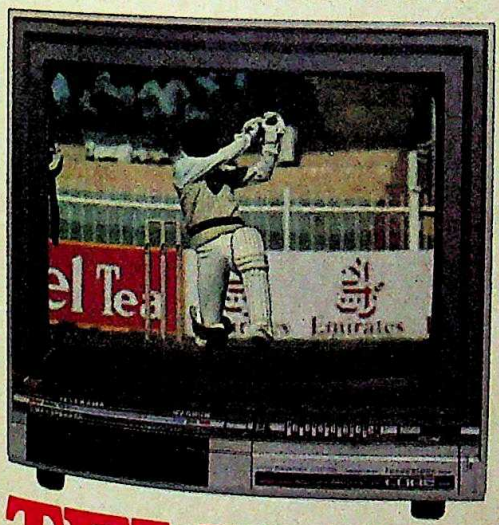

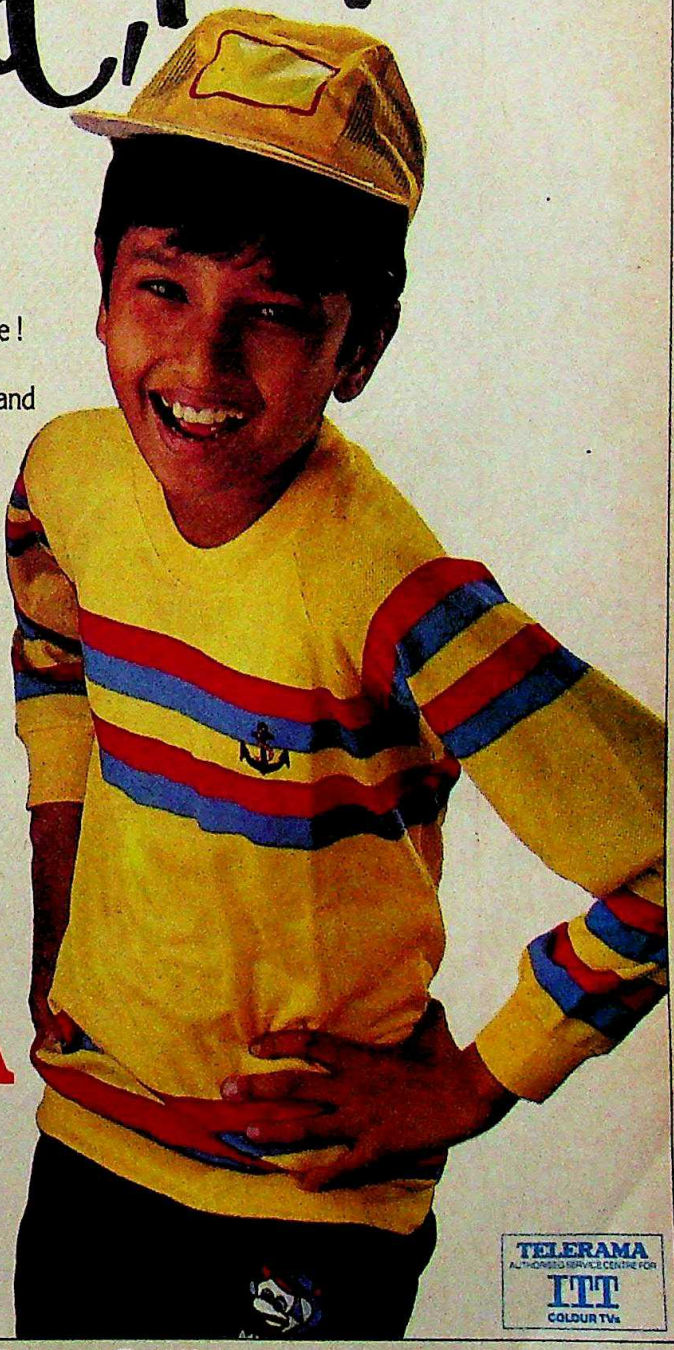

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The Business Trip

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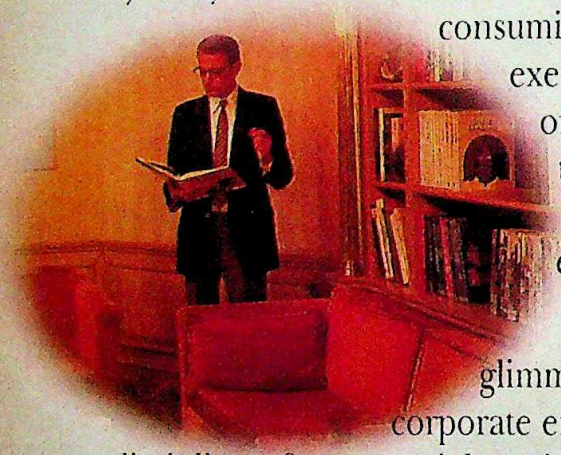
For the creative manager, innovative solutions are not always the result of a sequential working out of management syllogisms. They are very often the result of patterns formed out of millions of bits of information (not necessarily business-oriented) scattered over the vast expanse of his unconscious mind. This, of course, is a truism.

Innovation therefore seems to get bullied out of its rightful place by the tyranny of the well-ordered, step-by-step routine of corporate existence—of time-consuming maintenance and fire-fighting. Today the executive realises the need to switch on another process of 'thinking' that will compress time and jog his intuition to arrive at that moment of illumination. The office and the home may not always be the best environmental stimuli for this kind of thinking.



Many have confessed however, to a surprising glimmer of intuition on particular occasions—those corporate errands outside their work city. Forced out of the discipline of commercial routine the mind seems to free-float to possible illumination. "You travel to this other city on a pressing matter, which you are going to sort out," said an executive, "but the pleasant surprise is that you suddenly seem to see answers to questions that troubled you on quite another matter. This comes as a kind of bonus on such trips. I don't know how it happens, but it does."

The concept of the business trip as creativity jogger prompted another idea—the hotel room as creativity jogger.

The hospitality designers of Welcomgroup asked themselves the question: "Can we create an environment that will encourage this creativity jogging?"

They realised that this would call for more than the plushness and luxury of the five-star deluxe experience or the obvious provision of executive facilities

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as Creativity Jogger.

and access to equipment. It would require the creation of an atmosphere of a different kind of exclusivity which allowed for uncluttered mental room combined with quiet intellectual stimulation.

It meant shaping a whole new quality of property and services. It involved programmes of executive life-style study and intensive training for a new breed of hotel personnel.

Maurya Sheraton Towers

Thus was born the idea of the Maurya Sheraton Towers which is now an international reality.

To describe the Maurya Towers it is necessary to dispel the traditional notions associated with five-star hotels. The hyperbole and the superlatives (that come to mind if you view the 'Towers' in the context of other hotels) are inadequate, for the simple reason that the Maurya Towers is another genre in the art of executive hospitality.

The exclusivity of each floor, the elegant design of the rooms; the Business Centre and conference rooms; the intellectual stimulation of the Tower Club with its library and bar, the dining room and the health club; the exquisite taste with which every corner is designed...all these are incomparable, but in a way not the real discriminators.

The real difference is in the intangibles which the sensitive and mature intellect will perceive; in the finesse, the unobtrusiveness of the service, the charm and the flair with which the personnel allow you that much-needed quiet and freedom (from even the smallest of irritants) to do your intuition-jogging.

Admittedly the Maurya Towers is not for everyone. But for you and your nucleus of brilliant people it certainly could be an investment in creativity.

The Maurya Sheraton Towers, at the Welcomgroup Maurya Sheraton, Diplomatic Enclave, New Delhi-110 021

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All day long and well into the night.

It's afternoon. Karan and Rhea have designs on each other. From the Bombay Dyeing Shirting Collection.

Vidya and Aliya, sheer poetry in their Haiku saris, set the evening on fire.

Karan takes on the night in his suit from the Cezari Suiting Collection.

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SUITINGS, SHIRTINGS, SARIS, DRESS MATERIALS, TOWELS, SHEETS AND FURNISHING FABRICS.

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BOMBAY DYEING

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Left in a Corner

THE controversial play Christuvinte Aaram Thirumurivu (The sixth sacred wound of Christ) based on Kazantzakis's masterpiece which was banned in Kerala by the earlier UDF government has now become a hot potato for the new LDF Ministry in the state. Soon after the new Government was sworn in, the play was to be staged in Alleppey. But top church leaders threatened to start a 'liberation struggle' and take the issue to the streets if the new Marxist Government hurt their religious sentiments by allowing the drama to be staged. Chief Minister Nayanar and the

A scene from the controversial play: new threat

Marxist 'think-tank' panicked and extended the ban.

P.M. Antony, the producer and writer of the controversial play, said: "When it was banned a few months back the leftist intellectuals in the state made a hue and cry and blasted the then Karunakaran government for succumbing to religious pressures. Today all these intellectuals are silent." The new government is caught in a predicament from which it will be hard to wriggle out.

Hard Lessons

IT was clearly intended to teach the lecturer-turned-politician a lesson. On April 8, the Secondary School Certificate question papers were leaked out in Hyderabad in a well-organised manner, leading to the resignation of state education minister Galli Muddukrishnama Naidu, 41.

Front page press reports of the sale of the mathematics question paper at Rs 10 a photocopy appeared in local dailies on the very morning of the exam. A Telugu daily even reproduced it in full. Naidu sent his resignation to the chief minister who promptly accepted it. He also ordered an inquiry into the leak.

BABJI

Naidu: victim of intrigue

The leak itself could emerge only from the Government treasuries, police outposts where they are stored, or from the Commissionate of Examinations in Hyderabad. The manner in which the students, including Telugu Desam activists, gave photocopies to newspaper offices, shows that it was part of a plan to malign Naidu. Though he has a spotless track record, his attempts to improve the quality of education and to crush strikes have alienated him from teachers and college managements. Moreover, Naidu's relations with NTR's son-in-law and party General Secretary N. Chandrababu Naidu have been strained following the ex-minister's increased clout in their native Chitoor district.

NTR's prompt acceptance of the resignation is clearly an attempt to give a freer hand to Chandrababu in Chitoor. But with Naidu's sudden exit, NTR may soon find his partymen no longer willing to toe the line as they did in the past.

Merger Stir

AFTER several months of quiet, the agitation for the merger of Marathi-speaking areas in Karnataka with Maharashtra was revived in Bombay last fortnight. And interestingly, besides opposition leaders like S.M. Joshi, president of the Samyukta Maharashtra Seema Samiti, Shiv Sena's Bal Thackeray and the Peasants and Workers' Party legislator N.D. Patil, the morcha taken out to the state Assembly also included Sharad Pawar, who had spearheaded the stir last year as the Congress(S) chief but has since joined the ruling party.

Pawar made it clear that the state's political leaders would "forfeit the right to represent the people of Maharashtra" if

Photographs by SEBASTIAN D'SOUZA

Activists in Bombay; Pawar (left) and Thackeray: agitating

they failed the Marathi-speaking people residing in Karnataka's border areas. Thackeray went a step further and warned the Government that the Shiv Sena would prevent trucks heading for Karnataka from being loaded in Bombay if the boundary problem was not solved expeditiously.

Last fortnight, after a meeting with Chief Minister S.B. Chavan, the Seema Samiti agitation leaders unexpectedly agreed that the boundary dispute should be resolved "on principles and people's wishes within a time-bound framework". The demand has been made for the appointment of another commission to go into the Maharashtra-Karnataka border dispute with a framework similar to the one used for the Punjab-Haryana tangle.

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AMITABH BACHCHAN

"I have been ta

THE spotlight was on V.P. Singh and his resignation. But in the wings the murmurings about his arch-rival, Amitabh Bachchan were also increasing. And these rumblings appeared to indicate that the spotlight may now shine squarely on the role played by the man most closely identified as having influenced his friend, the prime minister, against Singh—Amitabh Bachchan.

The Fairfax affair, which has raised troubling accusations about Amitabh and his family—particularly Ajitabh (Bunty) Bachchan who, along with his wife, Ramola, is also a personal friend of Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi—was hardly buried with the exit of Singh. It threatens, once again, to explode into the open with Amitabh squarely in the dock. And in this situation, even many of the prime minister's friends say, his deep friendship with the Bachchan family could wind up becoming a political liability for him.

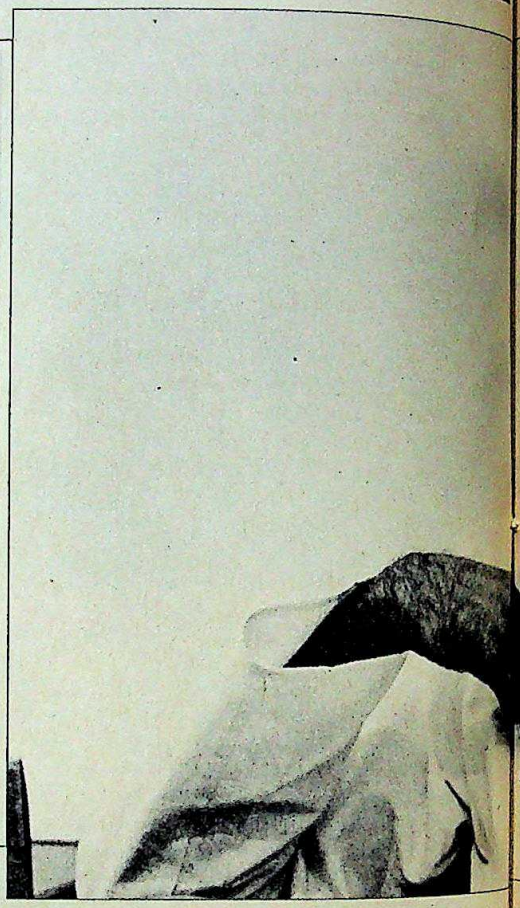
Even as the Fairfax debate was raging in Parliament last fortnight, Bunty and Ramola quietly flew in from Geneva to their New Delhi farmhouse where Bunty met with several advisers for long strategy sessions. He also flew to Bombay for several hours of discussions with Amitabh. In this surcharged atmosphere even senior party members, who did not hold any particular brief for Singh, were saying that unless Rajiv orders an independent inquiry into the financial affairs of the Bachchans, Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress(I) would continue to be the targets of public opprobrium that they were part of a conspiratorial cover-up. As one Congress(I) MP put it: "All this tamasha, and tension within the party and Parliament seems to be the result of trying to protect one man—the prime minister's friend, Mr Amitabh."

The controversy swirling around the actor stems from accusations made in the press and in Parliament that:

- *Bunty's exit to Switzerland may be to handle money siphoned illegally abroad.*
- *Amitabh had reason to lobby against Singh because the Finance Ministry was looking into his taxes and his business dealings.*
- *Amitabh has used his closeness to the prime minister to exercise unprecedented muscle in the film world and in Uttar Pradesh politics where there is now a political revolt against him.*

The actor-politician agreed to a lengthy interview covering these subjects. But despite his known rivalry with V.P. Singh, he consistently evaded or would not answer questions about the ousted defence minister. He referred to him only in cordial cliches but occasionally his guard slipped and hints of antipathy would show. Initially Amitabh refused to admit that he was in the eye of a controversial public hurricane, saying cryptically, "I too go out in the public, I have some fans, and I don't sense any hostility," but later admitted that he was under hostile pressure.

> "If the party feels I'm an embarrassment I'll withdraw. And I can assure you I'll be answerable to any inquiry. I've already spoken about these matters in Parliament—the highest forum—and I'm not afraid to speak about this again."



Throughout the interview in his well-appointed study in the front of his two-storey rented Vasant Vihar house, the superstar, dressed in an immaculate white kurta pyjama, a gold pen sticking out of his breast pocket, maintained a cool composure, his famous baritone voice occasionally rising to an emotional pitch, his gaze level, unflinching, and tinged now and then with a sense of hurt and indignation. Excerpts of the interview with Editor AROON PURIE *and Features Editor* INDERJIT BADHWAR:

Q. *Many people, including some close to the prime minister, seem to believe that your friendship with Rajiv may have become a political liability to him.*

A. If I'm a liability, it is because of the press, which has tried to make me into one. They have made me into a victim of rumour, allegation and gossip.

Q. *But there is a general feeling that some embarrassing questions have been raised that must be answered.*

A. If the party feels that way, or if the prime minister feels that I'm an embarrassment, I'll withdraw. And I can assure you, I'll be answerable to any inquiry. I've already spoken about these matters in Parliament—the highest forum—and I am not afraid to speak about this again.

Q. *But it seems as if the focus, since V.P. Singh's exit, is now on you.*

A. My name has been abused and misused and it will continue to be so because of my position.

Q. *But of late, you have been on the defensive.*

A. There was a time when I used to take all this like any other gossip. I've been in public life for 20 years. I'm used to gossip. I know how things work. So when things started appearing about me within days after I won the MP's election from

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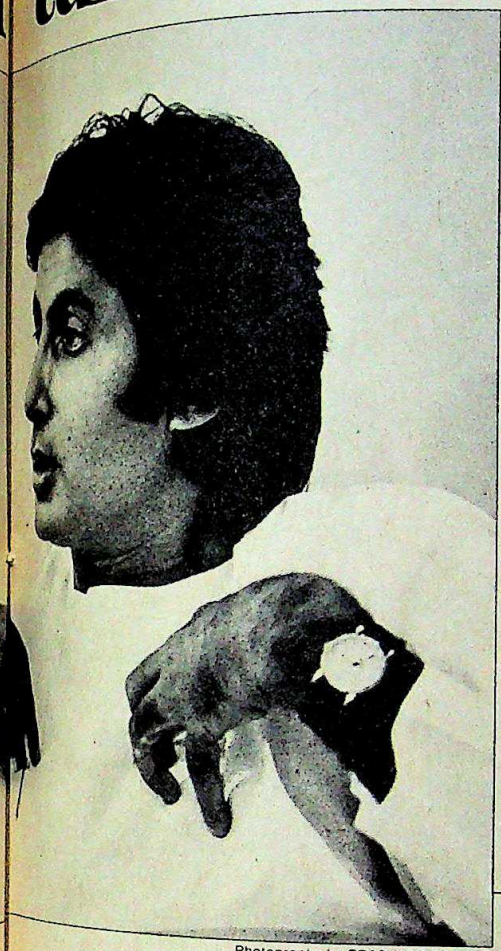

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR

> "Yes, Rajiv is a friend. Am I going to be ostracised for that friendship? Do I stop meeting him? If I'm a liability to him it's only from the media's point of view which has made me into a victim of rumour, allegation and gossip."

Allahabad, I just ignored it. But as time passed, things started building up. Maybe I should have contested all these allegations earlier, and I would not have been involved so wrongly as I am now.

Q. But don't you feel you have to clear the air because you are in public life?

A. My conscience is stronger and bigger than the whole world. If my conscience is clear I'll be the winner in the end. The strength of my character is the strength of my conscience. An attack on my character is an attack on my conscience. In this controversy what am I supposed to do, fight for the development of my constituency or waste my time confronting allegations?

Q. Since you gained your position because of Rajiv do you feel you are being used as a stick to beat him with?

A. Do you sincerely believe that? Do you sincerely believe that I'm a politician or that I've come into this line to look for positions? I knew nothing about politics.

Q. Then why did you get into it in the first place?

A. Because I felt deeply emotional about it. Yes, Rajiv is a friend. Am I going to be ostracised for that friendship? Do I stop meeting him? What do I do? If he were to ask me to get out, I'd do it.

Q. But there is an impression within the party, and in the public, that you're treated as very special.

A. I've gained nothing. I've never asked for a position. I'm one Congress(I) MP, who worked to collect Rs 2 crore during the Gujarat drought relief programme. Why should I have done it? I slogged for two days. I danced, I sang, I spoke and got the money for the people who needed it. And can you imagine what I got in return? A bloody court case in which people falsely alleged that this joker got the money for himself.

Q. You've been controversial since you entered politics. But now there's the new factor about Bunty.

A. Well, I'll tell you about him. He's four years younger to me. Has three daughters and a son. He joined Shaw Wallace after college. But he wanted to strike out on his own. He started slogging, making cans in a shed in Bombay. He did well. I was a struggling actor then, but when *Zanjeer* made it big, Bunty began to manage my financial affairs. I really have no head for finances. We bought into Raymond paints, and then we purchased the pharmaceutical company, IPCA, a sick unit, which now has a turnover of Rs 40 crore and which has won government awards for record exports. We also have foreign collaborations.

Q. But if he was so successful what made him go abroad?

A. He has good business acumen. He's a low-profile chap. People with smaller businesses make a bigger deal of it. But which young person doesn't want to go out and seek more opportunity. He's been in business all along. But only now people are talking.

Q. But, he had shifted to New Delhi, had he not, to be with you?

A. Yes, he shifted to Delhi, partly because my parents are here and my mother keeps indifferent health.

Q. Then why the sudden move to Switzerland?

A. Well, that had been on his mind for several years. But he finally decided to go last September or October.

Q. But he had a flourishing business right here.

A. Look, he's an independent minded person. If he wasn't, logically he would have got into films and become a film producer with me. And now that I'm in politics he could have joined me and helped me. But he likes business. He has a head for business. And he just wasn't interested in politics. He never once came to my MP's flat at 2-A, Motilal Nehru Marg.

Q. The move doesn't convince a lot of people.

A. But who would not want to go and get going if such an opportunity beckoned. For him, it was an opportunity to expand his business.

Q. But why, of all places, Switzerland? You know the kind of images that raises—Swiss bank accounts and all. Did you think it would cause such a commotion?

A. At the time he left, no. But his move there was pure coincidence. He's employed by a firm there. They screened his credentials carefully. He'll be involved in marketing and manufacturing and we'll

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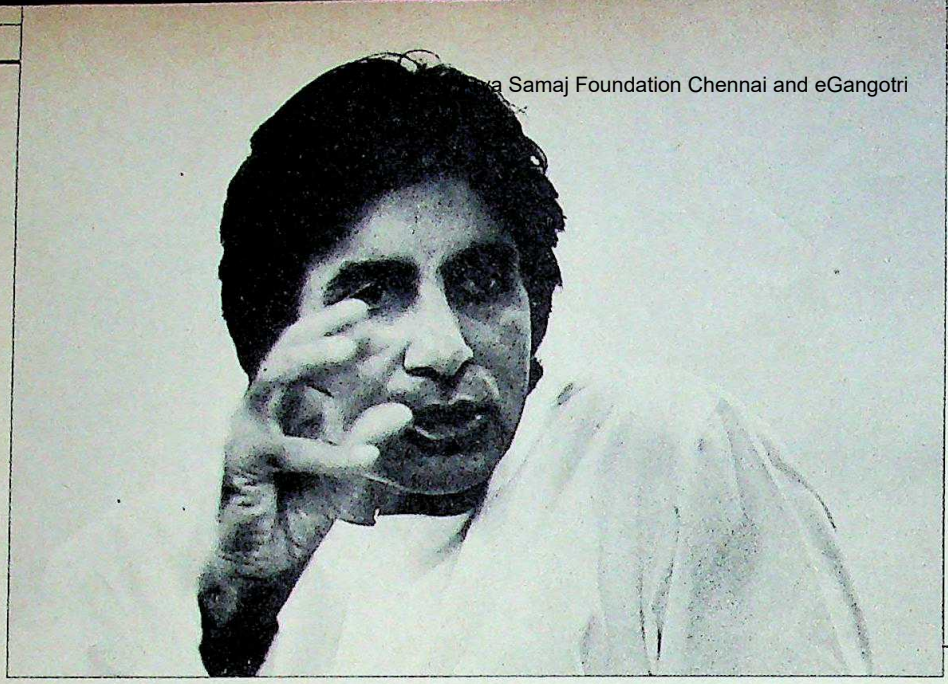


"People think there's an alternative to Rajiv Gandhi. They're sadly mistaken. I'll always fight for him. And I'll leave politics if he ever did."

provide raw material from here.

Q. *Don't you think it rather odd for a person who has a flourishing business, high social connections, and is generally well-settled to uproot himself and go and live in a foreign country?*

A. Business opportunities are better there than in India. He often felt stifled here. I mean, look, other people go abroad all the time.

Q. *Yes, but not people who run a Rs 40-crore business already.*

A. Why is it that just because he wants to stand on his own feet, we get clobbered for it? I rose from scum. I slept on benches and on roads without a roof while looking for a break in films. No one backed me then. Where was the media then?

Q. *You mean there was no inheritance or family money?*

A. No. Father was a professor. Nehru sponsored him to Cambridge where he got a Ph.D. for his work on the poetry of W.B. Yeats and occultism. Then he got a job translating English texts into Hindi in the External Affairs Ministry . There was no property or financial inheritance.

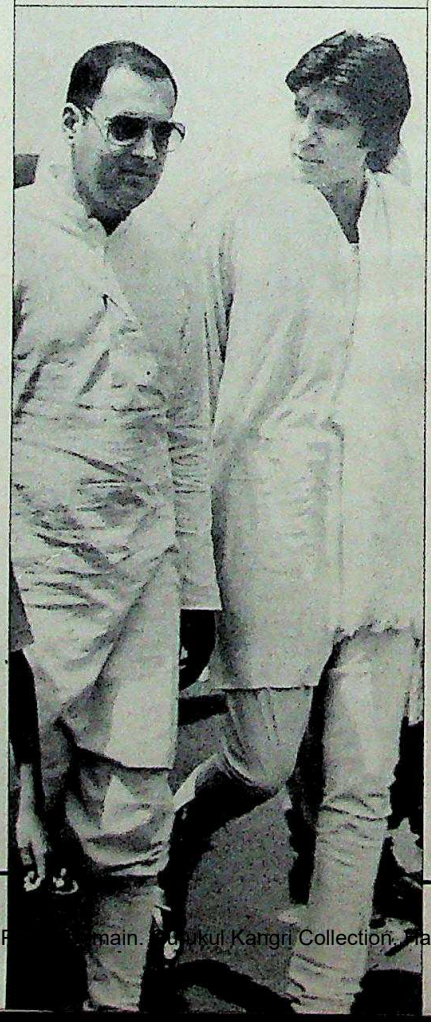
Q. *Were you aware that among the names to be referred to the Fairfax agency for investigation was that of the Bachchans also?*

A. Let them investigate. But, first let me ask, aren't there any rights a citizen has before he's investigated? If there is a question of evidence, what is the evidence? I say, if there is no evidence, then let the assets of all 10 million Indians living abroad also be investigated. There can't be a different law for Amitabh and one for the rest of the country. That's what makes me believe that there is an obvious move to defame me.

Q. *But you can't blame Parliament and the country for asking questions. After all, you are in public life.*

A. Rumours were planted by the media, and with time these rumours were presented as crystallised fact. And now the press questions me on the basis of rumours they started themselves.

Rajiv Gandhi and Amitabh Bachchan: personal commitment



Q. *But why have you been so reticent in answering questions about Bunty?*

A. He is a private person. Do I ask about you or about your brother.

Q. *But there is a difference. You are a prominent political figure, close to the prime minister, and your silence on the issue only raises more questions.*

A. All right, all right. He lives in Montreux. The kids go to a school called Aiglon, in Villars. He does not live in any fancy mansion. He lives in a two and a half bedroom flat on 900 sq ft that is paid for by his employers. They pay him a salary and take care of his kids' education.

Q. *What is his status? If he applies for residency or citizenship does it not entail paying a large sum of money there?*

A. No. There's no question of citizenship or residency. That is virtually impossible to get in Switzerland. What he is in the process of getting is a work permit. It doesn't involve payment of any money.

Q. *What is the name of this firm?*

A. Why do you want to know that? These firms are highly conscious of their privacy. It's simply a question of business ethics. They would be flooded with harassing queries if I gave you the name.

Q. *So what would have been wrong in clarifying these things earlier?*

A. Because if I have to give these clarifications on the basis of rumours I feel I'm being weak. And I will not do it. But if I'm asked specific questions in Parliament, I will first demand to know on what basis these questions are being asked, and whether it is in the public interest before I will provide the answers.

Q. *But if you, for a moment, look at the*

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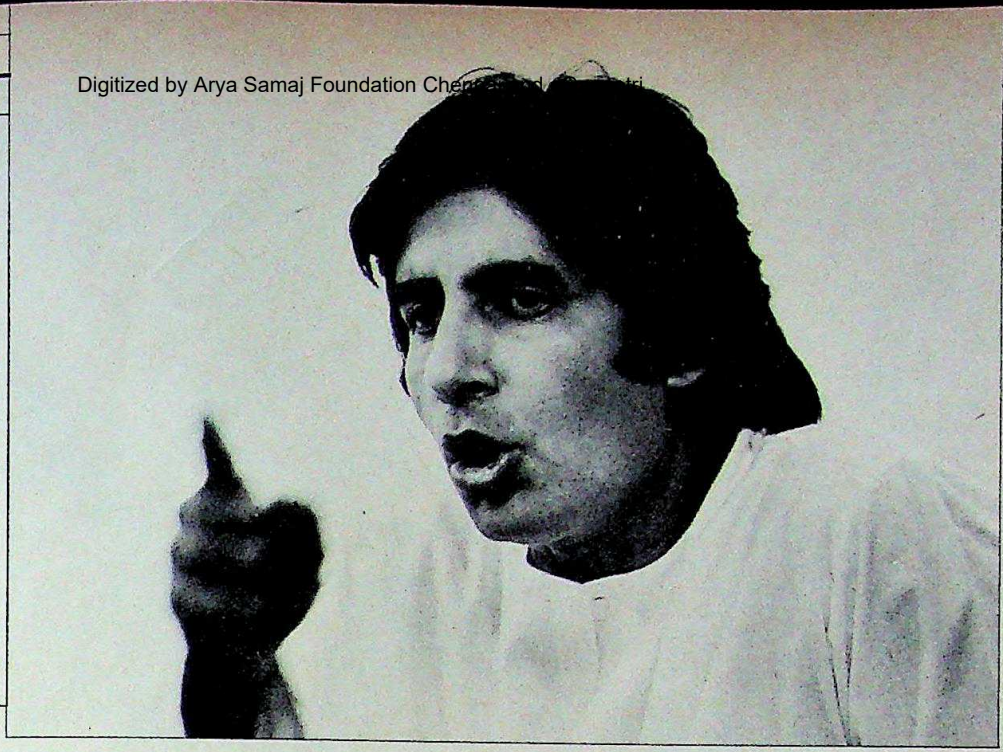


"Bunty lives in Montreux in a two and a half bedroom flat on 900 sq ft that is paid for by his employers. They pay him a salary."

unfolding scenario with the Fairfax agency, then your name comes up, and next a defence minister resigns. Don't you think the questions it raises are significant?

A. Of course. It's a beautiful screenplay. I must ask Salim-Javed to write it.

Q. *But people have a right to know what the truth is.*

A. Yeah, but nobody wants to believe the truth. Very simply, Bunty likes the business world. He likes the system there. It's free of bureaucratic hassles and there is no waiting for hours in government offices for licences. And he's thinking of launching several projects from there. He's not the only Indian there. There are at least 20,000 in that country. And he started from scratch. I'd like to see others, even V.P. Singh, try and start a business from a shed in Bombay like he did.

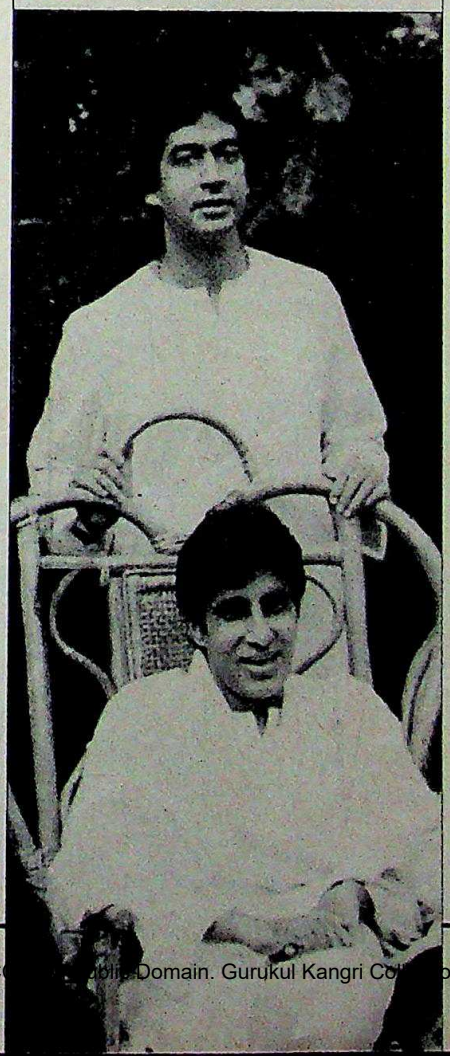
Q. *When they talk of political embarrassment, people point out that you used your clout to get the Uttar Pradesh chief minister to remove the Allahabad University vice-chancellor from office. Most of the MLAs from Allahabad are in revolt against you and have signed a petition against you.*

A. I have not seen this petition. But I had representations from the students saying they wanted a change. They were in total revolt. In fact they prevented the prime minister from visiting the university. Don't you think it is a matter of concern for an MP from that area? So, when his term expired, the chief minister did not renew it. I simply passed on this information to the chief minister.

Q. *There are also allegations that your Allahabad Fans Association has become politicised and you have given preferential jobs to members.*

A. So what? If there is someone in the fans association who is politically inclined and wants my help, what's wrong in my helping him? The trouble is that no matter whom you appoint, whatever the position may be, people are going to scream special favours. There are so many jealousies all around. I did what any MP does. So why is Amitabh always singled out?

Amitabh and Ajitabh Bachchan: controversial move



Q. *Again, it has been pointed out that it is because of your clout with Rajiv you were able to get the chief minister to your house for a meeting at which you gave him a long list of officers—19 is the stated number—whom you wanted transferred.*

A. The terms of three main officials were expiring and I felt new administrative officers were needed for the betterment of the city. Again, that is what any MP from a city does.

Q. *Similarly, your own colleagues in the film world accuse you of having let them down when you participated in handling the strike settlement. They say you sold out to the powers in Delhi.*

A. Again this is a question of people picking on me for the heck of it. My role in settling that strike was that of an MP and a representative of the people. I did not get elected as an MP from the film world. But that doesn't mean I disown them. And no one is willing to say that with my help, for the first time in 50 years, the film industry got a reduction in excise. This was a great relief. It wasn't all they wanted, but in which labour bargaining situation does a group ever get all it wants? Even Sunil Dutt participated in the final settlement in which the chief minister was also involved, but four days later Dutt began to criticise me and said he was not a party to the settlement.

Q. *But several studios circulated letters calling for your boycott and these letters, producers say, were withdrawn after high-level pressure from Delhi.*

A. I know. I was labelled as a traitor. I

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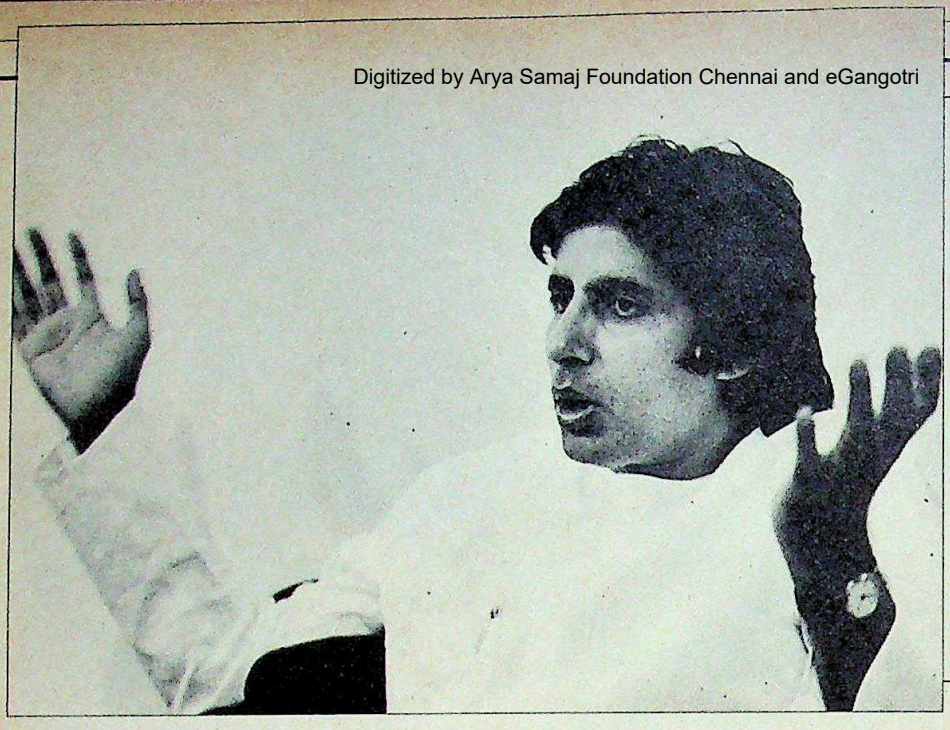

"I don't even smell anybody as an alternative. Not even a rat. Rajiv is a good, noble soul. But people he trusted have let him down."

wanted to call off the strike because the workers were suffering. And there was no pressure from Delhi to withdraw the letters. It just seems to me, I've been born to attract controversy. I guess I'll have to resign myself to the fact that I'll always be the loser, always be on the wrong side of things. But I'm also a fighter. And I'll keep fighting when I believe I'm right.

Q. *There are also reports that just before the Fairfax probe started, you took Dhirubhai Ambani, Reliance chairman, to meet Rajiv in order to assist him in settling some of his problems with the Government arising out of the Finance Ministry's investigation of that firm.*

A. Not true. According to the gossip he was supposed to have paid me Rs 5 crore for arranging the meeting. Well, why Rs 5 crore, why not Rs 10 crore? The truth is I don't even know Dhirubhai Ambani. I have only met one of his sons socially. I suppose in the next round my name is also going to figure in the defence deal probe that was ordered by V.P. Singh.

Q. *But do you think that Rajiv Gandhi has suffered and his position weakened because of all this?*

A. If people in the country or the party think there's an alternative to Rajiv Gandhi, they're sadly mistaken. I'll always fight for him. And I'll leave politics if he ever did. I'm here only because of him.

Q. *But that's the usual party line. Alternate leaders emerge just as Rajiv Gandhi did.*

A. I don't even smell anybody. Not even a rat. But Rajiv was always there, the whole country sensed him. He is a good, noble soul. And people he trusted, and entrusted jobs to, have failed him. They have let him down.

Q. *Who? And if this is so, it appears Rajiv must be lonely for good advice and support. If you are in politics because of him don't you think you should help him more rather than pretending to be just another MP nursing his constituency?*

A. I don't want to name names, but I do feel badly about this. But the moment I go to his help I get knocked on the head by a Fairfax or some other issue. Anyway, it's good to be knocked around a bit because that brings change. I still have faith and confidence in him.

Q. *Do you believe that V.P. Singh exceeded his brief in ordering the probe into Fairfax?*

A. Only the commission of inquiry will be able to establish that.

Q. *But don't you think V.P. Singh's resignation had a negative effect on the Government and the party?*

A. Many times I have felt in the past that our party in Parliament was disjointed and disorganised. But during the Fairfax debate we were cohesive and worked like a team. We beat the Opposition on every point with a great deal of dignity and poise.

Q. *Government sources say that you once rang up V.P. Singh to try and call off a tax investigation of Rekha.*

A. Why don't we pick up the phone and check with V.P. Singh? I've never

Rajiv Gandhi and V.P. Singh: unfriendly probe

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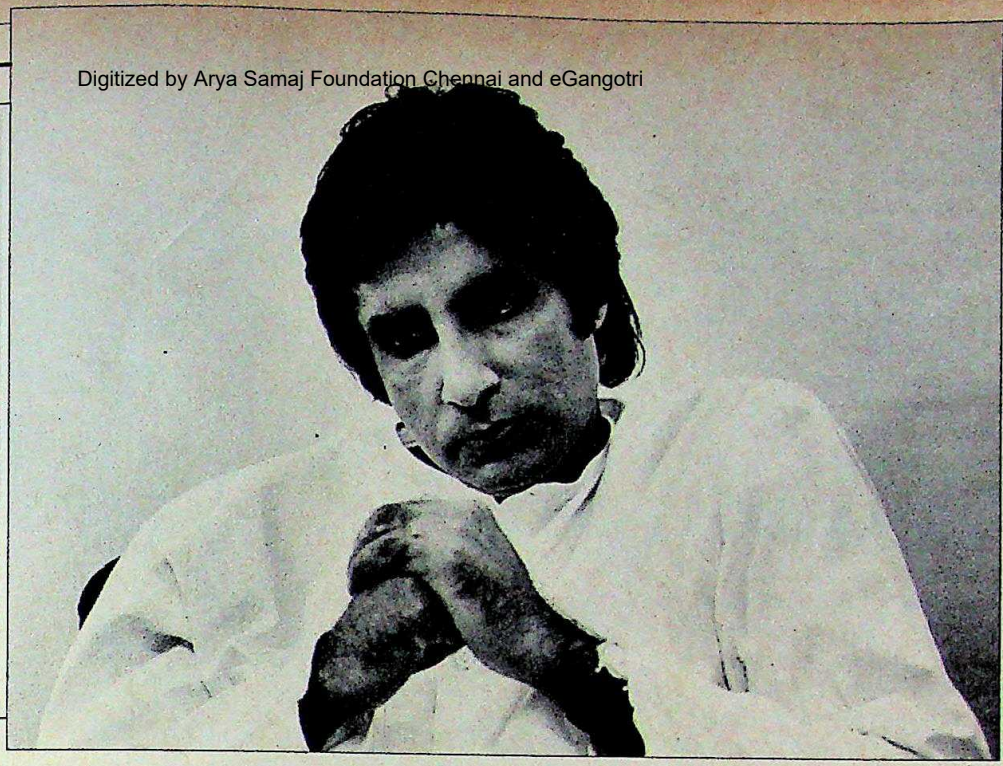

"I'll never be able to wipe out this stain. This whole country prayed for my life in 1982 when I was nearly dying in hospital. And now they fling shoes at me."

rung up Mr Singh on any raid episode on any artiste. Once, in Parliament I talked to him about a petition regarding some taxes that had been filed by Dharmendra and Hema Malini. I asked him if he would listen to them. He told me that I should refer the matter to Janardhan Poojari (minister of state for finance), which is what I did.

Q. *What about the constant controversy about your own taxes?*

A. I have never had any income tax outstanding. And I've paid record amounts since 1984. You can check on that. This charge keeps cropping up against me because they want to see my name up there with Sivaji Ganesan, NTR, Dharmendra and Hema Malini. Why don't people ever ask how much the Government has earned from what I've earned? The crores that have been made from my films for the Government treasury? I'll invite you to go over my tax returns with a microscope.

Q. ***In 1980-81 you showed Rs 33.50 lakh as professional income and claimed a tax deduction of more than Rs 21 lakh. Ultimately, your taxable income that year came down to a little over Rs 4 lakh.***

A. I do give to charity. What's wrong with that? Look, my work is documented in 75 films. The fallacy is that I make crores of rupees. I was paid Rs 1 lakh for *Zanjeer*. I was paid just Rs 1 lakh for *Sholay*. I had to beg for a role in that film. All that period is coolly forgotten by everyone.

Q. ***But why do you think you are constantly under attack? Do you think it's orchestrated, and if so, by whom?***

A. I don't know. You tell me. I suspect that because it is happening so constantly it must be organised. Maybe it is because I'm a self-made man. I took nobody's help. I struggled for every penny I've earned. And in this country calling yourself successful, or being successful, is like having committed a sin. Look, what did I have before? I graduated from Kirorimal College in Delhi, and someone told me, if you learn to play golf and sip beer in the afternoon you can land yourself a nice, firm job in Calcutta. So I put on my raw silk jacket and went from office to office putting on my best English accent, and got a job with Bird and Co—Rs 470 a month was my salary. I was interested in films and we saw this ad in the papers for new talent. Bunty took a box camera picture of mine outside the Victoria Memorial and we sent it to a studio. K.A. Abbas signed me up for my first picture, *Saat Hindustani*, for which I got Rs 3,000.

Q. ***But despite your success, you seem to be more and more on the defensive.***

A. That is the trouble. I can no longer say anything to prove my credentials to my dying day. My face has been blackened and I'll never be able to wipe out this stain. It's difficult being a 'have' in this country. Even moneyed people pose as have-nots. The moment you 'have' it, you've had it. That's what I feel about my own success. This whole country prayed for my life in 1982 when I was nearly dying in hospital. And now they fling shoes at me.

Banner during Amitabh's illness: mood change

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PRASHANT PANJIAR

SUPREME COURT

Women's Way

IN the Supreme Court, women's issues quite literally seem to be the order of the day. The past few weeks have seen three judgements in quick succession on matters close to the female heart: upholding equal pay for equal work, clarifying that daughters are equally responsible as sons for the maintenance of parents, and finally, sustaining a Muslim woman's right to live separately with maintenance from her husband if he takes a mistress or marries again.

In the first, stenographer Audrey D'Costa won a six-year battle against shipping giant Mackinnon Mackenzie and Co to wrest a salary at par with her male counterparts.

In the second case, Kashirao Sawai was granted maintenance from his married daughter Vijaya Arbat, a doctor. Arbat had appealed against it, saying the law made it obligatory only for sons. The judges ruled otherwise, but said the daughter must have sufficient income independent of her husband.

Lawyer Indira Jaising welcomed the judgement, stating simply, that if women want equal rights, they must have equal responsibilities too. But others had reservations. "There are certain lacunae the verdict ignores," said Prabeen Grewal of Saheli, a women's rights organisation. Grewal felt that when inheritance laws favour sons, the onus of maintaining parents too should be on the sons. Besides, Grewal pointed out: "This verdict will cause tension in the daughters' matrimonial homes."

The third judgement—the Begum Sabanu alias Saira Banu vs Abdul Ghafoor case, vindicating the rights of married Muslim women under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code—threatens to provoke a sequel to the Shah Bano controversy. That episode had resulted in the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, excluding divorced Muslim women from the purview of Section 125 Cr.PC.

In ordering maintenance for Saira Banu, the court made two substantial points. On claiming maintenance, they said, from the point of view of the neglected wife, the law "places the second wife and a mistress on the same footing...." They also said that if a husband has contracted marriage with another woman or keeps a mistress, his wife can justly refuse to live with him—and that this applied to Muslim women as much as to women of any other religion. The Muslim Women Act did not apply as Saira Banu was not a divorcee.

> **The Saira Banu case, vindicating the rights of married Muslim women, threatens to provoke a sequel to the Shah Bano controversy.**

The judgement was "an eloquent vindication of two of the most vital principles enshrined in the Constitution: equality before the law and dignity of the individual," editorialised *The Times of India*. Arif Mohammed Khan, who had vehemently opposed the Muslim Women Act, stressed: "The verdict has upheld the earlier view that Section 125 is a secular law that is applicable to all citizens of this country." Daniel Latifi, the leading lawyer in Shah Bano's case, and Kirti Singh, noted lawyer on women's rights, pointed out that the judgement was "merely a clarification of the existing law". But others felt its significance lay in its timing—just before the pending case challenging the Muslim Women Act itself was taken up by the Supreme Court. Yet all of them had one fear: what would be the position if Saira Banu's husband were to divorce her now, bringing her into the fold of the Act?

But Muslim fundamentalists appeared to be taxing their minds on a different plane altogether. Syed Shahabuddin, the Janata MP who had also led the campaign against the Shah Bano judgement, maintained that "the judges have only widened the conflict between the Shariat and the Criminal Procedure Code by remaining silent on certain issues." According to the Shariat, he said, the first wife would be entitled to separate residence and maintenance only if she can accuse the husband of "unequal treatment" as compared to the second wife. Moreover, the first wife can demand maintenance only till she continued to have conjugal relations with her husband, he said.

Interestingly, Shahabuddin's initial reaction was quite different. For, earlier he had told *The Statesman*: "We never objected to a husband paying maintenance to his wife or a son to his parents. These are Islamic duties under the Shariat and not just legal duties under the law of the land." But he has obviously changed his mind. The squabbling it seems will go on, till the Supreme Court makes up its mind on the petition challenging the Muslim Women Act.

—TANIA MIDHA

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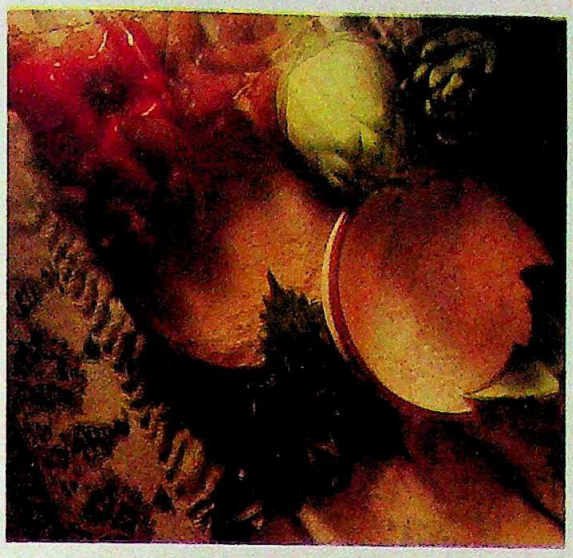

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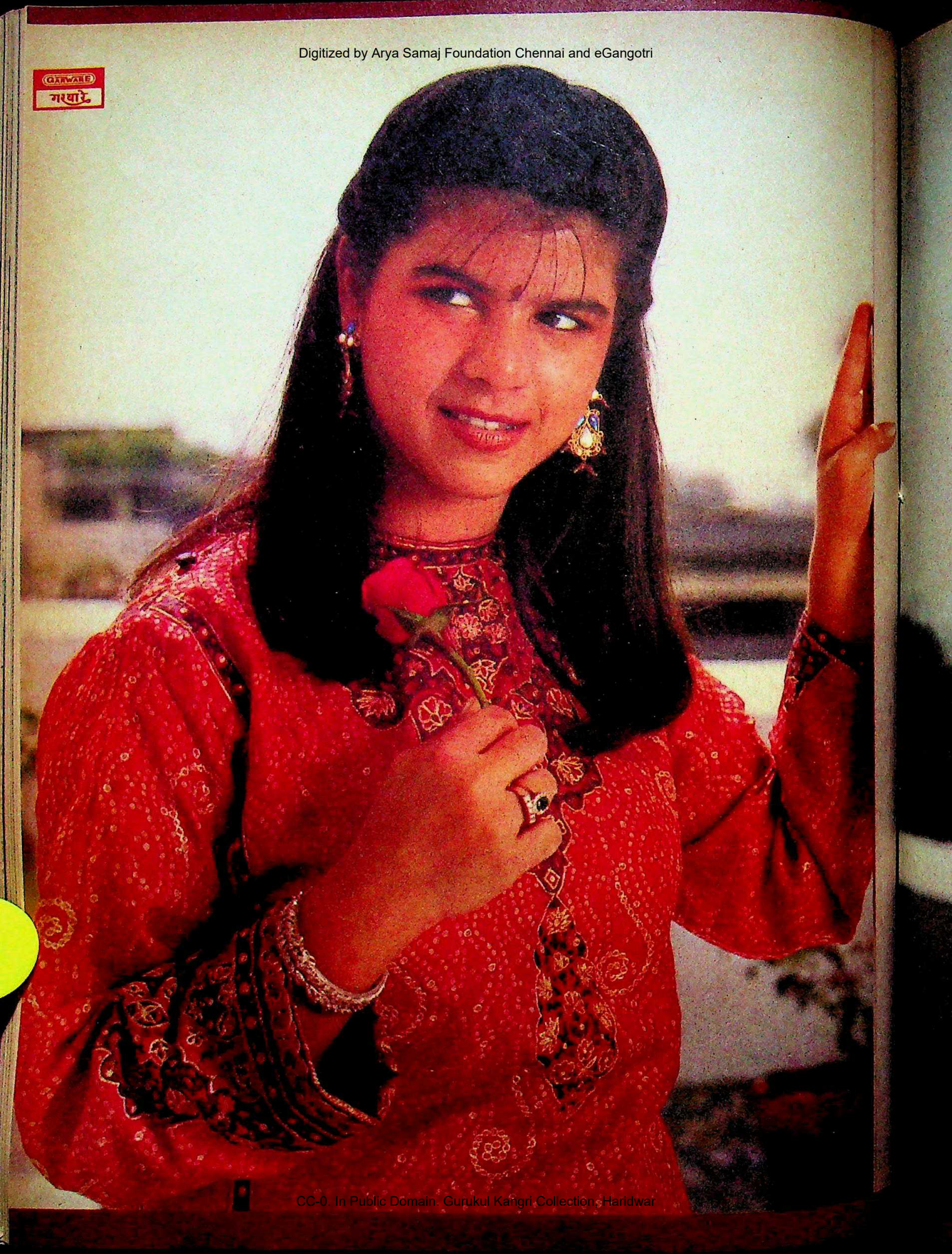

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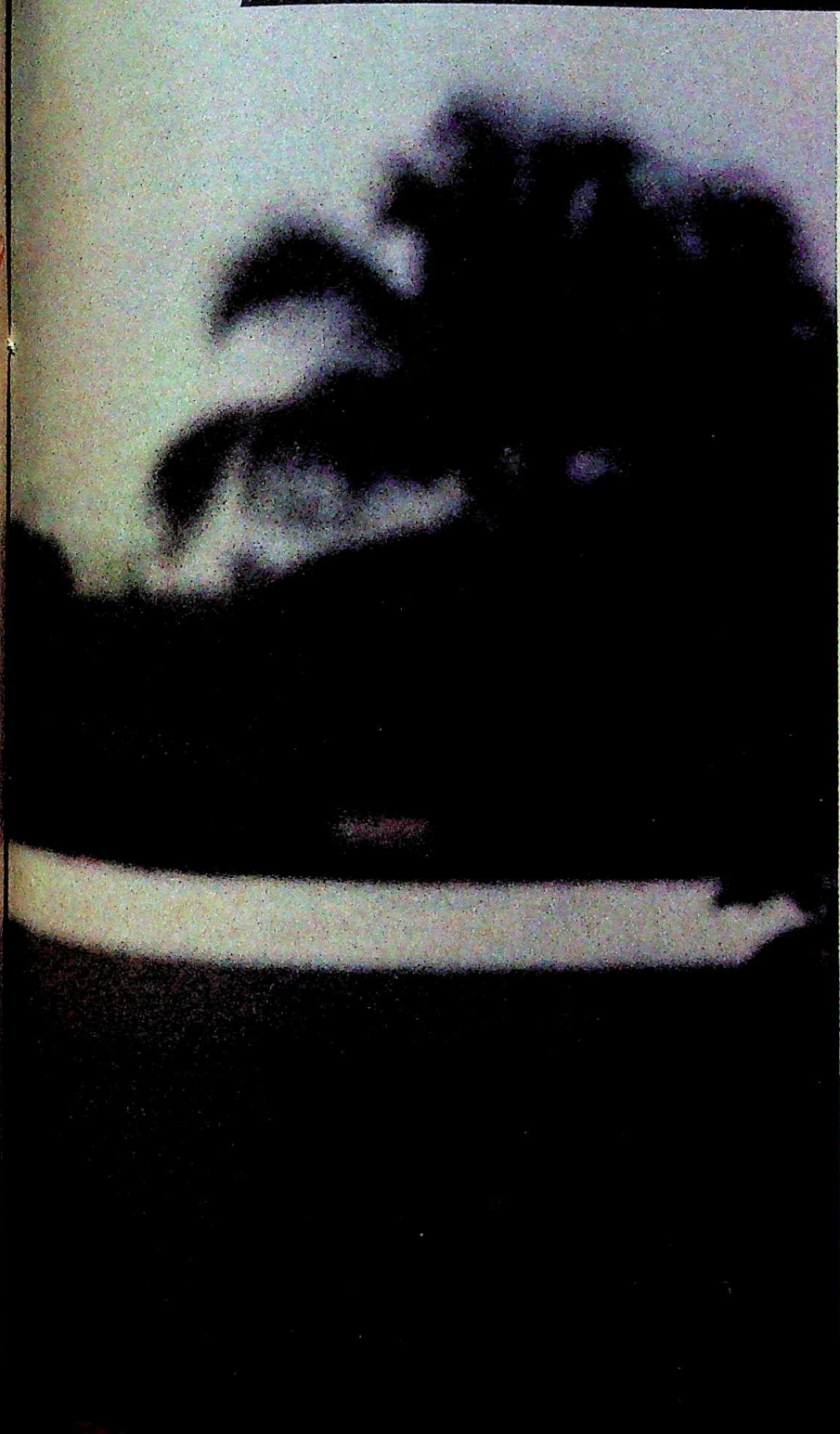

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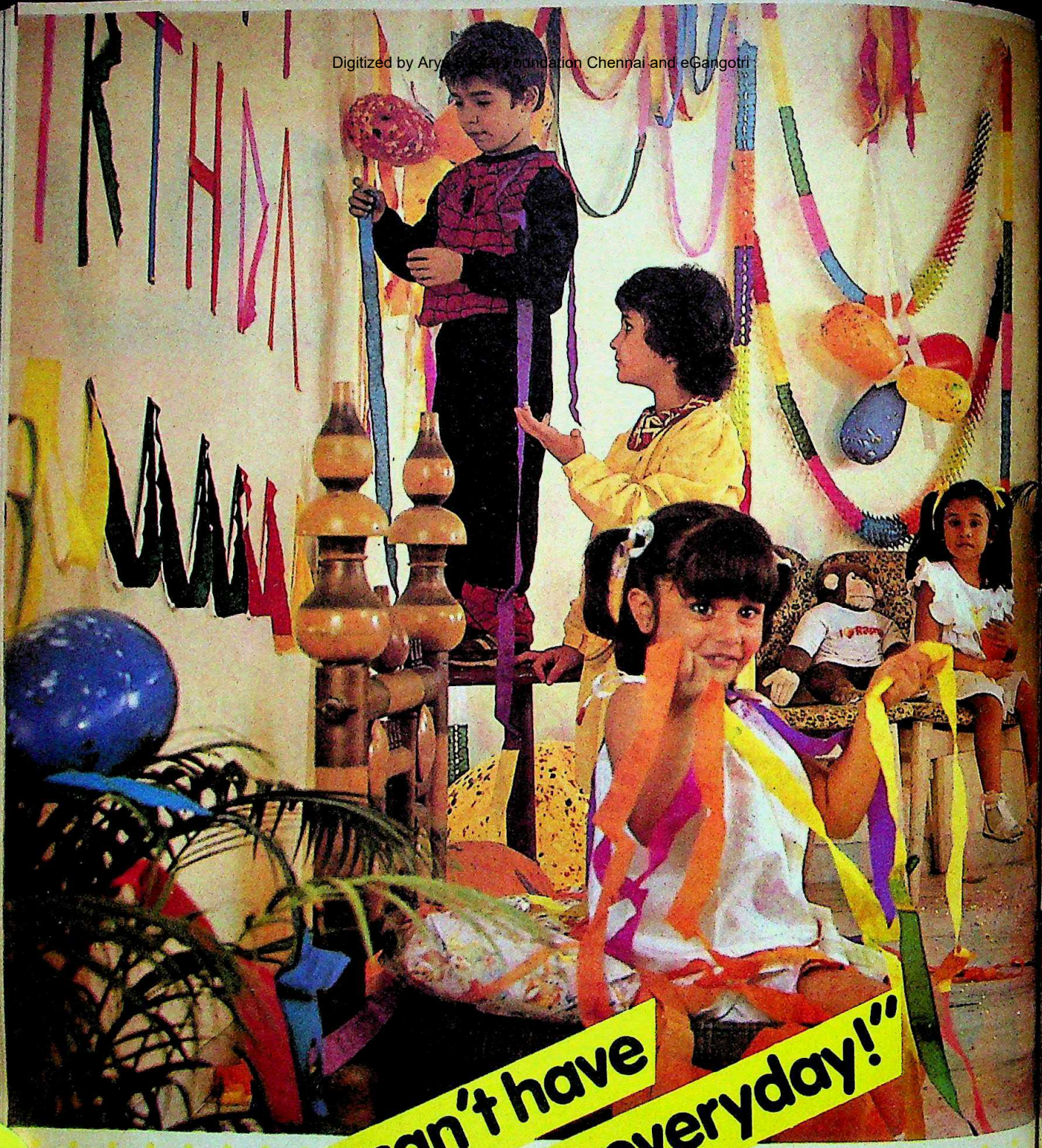

"Pity, we can't have Rasna parties everyday!"

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Rasna

SO ORANGIE-ORANGIE!

INDIA'S LARGEST SELLING SOFT DRINK CONCENTRATE

Manufactured by: Proma Industries, Asarwa, Ahmedabad 380 016.

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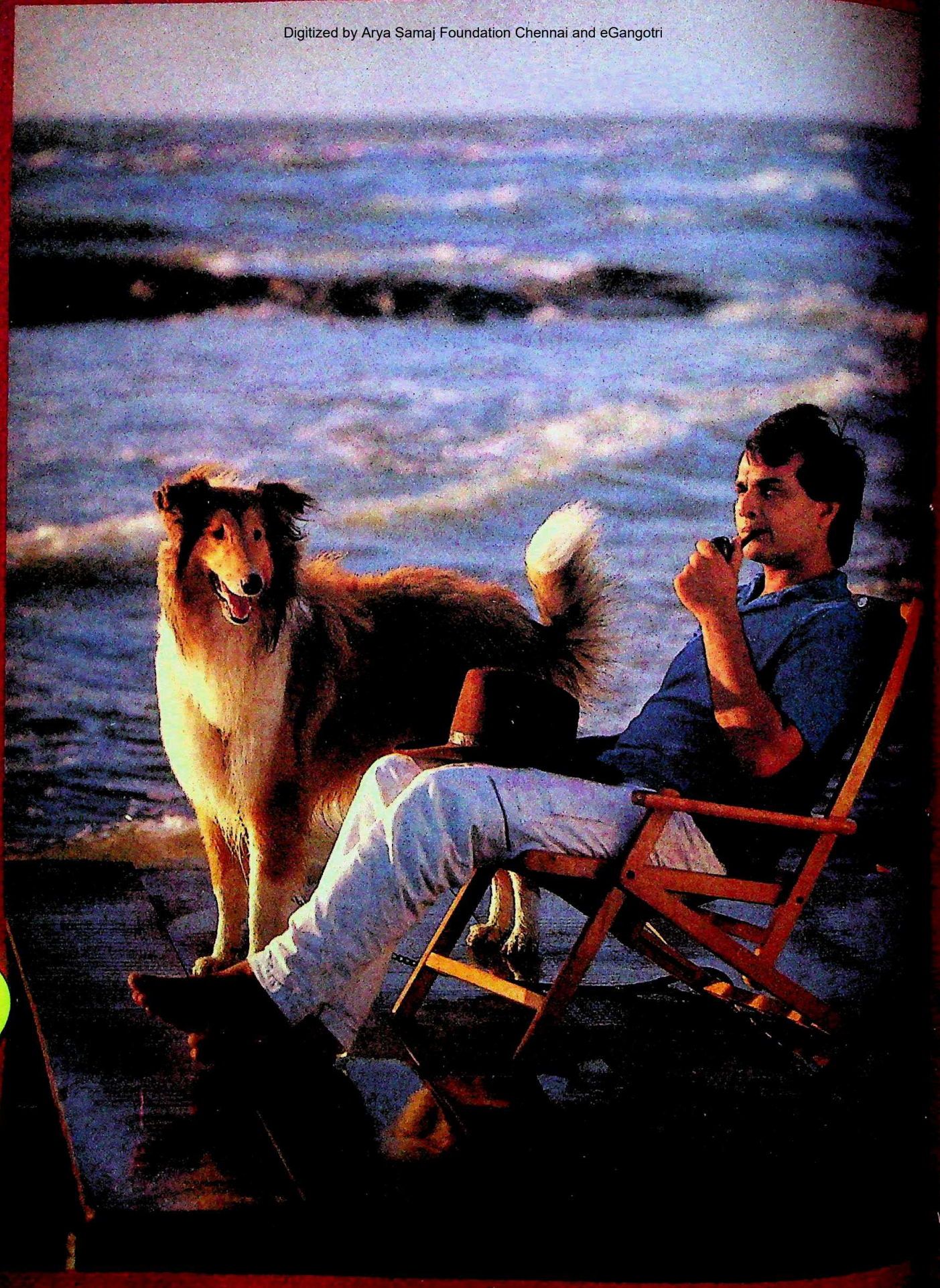

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You won't find the Bull in a common herd.

Smash
International

After raging abroad, the Bull has returned. Smash international quality T-shirts are now available in India.
The rare match of the cool comfort of classic cotton with the elegance and style of high fashion.

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"Now I see what I'd been missing."

TC-2160MR
PAL-System Colour TV
- 21 (54 cm) Grey Square Corner Picture Tube
- 35-Key TV/Video Dual Remote Control
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"Watching TV is important to me because it's part of my profession ... so I just naturally want to watch the best quality whenever possible. That's why I watch National. The 54-centimeter (21) TC-2160MR, for example, has a square-cornered picture tube that virtually eliminates distortion and image cropping ... and a cool, grey screen makes viewing easier on the eyes. Auto Tuning allows preset tuning of up to 30 channels. And a 35-key infra-red remote control controls not only the TV, but many National videos, too. And if something does go wrong, the National Service Network is there to back me up. Now I see what I'd been missing. You can see it too, at a shop that sells quality National electronics."

Mithun Chakraborty

National Authorized Service Centres in India

Indus Airconditioning Pvt. Ltd. (For home appliances only)
• 371, Cadell Road, Prabhadevi, Bombay 400 028 Tel: 4303719/4309270

Associated Electrical Agencies (For audio/video products only)
• Anugraha Apartments, "B" Block, Ground Floor 19, Nungambakkam High Road, Madras 600 034 Tel: 478559

Esquire Distributing & Servicing Co. Pvt. Ltd.
(For video-related products only)
• Unit No. 1A & 1B Ground Floor, Rehmat Manzil, Dr. Ved Nakhan Road, Churchgate, Bombay 400 028 Tel: 234226/230311

National

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PAKISTAN

The London Blitz

THE vociferous band of Pakistan People's Party supporters ranged outside the Foreign Press Association in Carlton House in London, kept up a deafening din, "Bhutto, Bhutto", almost drowning out Mohammed Khan Junejo, prime minister of Pakistan, as he rose to address a gathering of journalists. Although clearly discomfited, the mild mannered prime minister, to his credit, bravely ignored the shrieking cries of "Junejo, go back to the barracks" and "go back to your general".

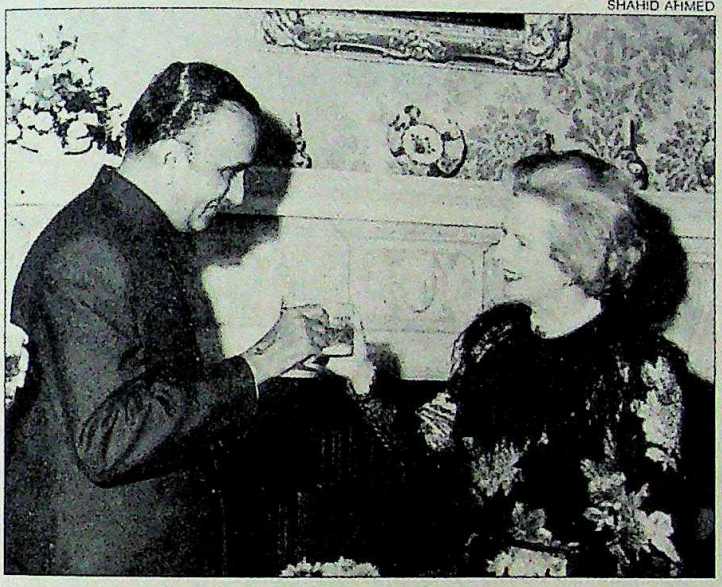
His predicament was symptomatic of the vexatious situations that had confronted him and his imposing delegation throughout their week-long visit to Britain last fortnight, intended to convince this country as well as the world, that democracy in Pakistan was now a firmly entrenched reality. Unfortunately for Junejo, his Foreign Minister, Sahibzada Yakub Khan and for the rest of the entourage bristling with military brass, they spent much of their time on the defensive—defending the questionable, non-party elections through which he came to power, the hundreds of political prisoners languishing in Pakistani jails, the dubious role of the army in the country's affairs and his own ability to stand up to the pressures imposed on him by General Zia-ul-Haq. And never too far away, was the menacing question of the nuclear bomb..

At the Foreign Press Association, Junejo blithely fielded questions about the authenticity of Pakistani democracy. To his bemused audience, he remarked: "After eight years of martial law, since 1985, I have been able to give complete democracy in Pakistan. You sitting in London, cannot dream what is happening in Pakistan. The freedom of the press currently enjoyed in the country has never been witnessed before, in the past 15 years"—a sentiment that the hapless editor of *The Muslim*, Mushahid Hussein, would no doubt, find hard to agree with. Junejo went on: "So far we have had only two fair elections in Pakistan—in 1977 and in 1985."

It was only when he was quizzed about the nuclear bomb that a benumbed audience came to life. Asked Junejo: "How much credence would you give to a report made by an Indian journalist, sitting on Indian soil, about a Pakistani nuclear bomb? Regarding the *Time* magazine interview in which our President was attributed as saying we have nuclear bomb capability, I myself asked President Zia, 'tell me Mr President, is the story true?' He said that what has been reported in *Time* magazine was totally wrong. The President has instead said Pakistan has no capability to make a bomb." It is debatable as to how many journalists present found it easy to believe Junejo.

Junejo with Thatcher: seeking support

SHAHID AHMED



Junejo's visit to Britain, though intended to convince the world that democracy had returned to Pakistan, turned out instead as an exercise in defence of the Government.

Expectedly, the hour-long talks between Margaret Thatcher and Junejo at No. 10, Downing Street, were dominated by Afghanistan. It appears that both were convinced that the Soviet Union wished to withdraw its 115,000 troops from Afghanistan, but the thorny question was to find a government acceptable to everyone. The British prime minister and her visitor wanted a "neutral, non-aligned regime in Kabul", and would have nothing to do with the present ruler of the country, Dr Najibullah who has called upon the Mujahedin-led resistance to join a government of national reconciliation.

While Afghanistan was the key issue, Indian observers here were tuned to the reports that Pakistan was once again seeking entry into the Commonwealth—a move steadfastly opposed by India. Some astute lobbying was done by the Pakistan delegation led by Yakub Khan. Although little was forthcoming from their meetings with Commonwealth Secretary-General Shridath Ramphal, it appeared that most western nations, led by Britain, would be glad to have Pakistan back in the club. And though Junejo denied that any formal application had been made for their re-entry, he indicated that they would gladly consider a "formal invitation". But he added: "India opposes us." What this seemed to mean was that informal bilateral discussions would be carried on by Pakistan and other Commonwealth nations, while Ramphal would sound out all members how they felt about Pakistan's re-entry. But what would happen should one country, say India, be adamantly opposed? A Commonwealth Secretariat spokesman said: "It is difficult to say anything now since there has never been any precedent of a member nation quitting and wishing to rejoin."

Independent observers feel it was now reasonable to expect, throughout western Europe, a Pakistani public relations barrage on three counts: the Afghan question and the increasing burden of the three million refugees; the "non-existent" Islamic bomb; and the grave problems confronting the country's eastern borders—viz India.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN in London

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WASHINGTON

Pitching for Pakistan

FOR several weeks it had shaped like a cliff-hanger cricket Test match, with fortunes swaying almost on an hourly basis. But last fortnight the signals were getting clearer, and somewhat depressing for India. The pitch on Capitol Hill had turned distinctly in favour of Pakistan.

The Indian camp had still not conceded defeat but there was now a sense of helplessness, with even a supposedly pro-Indian Congressman like Democrat Stephen Solarz of Brooklyn deciding to float with the right-wing mainstream. Said an Indian lobbyist: "What we have been up against is not Pakistan but the US Administration. Make no mistake about that."

As the desperate lobbying entered its penultimate phase, it was clear last fortnight that, barring a miracle, Pakistan was going to get all of its proposed $ 4.02 billion aid package, including much of the modern weaponry it had demanded. Perhaps the only question that still remained was what kind of Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) the US Administration will finally be able to supply Pakistan. "That something of the sort will be given to Pakistan is beyond any doubt," said a State Department official.

While the optimists on the Indian side still hope that Pakistan may finally have to settle for a lesser system than the E-3—perhaps the Grumman Hawkeye—the Congress has left the option entirely with President Reagan. It has authorised him to sanction the AWACS if he certified that "there is no other cost-effective alternative and that the system would provide effective air defence against attacks from Afghanistan". Since this had been the Administration's line to begin with, it is unlikely that Reagan would dilute his own, original recommendations.

In the complicated American system of decision-making, it will still be some months—perhaps till September—before a final arms package is approved. And, even if a little dispirited, the Indian side is praying for a reversal of fortunes in the Senate. The next step in the decision-making process is the consideration of the aid package by the Senate Foreign Policy Committee, where India has some influential supporters. In fact the only good news from the Indian point of view in recent weeks came from the Senate committee last fortnight, when the committee's secretariat circulated a draft of amendments in the Pakistani aid package. The suggested amendments include a stipulation that Pakistan should not be given any military hardware that introduces new, higher technologies in the region, that there should be a yearly slashing of $ 100 million in arms aid and

Photographs by USIS

Reagan: full authority

$ 45 million in economic aid, and, most vitally, that the aid package should not be approved unless Reagan has verifiable assurances that Pakistan is not pursuing a nuclear weapons programme.

The term "verifiable" survived on the draft after a lot of haggling, and this, from India's point of view, is a key factor since a common interpretation of verifiable assurances is that it would involve inspection of Kahuta by American officials. But it is still only a draft and could end up looking very different in its final form, after a complicated series of discussions, votes and, possibly, some hard bargaining at the Senate-Congress conference.

Indian officials admit that they have

US CONGRESS

India Bashing

NOT for a long time had American decision-makers sent such a nasty signal to New Delhi. In a step that shocked Indian policy planners and surprised even the US State Department, the House Foreign Affairs Committee decided last fortnight, to slash by $ 15 million the proposed $ 50 million development assistance to India. Worse, in the run-up to the amendment, some Democrat Congressmen joined arch-Republicans in condemning India for its proximity to Nicaragua's Sandinista regime, its close defence ties with the Soviet Union and its lack of opposition to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

So intense was the assault on India that Congressmen even accused the Indian Government of hurting US farmers' interests, by selling their surplus wheat to the Soviets. While the Republicans, led by William S. Broomfield of Michigan, out-Ramboed Reagan, Democrats Robert Torricelli and Peter Kostmayer also castigated India for its attitude towards Israel, a "sister democracy". In the past, both Torricelli and Kostmayer were considered generally sympathetic towards India.

While the Republicans attacked India on almost all aspects of its foreign policy, the Broomfield assault was directed specifically at the $ 10.4 million assistance pledged by India to Nicaragua in September last year, when President Daniel Ortega visited New Delhi. So strong was the feeling on this issue that Stephen Solarz's plea, that it was after all not American dollars that India was

Broomfield: sharp attacks

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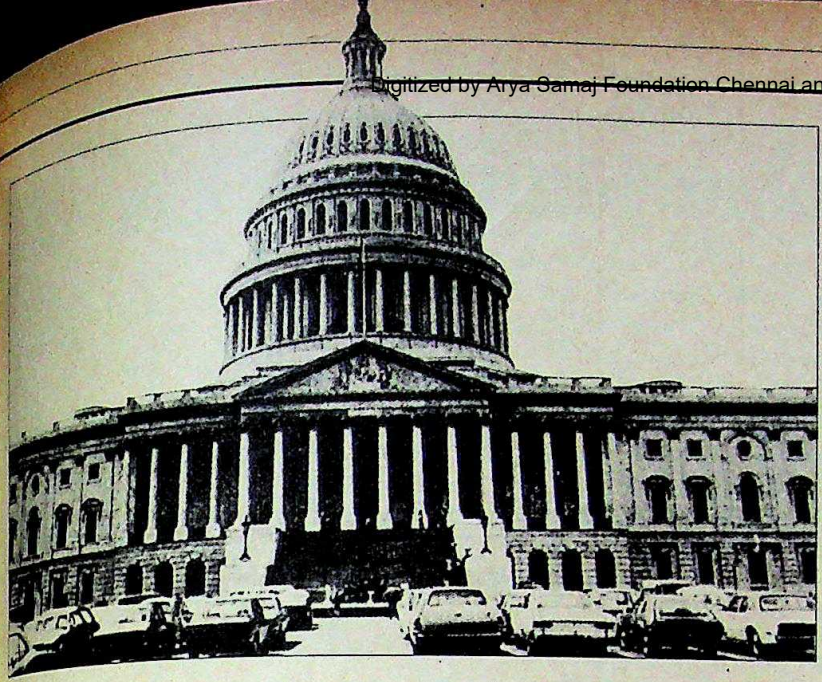

Capitol Hill: depressing signals

little chance of stopping the aid package. But they also see some consolation in defeat—in the fact that the Indian effort has had some impact this time. This is unlike in the past, when the $ 3.2 billion package to Pakistan was approved without any problems. Said Ambassador P.K. Kaul: "We have taken this seriously. We have had two of our people working almost full-time on the Hill."

But given the current mood in the US, it is apparent that whether two or 20, even the most brilliant Indian diplomats can do very little to turn around the new McCarthyism that stalks the American establishment (*see box*). So strong is the anti-communist tide that even liberal Democrats can't swim against it. The Indian lobby's task was made even more difficult by the timing of the alleged Soviet-Afghan air raids on border villages in Pakistan, just when the deliberations on the Hill were at their most crucial stage. The bombings were followed by the shooting of an Ilyushin transport aircraft by a Pakistani F-16 (the Pakistanis claim the aircraft was spying and was escorted by a fighter, while Kabul asserts that it was an airliner). "A few more incidents like this and India would have to blame the Russians for giving Pakistan the AWACS," said a State Department official.

In this atmosphere, even the Indian supporters have found it convenient to equate India with Pakistan. At one stage, even Solarz, who had once sought financial help from Indian settlers in the US for his fight against the arming of Pakistan, said at a subcommittee meeting: "The truth is, if we sell arms to Pakistan, Indians are going to object....They might even object to sling-shots, for all I know."

But Indian officials believe that the Pakistani arms shopping list includes, besides the AWACS, a large number of M-48 tanks, P-3 Orion maritime reconnaissance and anti-submarine warfare aircraft and Vulcan-Phalanx rapid-firing guns for naval ships. The Pakistanis also want to reserve 15 per cent of the aid package for their ambitious armament production programme. Top priority is placed in Pakistan on the plans to manufacture an upgraded version of the Chinese F-7 fighter and the T-59 tank.

In the current situation, it is unlikely that there will be any major changes in the aid package. Though the Indian effort could move to higher levels, with the forthcoming visits of Indian ministers—External Affairs Minister N.D. Tiwari and his deputy K. Natwar Singh—there will be no stopping the Pakistanis from getting what they have demanded. That will push up the arms race in the subcontinent.

On yet another level, it will leave Indian policy planners with the uneasy realisation that, with American and Pakistani strategic interests converging almost completely now, there will be no knocking the Pakistani lobby in the US till either the Soviet Union leaves Afghanistan or India discovers or builds a lobby of its own. Neither seems likely just now.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Washington

giving Nicaragua, fell on deaf ears.

For once, even the US Administration tried to plead the Indian cause. The State Department's deputy assistant secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, called it a "very wrong signal" and warned the committee that India would view it as a "punitive" action and could "react very strongly". Broomfield and his supporters said that they couldn't care less, and that the cut was indeed meant to be that kind of a signal.

There was dismay in the Indian Embassy, where an aid cut was anticipated, but not the kind of criticism that the debate involved. "Once again, senior leaders in the American political system have proved how little they know of India," said an Indian diplomat, pointing out that a $ 50 million aid package was of no consequence to India anyway. And while New Delhi was yet to make its mind known on the cut, there was speculation that India might simply turn down even the remaining $ 35 million.

Indian officials ascribe the sudden attack on India to the hawkish mood on the Hill and among the American establishment. This was evident last month, in the testimony before the Congressional subcommittee by Marine General George Christ, who heads the US Central Command. Asked about the likely impact of Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear weapons capability on American defence projections, Christ clearly remarked that it would be a useful deterrent against the Soviet Union.

It is the return of such obsessive fear of communism and the consequent inclination to treat every non-ally as an adversary, that makes the going so much more difficult for India. Similar fears have also hardened Pentagon's resistance to the proposed super-computer sale to India and, consequently, the US Administration's offer of a lesser super-computer than India wants.

Observers here are still a little surprised by the lack of obvious reaction from India to these developments. It seems that South Block is still weighing the situation and will wait for the outcome of the visits of N.D. Tiwari and K. Natwar Singh, besides the outcome of the Senate subcommittee deliberations on the Pakistan aid package, on April 24. But unless damage control is initiated quickly, the aid cut, taken together with the generosity towards Pakistan and the new hesitations on the super-computer sale, could easily take Indo-US relations back to the chilly days of 1971, making it the most expensive $ 15 million the US taxpayer ever saved.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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BOMBAY

White Collar Slum Dwellers

BOMBAY slums have always been associated with menial labourers, small-time tradesmen, pavement hawkers, petty thieves, and the flotsam and jetsam of the lumpen proletariat. It hardly occurs to even the most immunised Bombayite that within the filth and grime of the city's *jhopadpatti* colonies also dwell cringing members of the educated middle class—engineers, bank officers, advocates, doctors, airline crew, schoolteachers—living two parallel lives. They hate every minute of their slum existence but are helpless in the face of the acute housing shortage in Bombay. They have the money to rent respectable dwellings but there simply aren't any available.

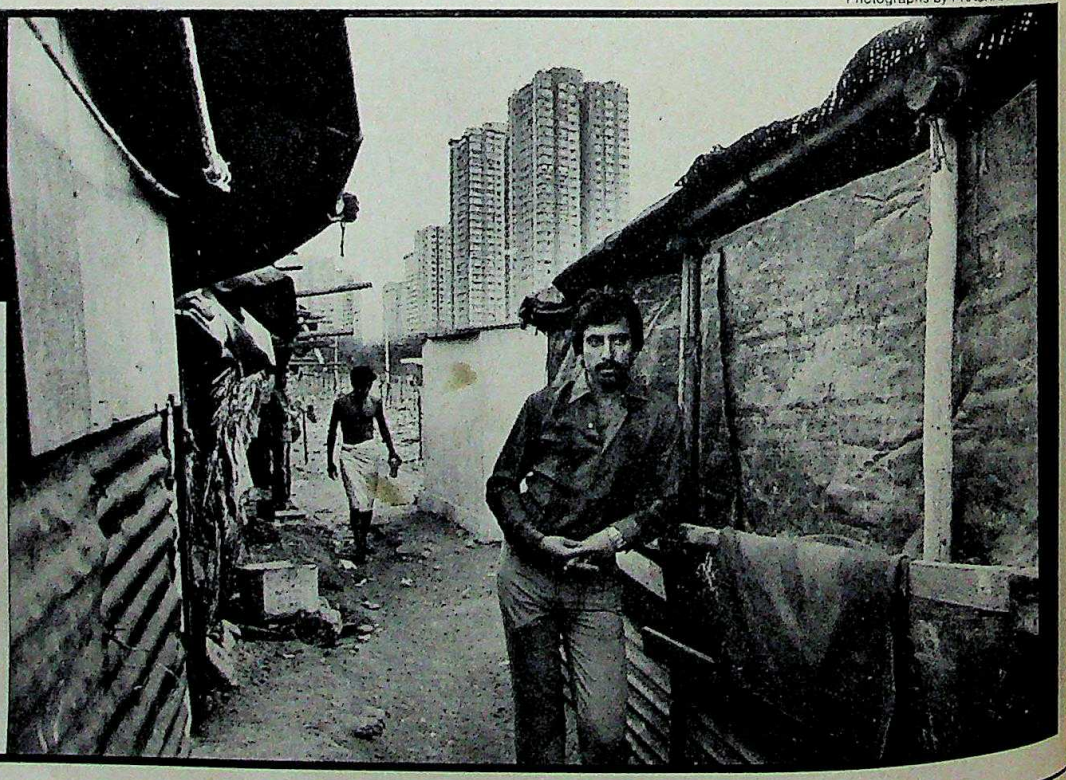
Senior Correspondent TANIA MIDHA spent a week in the slums tracking down the lives of these inhabitants. Her report (some names have been changed on request):

NINE-to-five they are members of the white-collared salaried class. Then they quietly switch over to their nocturnal roles—that of slum dwellers. Torn between embarrassment and anger they lock themselves up inside their cubby-holes and never let their children out to play. Still, they try hard not to be aliens among their neighbours. But they never bring their friends home. Some suffer sleepless nights each time a friend drops in. Many have still not told their office colleagues where they live. Others who do not have this cloak of anonymity, are shunned by both sides.

When Manhar Patel, an officer in the Bank of Baroda, told his office that he lived on Pali Hill, he was not really telling a lie. What he had not specified was that he lived in a slum—Pali Pathar—right near that posh area. He was scared that the fact that he lived in a slum might be considered a job disqualification since he dealt with crores of rupees in the foreign exchange department of his bank. But he couldn't keep this hidden for long. Patel had an accident while riding his scooter and telephoned his office for leave. Concerned colleagues decided to pay him a visit. Since he had not divulged his residential address to anybody in office, they took it out of his personal file. For Patel, the mortification hurt more than his wounds that evening as he saw half a dozen of his colleagues trooping down the narrow *gali* that led to his hutment. "They were very nice and understanding about it. But obviously I was terribly embarrassed for, after all, peons and clerks in my office must be living in better places," recalled Patel.

Sunil Prabhakar (false name) is a member of an international airline crew. Drawing an average salary of more than Rs 3,000 a month, he stays in Dharavi, Bombay's most infamous slum. Having to report for flights in the early hours of the morning, Prabhakar had to reveal his address for the office car to pick him up for duty. Initially, like all other crew members, the car reported at his residence for

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR



Sanjeev Chopra, an engineer from Jalandhar, works as an electrical designer but lives in slums near Cuffe Parade.

'Nobody in his right mind would like to live here. We're here only because we are helpless.'

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flights. Then, one day when he was being dropped home, air hostesses being dropped by the same car complained against having to go through Dharavi on their way. Next, even the drivers refused to pick him up and the cars stopped coming altogether. Today, Prabhakar has to find a taxi in the wee hours each time he takes a flight. "I hate this place," says his wife Mandakini, *"Ek ek din, ek ek saal ke roopik nikalta hai* (Each day stretches on like a year)." She refuses to make friends with any of her neighbours notwithstanding her husband's tireless efforts to convince her that just because the people living around them are illiterate it does not necessarily make them "bad people". Prabhakar has learned to take in his stride the jarring phenomenon of flying straight out of the five-star Hotel Lexington in New York and crash-landing in Dharavi.

Shobha Sharma, a schoolteacher grossing over Rs 2,500 a month, has come to terms with her slum at Sion Koliwada. Shortly after they moved into their *jhopdi*, her husband managed to obtain a telephone connection for them. During those early days, both parents used to call their children at home to remind them not to step out of the house after coming home from school. But after seeing how much the neighbours helped out after her husband's untimely death, Shobha has changed somewhat over the years. She says: "Their values may be different, but they are always there to help in times of emergency."

Yet that middle class ego is difficult to suppress. Says 26-year-old Sanjeev Chopra (false name), an engineer working on contract as an electrical designer in Development Consultants (Pvt) Ltd: "When you move around in a particular circle, you have some sort of respect. In any case I don't have the time to mix around here." Chopra switches between his Nariman Point office and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Dalit Nagar, a slum at Cuffe Parade, and is extremely uncomfortable at home. His neighbours just look at him sympathetically and understand his problem. "He doesn't mean any harm. He just sticks to himself," they say.

APART from the mental torment, there is of course the sheer physical discomfort of living in a slum. If the wives gradually get used to collecting water from a common tap or handpump in the area, the families are unable to accept living without electricity in a metropolitan city like Bombay. So, like most slum dwellers, these people too have learned the ropes and have managed to get unauthorised electricity connections. Open drains and gutters are inescapable for most, but some have managed to cement the paths outside their houses, and used their influence to get the drains covered.

Subhash Sawant, municipal councillor in the corporation of Greater Bombay, who stays in the Dawri Nagar slums in Santa Cruz (East), may not have been able to muster the clout to get himself a house outside this colony but has managed to collect all the basic amenities possible inside a slum dwelling. He has even managed to get the Telephone Department to allot him his councillors' special category telephone. And he has replaced the steel, asbestos, tile and polythene used in the construction of regular tenements with concrete, brick and cement walls. But all is not hunky-dory. For Sawant still has to contend with floods and water overflow into his house during monsoons.

Sawant, however, does not consider his residing in the slum an act of political gimmickry as some are ready to suggest. "People feel that since I have become a councillor, at least now I should be able to ask for and get a better place. After all, if I can't look after myself, how will my voters expect me to look after them?" asks Sawant glumly.

Many of these elite slum dwellers have constructed imaginative first floors within their huts, which are accessible by wooden ladders going through a false ceiling. Down the lane from Sawant's house lives H.I. Surti, a supervisor in R.K. Industrial Insulation. Surti's hutment sports what he calls his mezzanine TV room—just large enough to accommo-

Shobha Sharma, a schoolteacher, lives in the Sion Koliwada slums with three convent-educated daughters who speak French fluently.

'Their values may be different but they are always there to help you in times of emergency.'

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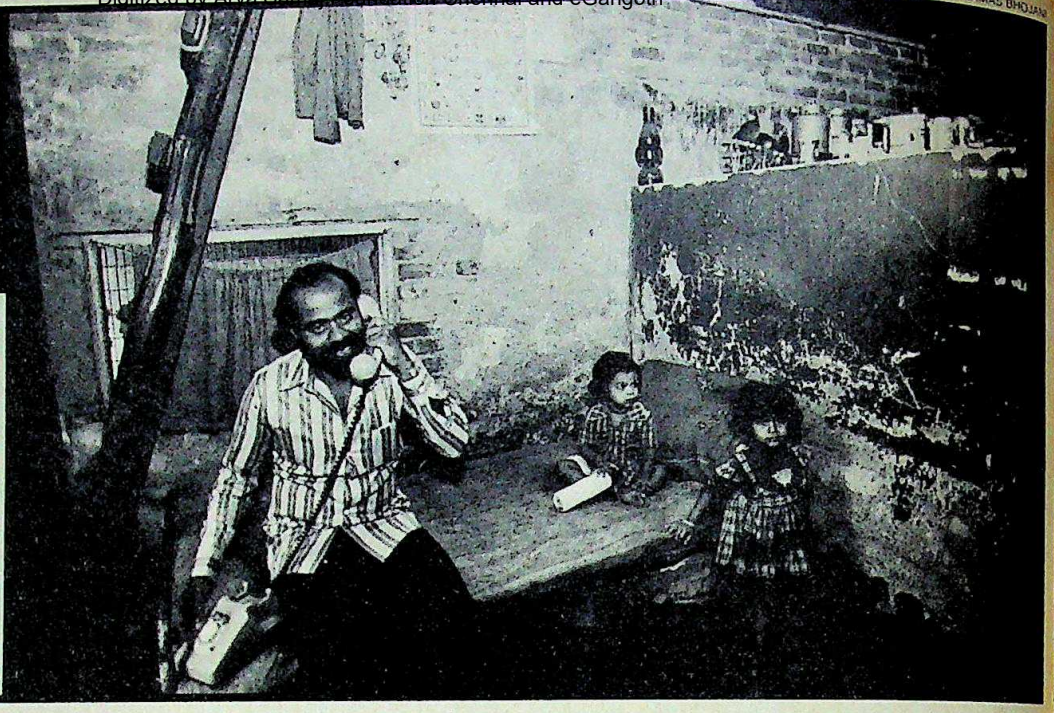
NAMAS BHOJANI



Subhash Sawant, municipal councillor, has managed to get his special category telephone in Dawri Nagar slum tenement.

> ‘If my voters feel that I can't even look after myself, how will they expect me to look after them?’

date a crouching family of four and the television. The evenings are generally spent up here. "It's our way of escaping the crowds. Even if we are not watching TV, I read my newspaper, my wife cuts vegetables for dinner and my daughter gets some peace to study," says Surti, for what these people crave for most is some form of privacy.

Because most of these people can save more money than regular city dwellers for luxuries, not having to pay water and electricity bills and prohibitive rents, their dwellings, equipped with televisions, videos, refrigerators, telephones, LPG connections, fans and electrical fittings, full-length mirrors and even glazed tiles on the walls and floor, suggest a middle class ambience. But step outside and the dream is shattered.

But many of them still wax philosophical about their condition. Says Kiran Gaikwad, an income tax inspector who lives in Dharavi: "Dignity comes from within the person, not from the surroundings." But his brother, Rajan, a police sub-inspector, is quick to add: "All the same, I frankly don't like staying here and prefer not to bring my friends over."

A lot of couples admit that it is easier for them to live with their predicament because their wives are also working. Says Patel, whose wife works for the Maharashtra State Electricity Board and has office hours as long as his: "If she were to live here alone all day, we wouldn't last long." Gaikwad too admits that his wife would have found it "claustrophobic" if she were to stay home. "At least this way we both are out of these surroundings for a major part of the day," he says.

BUT what deeply troubles most of these residents is having to subject their children to such contrasting worlds. And they hate to burden their offsprings with the embarrassment they themselves face in combining the two worlds. Their children invariably come home from school and demand to know why they live in dirty colonies as compared to their school friends. Eleven-year-old Daksha Surti is no exception. "I point to the building being constructed across the main road and say we will be shifting there when it is ready—I dread the day when it actually is," confesses her father.

Shobha's daughters have all studied in convents. They have all been taught French and each aspires for a professional career. While Deepika intends to join hotel management, Arti is trying for commercial art and Sheetal, the youngest at 14, wants to be an air hostess. Their style of dressing—jeans and casual T-shirts—invites comments when they return home in the evenings, and although Shobha feels bad about it, she rationalises things: "The girls are least bothered by it now—they have hardened themselves to become immune to such remarks." They have been taught to be friendly with their neighbours, so Sheetal has friends in the colony. But she says: "They're different. They speak filthy language and their parents don't teach them manners."

Prabhakar has bought a video for the house so that he can keep the children home with new movies every day. "It had become difficult to convince them that they must study even though the other children don't. And if I asked my neighbours to call their children in to study, they would say: 'You bother about your own child. We don't want to make our child an officer'", says Prabhakar. But Shobha feels that some of her neighbours, following her example, have now begun to send their children to school, even English-medium ones. Gaikwad too says his family has become a trend-setter in the colony. His neighbours are now thinking in terms of a good education for their children and are saving for it. Yet, says Gaikwad: "My friends ask me what future my children have in Dharavi. If I sincerely think about it, they are right. These are not the surroundings I want my children to grow up in. Ultimately when they grow up a little, I will have to move out." Patel has the added problem of his neighbour running a liquor business from home. He has had several embarrassing moments with drunkards hanging around outside his house. Obviously, he doesn't want to bring up his children in the area.

All these people consciously make a special effort at creating an agreeable domestic atmosphere at home to offset the contrary values imbibed from the neighbourhood. But beyond that, the question

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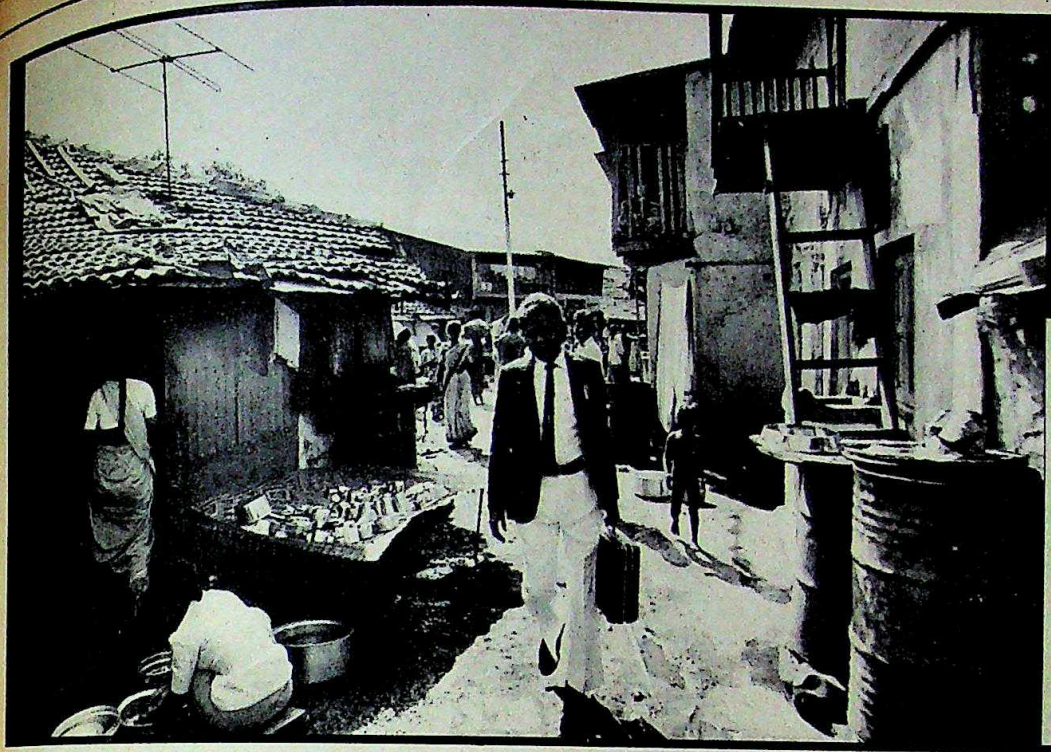

S.Y. Sherkhane, a high court advocate, picks his way through the lanes of Dharavi on his way to the courts every morning.

> ‘It's no joke getting space in Bombay. It's easier to find a wife here than a house to live with her in.’

remains: "Where do we go from here?"

Patel's background is similar to that of S.Y. Sherkhane, a high court advocate living in Dharavi. Both, in an attempt to break out of the circle of poverty were able to complete their education despite heavy odds. Both secured Bachelor of Law degrees. But having broken through inherited barriers and successfully joined Bombay's army of educated white-collar workers, they have had to succumb to the simple logic offered by Bombay—there are no middle class houses going at middle class rates. So they stay put in the slums.

Sherkhane says he has tried his "very level best" to shift out of Dharavi, but with no success. "It's only the lucky few that get away," he says. A conservative man with daughters in their late teens, Sherkhane is desperate to move out as he says his daughters cannot step out without being greeted by whistles and comments. "How long can a father watch this?" he asks.

The lucky few who managed to break away, people like Kishore Tamhankar, an agent for Life Insurance Corporation and also working for National Organic Chemical Industry Ltd, looks back in wonder on the years of struggle. Says Tamhankar, who recently shifted out of a slum in Santa Cruz to a flat in Borivili: "I've learnt a lot about community living and caring for neighbours from the slums." In his new building, nobody has the time to bother about each other's well-being, he says, pointing to the fact that in the first fortnight of his stay in Borivili his house was broken into in broad daylight and none of the neighbours even noticed anybody slipping in or out. "Such a thing would be impossible in the slums," says Tamhankar.

BUT security is cold comfort for the odds that go against it. "Nobody in his right mind would like to live here. We're here only because we are helpless," says Chopra, who has seen much better days when he lived with his father, a retired army captain in Jalandhar. Chopra wants to get married soon and is desperately looking for a flat. "I thought I would just stay here for a few days. It's been a year now," he recalls bitterly, adding: "And all I want is one room."

All each one wants is a room somewhere. But with virtually no houses being offered on rent anymore in Bombay, they have to buy that room. And the property market in Bombay being a sellers' market, buying a room at market rates is unthinkable for middle class pockets. Even the smallest and the worst tenement in a *jhopadpatti* colony comes for a minimum of Rs 20,000. The better ones with first-floor contraptions range right up to Rs 1 lakh and even more if they are concrete structures. Inflation knows no class barriers and according to a rough market assessment, tenements that were for the asking at just Rs 200 to Rs 300 in 1970 today fetch anywhere between Rs 30,000 and Rs 40,000. There is no rent system in the slums—the regularised ones pay a pittance of around Rs 25 to the municipal corporation and the others just sit pretty on their land with no rent, water or electricity charges till the demolition squad comes along. You either buy it straight off or take over occupation by paying a lumpsum as *pagdi* to the previous occupant. "It's no joke getting space even in the slums today," says Sherkhane. "In Bombay it's easier getting a wife than a house to live with her in."

The only way out seems to be to become members of self-financed group housing societies. Each of the middle class slum dwellers is making desperate attempts to get membership in one—and many have got duped by dummy societies in the process. In the genuine ones, what they can afford are one-room apartments in housing schemes as distant as Virar and Andheri—far enough to make a man think whether a renovated tenement in a conveniently located slum is not as good or as bad as one concrete room in the back-waters of Bombay.

The hot young-bloods, Chopra, for example, would go anywhere to get out of what he calls his present hell. But for those who have mellowed with age, a certain fatigue has crept in. As Surti says: "*Ab himmat nahin hoti*. (Now I don't have the will anymore.)" They have fought and they have lost. They are not sure if they have resigned, but have postponed the next bout, maybe indefinitely, for they see no hope.

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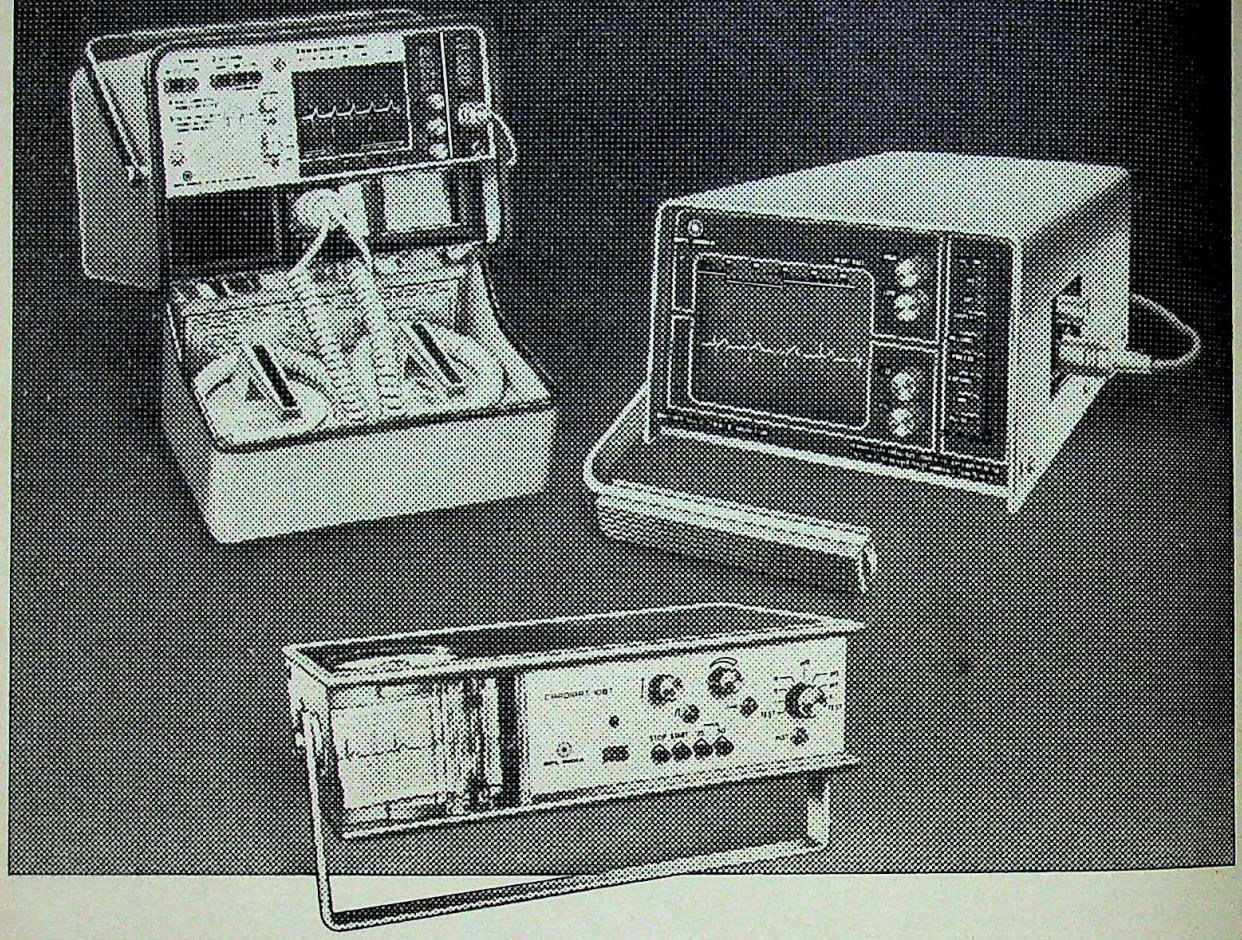
When cardiac arrest comes, are you ready for the rescue?



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It takes three wings to carry the outdoors to the indoors

ASP-OGI-112B/87

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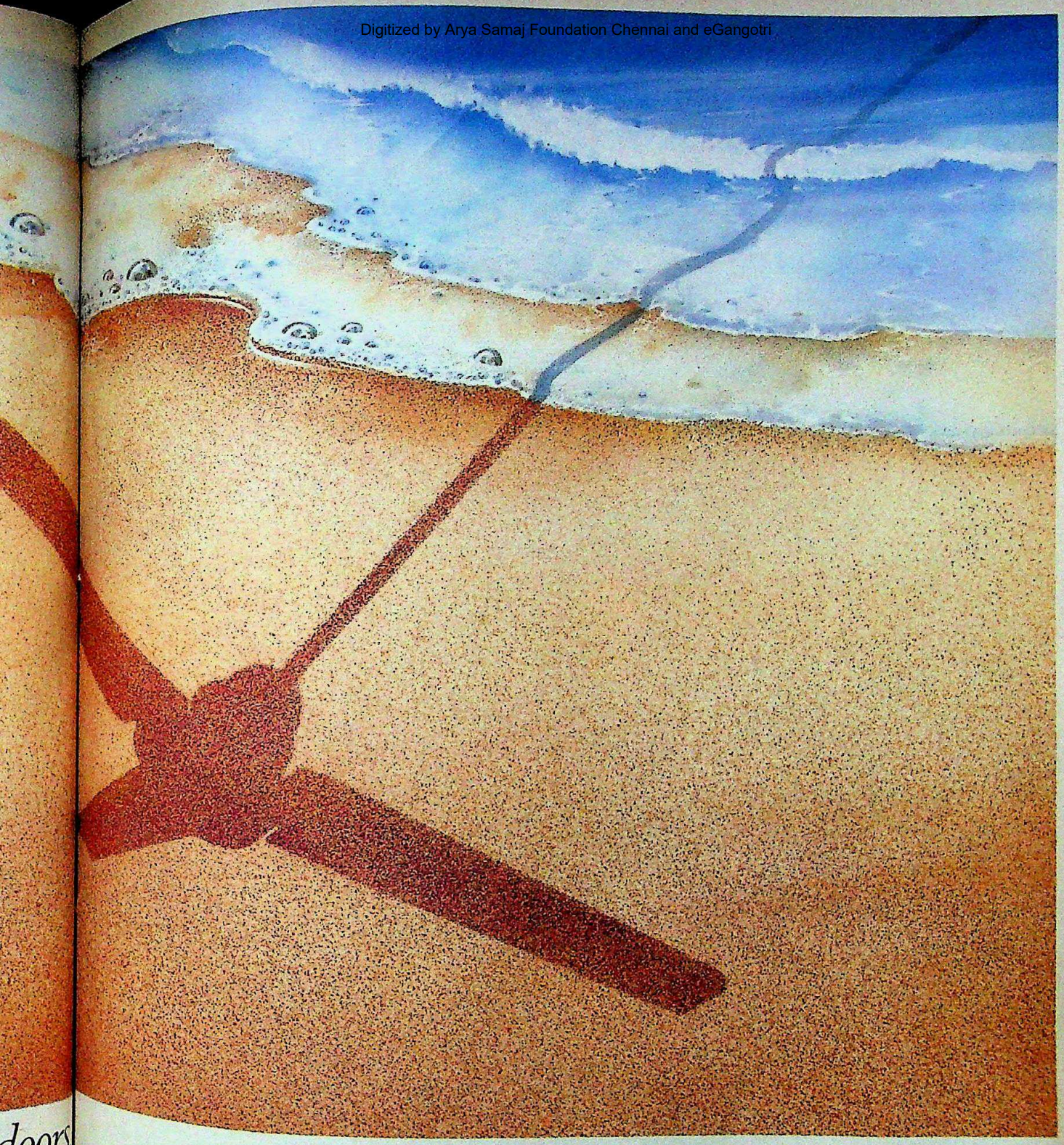

doors

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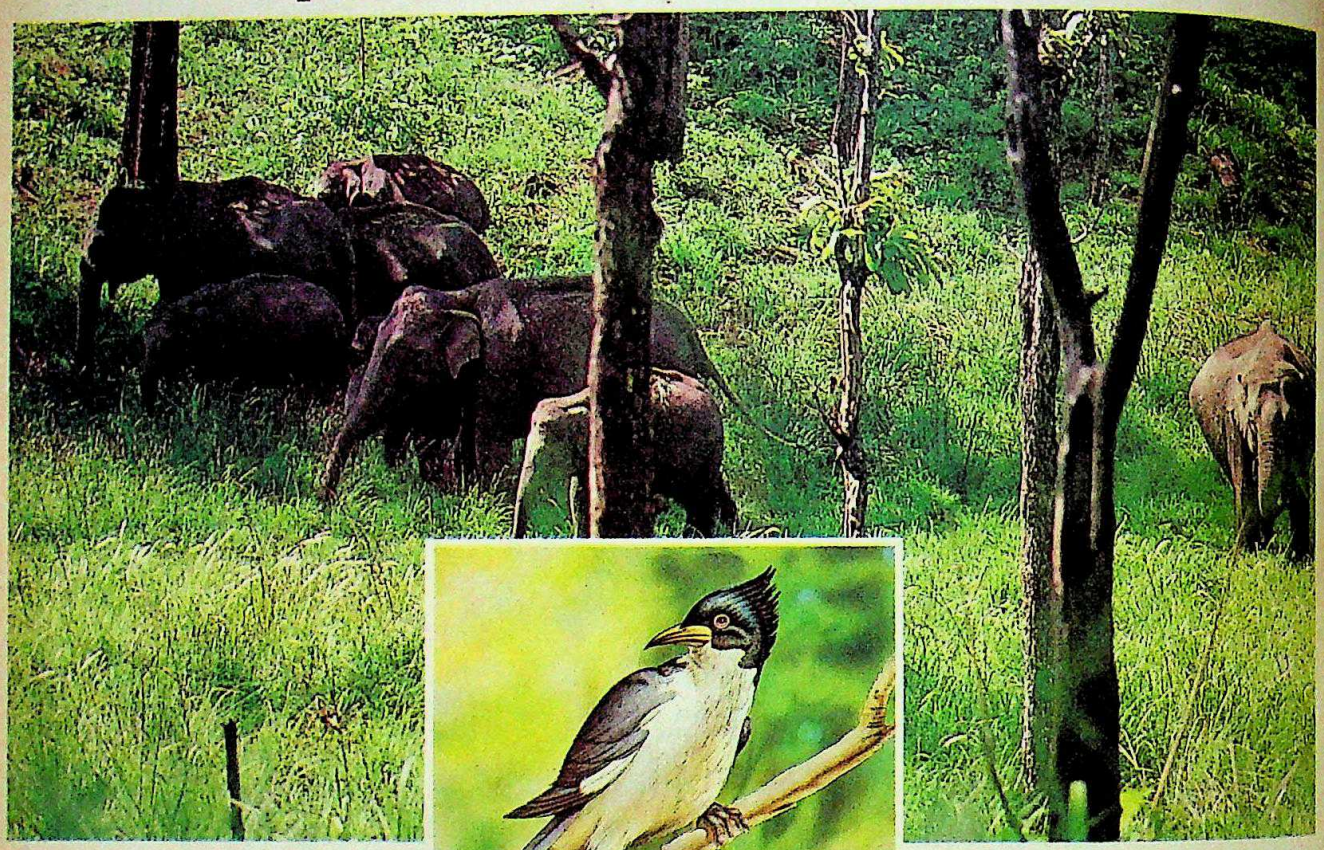
The frenzied bird-call starts again... what strange visions disturb the peace of the papiha?



Perhaps it dreams of the beautiful forests sunk fathoms deep beneath the spreading waters of the Periyar Lake. Maybe it fears the occasional glimpse of the elusive tiger as it stalks its prey... no one will ever know for sure. But the papiha calls unceasingly, while the world dismisses it as the "brain-fever" bird. All other inhabitants — the elephants, antelopes, bison, sambhar and the monkeys seem restful enough. Come, cruise around this lake and become a part of this peaceful co-existence.

ACCESSIBILITY
Thekkady (the entrance to the Sanctuary) is accessible by road from its nearest airport at Madurai (145 km). Other convenient airports are Trivandrum (272 km) and Cochin (190 km). The nearest railhead is Kottayam, 115 km away.

ACCOMMODATION
Three hotels are run by KTDC at Thekkady. For reservations contact the Managers of Aranya Nivas, Tel: Kumali 23, Lake Palace, Tel: Kumali 24 and Periyar House, Tel: Kumali 26. There are also Forest Rest Houses inside the forest. For further details contact: The Field Director, Project Tiger, Kanjikuzhi, Kottayam, Tel: 8409.

TOURS
KTDC conducts Tours from Trivandrum and Cochin every Saturday. For reservations contact: Tourist Reception Centre, Thampanoor, Trivandrum, Tel: 5031 and Shanmugham Rd., Cochin, Tel: 33234.

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ELECTRONIC MARVEL

SHARP policy turn-abouts are round the corner in electronics. The Government has decided to throw open to the organised private sector the manufacture of both digital watches (restricted so far to state undertakings) and pocket calculators (now mostly assembled from imported kits by small-scale units). The idea is to license five manufacturers to turn out up to 20 lakh calculators each (the present ceiling is one lakh), on condition that they do not import components.

Meanwhile, the Department of Electronics is also proposing that a private company be allowed to start a joint venture with a Central government undertaking. Indian Telephone Industries (ITI) has tied up with the California-based Equitorial Pacific International for a Rs 7-crore satellite communication equipment venture. A new company is to be launched in which ITI will hold 49 per cent of the equity, the Unit Trust another 11 per cent and the Californian company the remaining 40 per cent. If cleared, the shareholding pattern will represent an extension of the joint sector concept from state government enterprises to Central government undertakings.

PR PROPOSALS

ADVERTISING agencies have found a new avenue for growth: the public relations business. Several agencies are suddenly busy setting up satellite units to handle a range of public relations functions for corporate clients. First off the mark was Ogilvy, Benson and Mather, which launched O and M Publicity last year and already has some 15 clients on its roster. Sistas already has an in-house outfit, Marketing and Advertising Associates has launched its Corporate Voice, Trikaya will be kicking off a unit called Profile, and both Lintas and Enterprise are considering taking the plunge.

LOSING BID

VIJAY Mallya's McDowell & Company has lost out in its bid to annually manufacture one lakh tonnes of methanol (used for aviation fuel and as a raw material for the plastics industry). The proposed Rs 55 crore project in Andhra Pradesh has been shot down by the Government on the ground that sufficient production capacities are already in the pipeline. This decision marks a victory for two public sector companies, Rashtriya Chemicals & Fertilisers and Gujarat Narmada Valley Fertiliser Company, both of which produce methanol. They had opposed McDowell's application, using the same argument that the Government finally cited. Mallya has also been trying to get a license to manufacture linear alkyl benzene at Vishakhapatnam, so far without luck.

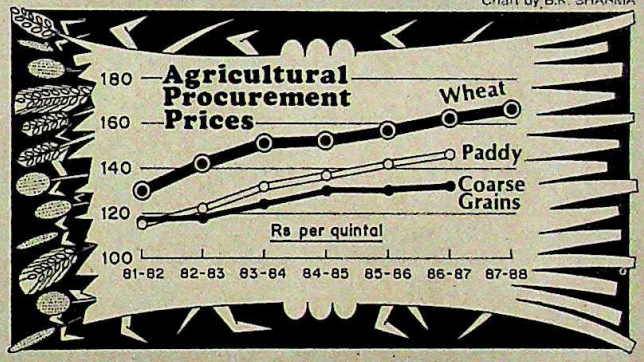
RIGHT CHORD

AFTER many years of stagnation, DCM has finally got the green signal from the Government for one of its many proposed projects. This one is for a Rs 65-crore project to produce nylon industrial yarn and tyre chord, most of which will be converted into fabrics at Kota in Rajasthan, for supply to the tyre industry. The Government had turned down a similar proposal almost two years ago, arguing that the Shriram group already had a licence to manufacture rayon tyre chord. But this time, DCM argued that rayon tyre chord was an obsolete item with shrinking demand, that another unit making rayon tyre chord had already closed down because of this, and that some existing facilities at Kota could be used for making nylon tyre chord.

STABLE STAPLES

THE Government's decision to increase the issue price of wheat by Rs 5 per quintal, to Rs 195, emphasises once again the relative stability in foodgrain prices, due to the accumulated foodgrain stocks. Over the last six years, wheat procurement prices have gone up less than 30 per cent

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



(from Rs 130 per quintal in 1981-82 to Rs 166 this year). Paddy prices have also risen modestly, from Rs 115 in 1981-82 to Rs 146 last year, while coarse grains procurement prices rose the least, from Rs 116 to Rs 132 in the same period (less than 15 per cent). For other commodities like groundnut, urad and moong, however, the procurement prices have risen faster.

SHOE SCRAMBLE

THE new corporate El Dorado seems to be shoe exports: a host of big companies are scrambling to enter the burgeoning overseas market, in the light of the government decision to allow manufacture if 75 per cent of production is exported. The latest to apply for permission is Indian Hotels (the Taj group). This Tata company has tied up with the US-based Wolverine to set up a plant in a backward district in Karnataka to produce seven lakh shoes a year.

The project is yet to be cleared, as is a Bata proposal involving a collaboration with Adidas (Bata is seeking a 50 per cent export obligation). But Larsen & Toubro has recently got permission to launch a shoe venture in Gujarat, while another Tata proposal to make finished shoes at Dewas was cleared last year. Meanwhile, Ponds India seems to have expanded shoe upper production capacity in Pondicherry.

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AIRLINE BOARDS

Troubled Experiment

SIX months ago, Ratan Tata was in his Bombay office when Jagdish Tytler, minister of state for civil aviation, came on the line from New Delhi. Would Tata become chairman of Air-India? "I was taken aback, but thrilled," Tata recalls. "I fly myself, and I have always been interested in aviation." He promptly accepted.

On the same day, Rahul Bajaj was attending a seminar in Italy when he got a call from his Pune office. Tytler had apparently called Pune and said that Bajaj was being made chairman of Indian Airlines. The two-wheeler tycoon didn't quite know what to make of this offer. He called his uncle in Bombay to find out what it meant, and was advised to accept—which he did. "In any case, how could I refuse?"

Thus started a bold, new experiment in public sector management. For this was the first time that public sector boards would have government officials in a minority, and people from the private sector dominating the show. Apart from the two chairmen, the other new private sector inductees were Yogi Deveshwar (president of the Welcomgroup chain of hotels), Ritu Nanda (managing director of Niky-Tasha), Russi Mody (chairman of Tata Steel), Pratap Reddy (chairman, Apollo Hospitals), Z.R. Rangoonwala (chairman, Mercantile Bank), Vivek Bharat Ram (executive director, DCM-Toyota), and Arun Nanda (Rediffusion).

But six months after the experiment began, the mood in both boardrooms is uncertain, many of the new directors are not sure what exactly they have achieved, there have been unexpected conflicts with Tytler's ministry, and a lowering of hopes. Although a cheerful Ritu Nanda argues that "private sector people in a public sector situation will yield better results, because hybrids always do", there is little doubt that this particular experiment in industrial genetics—being conducted by Rajiv Gandhi himself (for it was his idea)—has got off to an uncertain start.

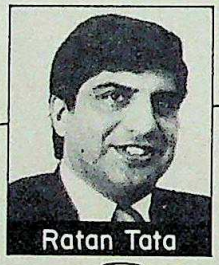
"They ask a lot of questions, they are certainly eager to do something," said a doubting member of the Indian Airlines management. "But why don't you ask the passengers and the Indian Airlines staff, whether they have found any difference." Added a full-time director in Air-India: "Do we need to be told by the new board that our ground service is poor, or that we are now only an ethnic airline? We already know all this. The point is, what are they doing about it?"

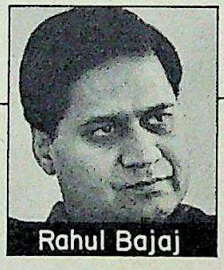
If these questions and comments reflect the skepticism that still prevails in the head offices of both Air-India and Indian Airlines, most board members argue that it is still early in the day for results. Ratan Tata is cautiously optimistic—"Our initial expectations may still be fulfilled"—and rattles off a long list of what he has found wrong with Air-India: stagnation and a poor growth record, very old fleet of aircraft, poor industrial relations, failure to move with the times and introduce non-stop flights, de-motivated staff, in-house politics, and so on. His board has already played a role in getting the new Boeing 'Combi' aircraft (planes that combine both passenger and cargo loads), pushed through a plan to acquire younger planes, and decided to introduce non-stop flights instead of the multi-stop milk runs that it now specialises in. Even the image of the airline may be changed in the total revamp effort. Three specialised agencies have been asked to make presentations on the subject, and in the next few months the Air-India Maharaja might finally give way to an altogether new airline image. Also, expansion is being sought more aggressively, and aircraft will be leased instead of bought in order to get around the shortage of money.

Indian Airlines too has begun to show some changes under its revamped board. The first priority has been passenger service. One area of action has been to speed up check-in and flight boarding and to avoid the irritation of repeated queues. Thus, Airbus passengers between Bombay and Delhi now go straight into security check after checking-in, avoiding a second queuing up as well as baggage identification near the aircraft. Soon, checking-in will be done at any counter, for any flight, so that passengers can choose the shortest queue counter.

In the air, stewardesses have been given new uniforms (sarees in pastel shades) and will also get work aprons so that their sarees don't get soiled while serving food. And for the executive class, new frills are being added and the fare being raised, so that those flying 'J' class feel they are in fact getting something special—including a greeting by name when they board the aircraft.

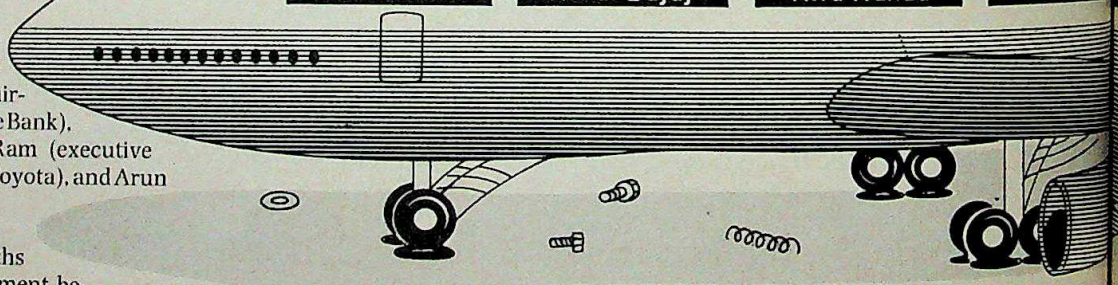
That is not very much, but it is a beginning. If more has not been achieved already, one reason is that a board of directors in a public sector context has severe limitations on what it can do—as


Ratan Tata


Rahul Bajaj

Ritu Nanda

Vivek Bharat R



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After private sector stalwarts moved onto the Air-India and Indian Airlines boards, the directors are not sure what they have achieved, there have been conflicts with Tytler's ministry, and a lowering of hopes.

some of the private sector stalwarts now admit. Also, matters have not gone very smoothly with the ministry, headed by Tytler, who clearly likes to take a direct and day-to-day interest in the affairs of both airlines.

Inevitably, there have been differences. The new Managing Director of Indian Airlines, G. Pais, was not Rahul Bajaj's first choice, only his second, and was really Rajiv Gandhi's appointee. The word in the Air-India headquarters is that Tata too did not want his new Managing Director, Rajan Jetley, and that he had been in favour of an in-house promotion. But Tata denied this, and said he had only suggested two possible choices—one in-house and the other a man brought in from outside—and that Jetley was an excellent choice as a man-manager.

In a more forthright difference of opinion, the Indian Airlines board wanted to charge the market value for the turboprops that it was handing over to Vayudoot, but Tytler put his foot down and said only a nominal book value would be paid. In Air-India, Tytler has seen to it that some items on the agenda for the board meetings have been removed.

Inevitably, there has been some tension between the boards and the ministry. Initially, the boards seemed to be under the impression that they would be the decision-makers, and that the ministry's role was far more circumspect. Indeed, both Bajaj and Tata suggested to Tytler that he and the ministry should restrict themselves to broad policy issues, and leave the rest to the board. Tytler apparently agreed in principle, but (and this is the way the boards see it) has then continued to do what he has wanted. Recently, he sent letters to both airlines with suggestions on the minutest detail, down to in-flight menu.

The view from the ministry is that the boards themselves have debated several issues but not actually done very much, and that it is the ministry that has had to take the initiative in order to get things moving. Several examples are cited to prove this, including the buy-back deal being negotiated with Boeing to save foreign exchange, and the networking that has been done between the Air-India and Indian Airlines computers. A board member, however, contested this and said that several suggestions in Tytler's letter had already been approved by the board—implying that Tytler was trying to pre-empt credit.

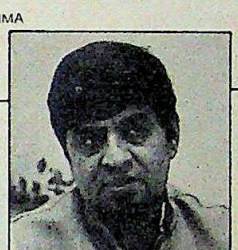
Bajaj declined comment on the relationship with the ministry, while Tata, picking his words carefully, said: "This experiment won't succeed through either confrontation or acquiescence. It needs independence, and mutual respect." He added that the ministry had been used to functioning in a certain manner—taking the board for granted—and that it would only be fair to give it some time to change. "I would need time if I were suddenly asked to change my style of functioning." But others are not quite so hopeful. Said a new director: "The fact is that the board meets about once a month, whereas the ministry is there every day and so is the airline management. The two will naturally interact without the board. I don't see how this can change."

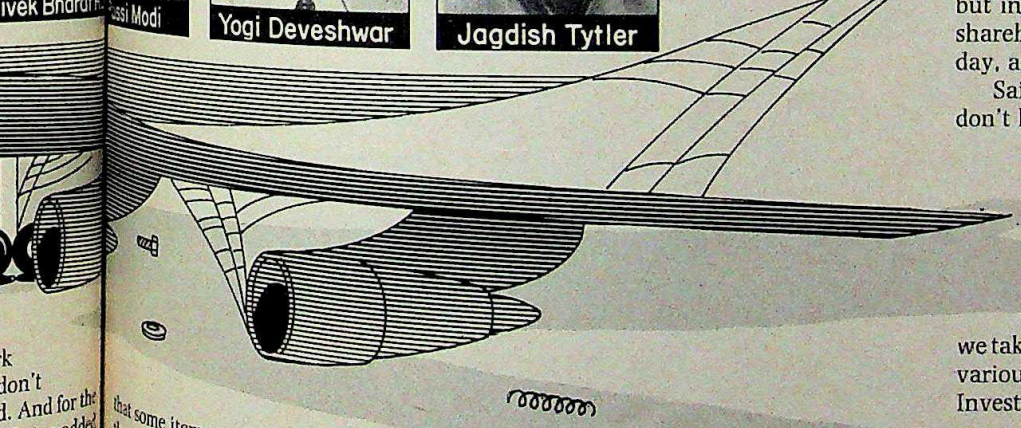
That little dilemma points to another discovery that many of the new appointees have made: the company boards in the public and private sector function differently. The latter have to deal with their shareholders only once a year, but in the case of the public sector the shareholder (the ministry) is there every day, and is used to calling the shots.

Said a director of Indian Airlines: "I don't know how much we can actually achieve. We have no role in the appointment of the managing director, our investments are limited by the funds that the Planning Commission chooses to provide, any decision that we take on the aircraft must be ratified by various government bodies like the Public Investment Board, and practically anything that you want to do seems to need the ministry's clearance." Retorted a public sector nominee on the board: "In their own companies these people are used to being rajas, with their word being law. But now they find that they can't really do very much."

Nevertheless, most of the new directors have taken their role seriously. Ratan Tata says he spends two or three half-days every week at the Air-India head office. He has visited several of the airline's offices

Diagram by B.K. SHARMA





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around the world, been to airports, checked on the engineering and other facilities, and also done some spot night visits. Bajaj is reticent about how much effort he has put in, but his fellow-board members say he has shown a tremendous interest in the job at hand. Others, like Ritu Nanda, have talked to loaders, supervisors, pilots, and asked for a security card so that she can have unhindered access to all the civil airports. Indian Airlines has also run special work sessions so that the new directors become familiar with the aviation industry. Indeed, one of the new directors was so enthusiastic as to ask for a full-time office in New Delhi's Airlines House—prompting the then managing director, Captain K. Chadha, to offer his own and another director to say that people should know the difference between full-time and part-time directors.

Said a government official who is used to being on airline boards: "On balance, I think it has been a good thing to do. Civil aviation is a service industry, and when it becomes a government monopoly we tend to forget the passenger. These people are very conscious of passenger service." Others are more critical. Said a public sector director on one of the boards: "Frankly, I don't think these boards have been able to do anything as yet. I think Tytler as minister has made his presence felt more."

But one particularly depressed member of the Indian Airlines board said: "Looking back, I feel we have achieved hardly anything. There is no money, there is too much ministerial interference. The managing director is threatened with transfer unless he does something the ministry wants, and the board is nowhere in the picture. I keep wondering, should we complain, or just resign?"

With such a sharply varying mixture of assessments and moods, it is impossible to predict what will happen in the months ahead. Both boards have an initial term till the end of June. Logically, the prime minister will want to give his experiment in industrial genetics time to succeed. Meanwhile, the ministry is suggesting to him that both Air-India and Indian Airlines have a common board of directors so as to bring about greater cohesion and common use of facilities. If this goes through, the Tata-Bajaj experiment will very quickly have been aborted. If not, they may still get time to show passengers, airline staff, the Government and their critics that private sector techniques can deliver results in the public sector.

—T.N.NINAN

EAST INDIA HOTELS

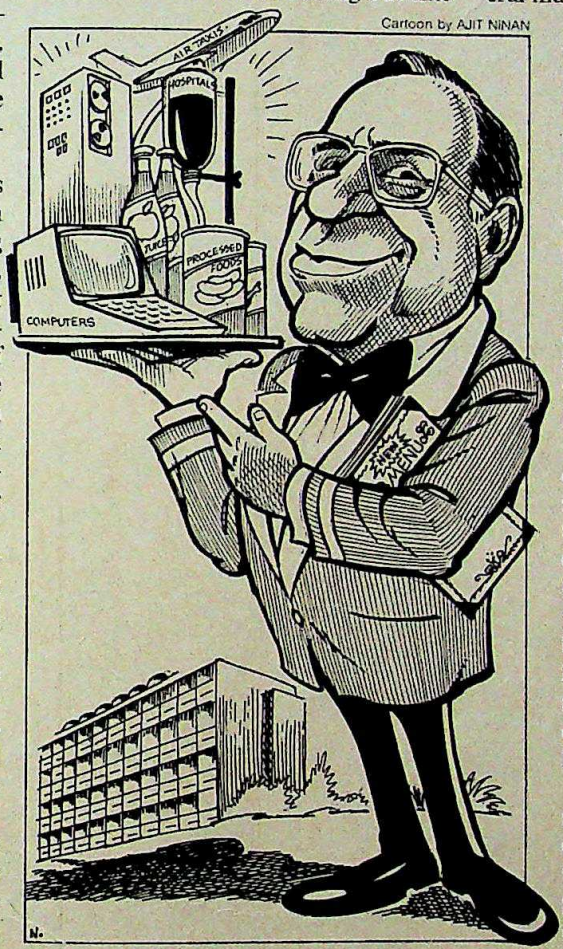
Branching Out

QUESTION: What do hospitals, processed foods, fruit juices, air taxis, edible oils, computer software and computers have in common? The answer, surprisingly, is the Oberoi group of hotels. Bent on setting a blistering pace of growth, the Rs 200-crore-turnover hotel chain is readying to leap into all these and more.

"We don't want to put all our eggs in one basket. We are branching out into related fields—food, drink, and transportation," explains hotel baron P.R.S. Oberoi. At the sprawling 80-acre farm on Delhi's outskirts from where he directs his empire of 30-odd hotels, the dapper vice-chairman of East India Hotels flicks the ash off a cigar, pushes his spectacles up onto his forehead and talks of setting up food preservation plants and launching mid-market hotels.

The group is negotiating with a British company on a food irradiation project, meant to prolong the shelf life of food products. It is actively seeking a tie-up with a US outfit for processed foods, with a good chunk of the herbs and spices from the Rs 10-crore venture meant to be sold overseas. A Rs 25-crore upscale general hospital on Delhi's border is to be followed by hospitals in other cities, if the first succeeds. And computers are certainly coming soon, a tie-up already having been negotiated with Hewlett Packard to hawk hotel industry software world-wide. The Rs 6.5-crore project is expected to notch up annual sales of over Rs 11 crore three years from now. "We can piggyback on the Hewlett Packard name," says Avijit Datta, general manager, computer systems.

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



The Oberois have also signed up with a Canadian consultancy firm for edible oils extraction technology, with the project cost expected to be anything from Rs 60 crore to Rs 120 crore. "We will be marketing oils and all the derivatives such as oil cakes, and can get into soaps, although no firm decisions have been taken. We may form a new company and go to the public to raise funds," says Keshav Prasad, vice-president of East India Hotels.

Also on the anvil is a Rs-140 crore proposal to blanket 21 smaller towns with four-star and three-star hotels over the next decade (a beginning was made at Bhubaneswar in Orissa over a year ago). With the market for five-star hotels being limited, going mid-market could help tap new clientele. The new hotels are expected to bring in almost Rs 100 crore a year in sales.

The new projects put together will call for an investment of roughly Rs 300 crore. Where will the money come from? The group will not have to ante up all the cash (it can go to the public and the banks). Also, all the projects may not materialise. Already, the Oberois have given up their plans for an ambitious foray into fast foods (the real estate prices were forbidding), and the air taxi venture has been kept hanging for want of government clearance. Some of the other ventures may be iffy too. But the sorties into edible oils and hotels stand a good chance of being cleared, and the Hewlett Packard deal is already on. Clearly, the Oberois will soon be playing host to a lot of non-hotel business.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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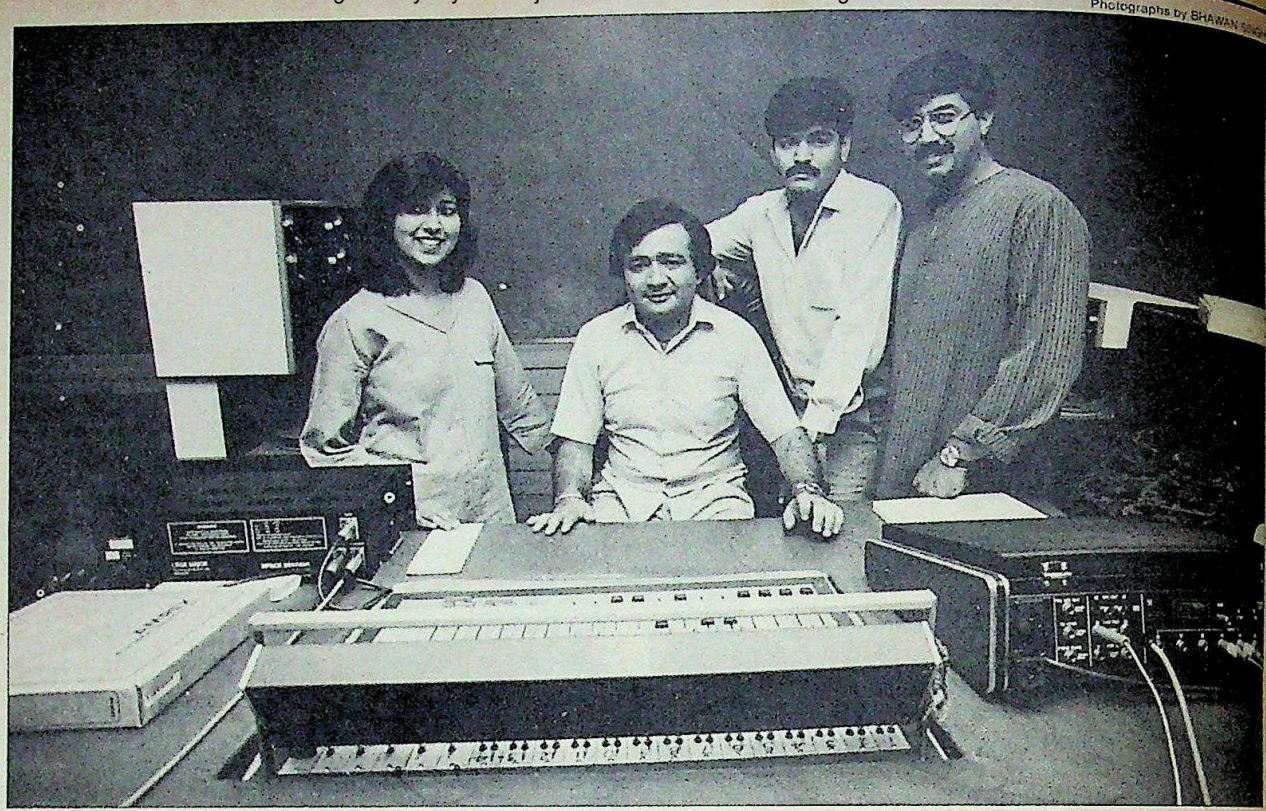

Arora with artistes: version recordings

AUDIO-CASSETTES

A Supersuccess Story

LATE in the evening, a stroll through Old Delhi's Daryaganj fruit market will take a visitor past Gulshan Arora's nondescript stall where, twice a week, he tends languorously to his wares. Arora, 32, a curly-haired baby-faced man with dreamy eyes looks like the quintessential stallwalla. There is little about his appearance and demeanour to betray Arora's other life—that of a jet-setting tycoon, owner of two sleek Mercedes limousines, a mansion in a swank south Delhi suburb, a house in Bombay's fashionable Juhu and a man who, by all accounts, is India's uncrowned audio-cassette king.

Barely 15 km from his fruitstall, which he attends to ritualistically—because this was the economic mainstay of his family only six short years ago—lies Arora's miraculous electronics empire housed in some four small factories in the new industrial townships of Noida and Okhla. Here, Arora and his brothers have created a mini-Japan.

Some 2,000 skilled workers employed in three shifts and paid a minimum monthly wage of Rs 900—plus a 20 per cent bonus, free home-cooked lunches and tea, and free transport aboard deluxe coaches—churn out between 75,000 and 80,000 music cassettes a day using the most sophisticated machinery in the business. This is the home of Supercassettes, now marketed in shopping centres all over India under the 'T-series' label. A recent visitor to Japan who was invited to tour the Sony establishment remarked after he had visited Supercassettes: "The only difference I saw was that in Japan workers wear uniforms. Here they don't."

Supercassettes has cornered 70 per cent of the music market for new films. Within five years the total investment of this firm in plant and equipment has grown from around Rs 10 lakh to about Rs 20 crore, and its executives are already talking about diversifying into the production of 14-inch black-and-white TV sets to be retailed at about Rs 1,300. Its total turnover from sale and export of magnetic tapes, empty cassettes and components is about Rs 80 crores. Sale of recorded cassettes is already estimated at about Rs 25 crore, leap-frogging the company ahead of established giants in the field such as Gramophone Company of India, Music India, CBS, and a host of smaller companies.

Despite the growth of Supercassettes, it is not easy to pin down its precise position in the Indian audio-cassettes market, estimated at between Rs 150 crore and Rs 200 crore—way above industries such as typewriters, ball-bearings and fluorescent tubes. Much of the cassette market in the country is still in the hands of thousands of fly-by-night operators who do a thriving business on piracy.

Market competitors shrug off Supercassettes' success as but one more example of successful piracy. They claim that the company has been able to undercut the established businesses by subsidising its legitimate operation through unaccounted earnings through the sale of pirated tapes. But Supercassettes executives bristle at even a suggested hint of this. "If anything," says Pinki Kumar, senior technical manager, "it is we who face the biggest problem from pirates. We have turned over pirated tapes to the cops, we have helped conduct raids on pirate establishments, but this does not stop them." In order to hammer home its bona fides, Supercassettes not only brands its 'T-series' label and address of manufac-

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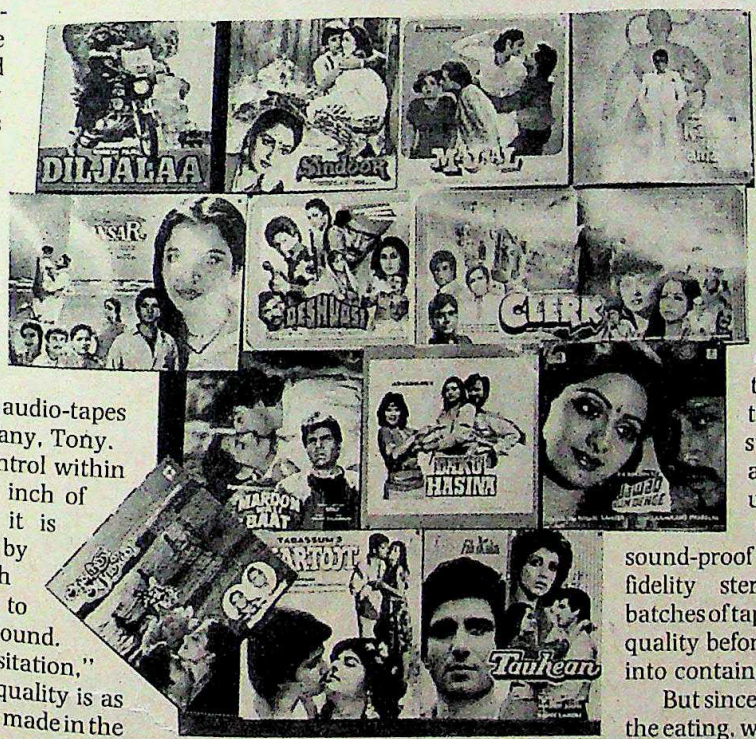
A Supercassettes factory (above); and some new releases: hi-tech operations



tures on the cellophane wrappings of its cassettes and on the casings but also has it printed in mini-type—a process only available in Japan—on its tape leaders.

Supercassettes, which has now sold crores of tapes since its inception, paid more than Rs 2 crore in corporate income tax this year, and has been paying excise duty of Rs 1 crore every six months on the production of magnetic audio-tapes from its modern sister company, Tony.

So tight is the quality control within this unit—that not a single inch of tape is allowed out until it is screened before special lights by the naked eye and put through special magnetic purifiers to erase even a trace of ambient sound. "I can say without any hesitation," maintains Arora, "that this quality is as good as, if not better than, any made in the world."

Because Supercassettes now itself manufactures almost every part that goes into a cassette—cases, components, magnetic tape, and even the machines, such as high-precision rollers, which are used in the manufacturing, and because it also prints its own labels and ad posters on its own printing press—the company is able to sell a C-60 (one-hour tape) for Rs 10 wholesale. Other companies, which have to buy or import components, often sell a 30-minute cassette at an ex-factory price anywhere between Rs 15 and Rs 18. Dealers almost unanimously admit that Supercassettes is almost impossible to undersell.

The sheer volume of production is mind-boggling. On one floor is a giant Otari machine capable of recording at 64 times the normal speed. It accounts for 400 one-hour cassettes every 20 minutes. In tape-to-tape cassette duplication—through several hundreds of such machines—43 cassettes are reproduced every six minutes. And in every corner of the production areas are sound-proof rooms equipped with high-fidelity stereophonic systems where batches of tapes are tested by engineers for quality before being labelled and packed into containers for shipment.

But since the proof of the pudding is in the eating, what of the final product? And here, most observers believe, lies Arora's marketing genius, for he was among the first to hit upon the idea of what he calls "version recordings". Bringing the evergreen oldies to life was a problem that Arora had mused over for long. Hit songs sung by Gita Dutt, Suman Kalayanpur, Mukesh, Rafi and Hemant Kumar had

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Arora, in Mercedes, parked in front of his family fruit stall

continued to retain their old magic, but now, recorded from one generation to another, they sounded awful. Most of them had not been recorded on stereo with all the latest sound mixing technology available. Arora soon solved this problem.

In an air-conditioned mixing and control room sits an engineer, manipulating the levers of a high-tech Swiss-built Studer machine. Two JBL speakers, 350 watts each, are belting out Mukesh's *Dost dost na raha* in faultless stereophonic sound with almost no harmonic distortion. The music score is the same, the orchestral arrangement identical, and the voice, well, it has to be Mukesh. But it isn't.

A peep through the control room window into the recording studio shows an orchestra in full swing with a young man in the singer's booth lost in song. He is Babla Mehta, almost an exact double for Mukesh's voice. What is happening here is a "version recording". An orchestra assembled in Delhi is playing the music almost exactly as it was recorded in the original, but this time it is in stereo. And Babla Mehta is singing the oldie as if infused by the late Mukesh's soul. The end product is a brilliantly recorded piece of music—which will perhaps be made into a C-60 called "The Best of Mukesh, sung by Babla Mehta," or inserted into a cassette containing songs by other similar "double" artistes singing popular oldies in dazzling stereo sound.

By visiting campuses and local talent shows around Delhi, and advertising in newspapers, Arora has managed to collect more than a dozen talented singers who double for the original artistes—including doubles for Kishore and Lata. Vipin Sachdeva sings Rafi and Vandana Vajpayee does an incomparable Lata. When P. Mukherjee sings Hemant Kumar's *Ye nayan dare dare*, or Alka Shankar belts out Geeta Dutt's *Babuji dheere chalna*, the effect is magnetic. Using the living greats like Lata or Kishore to rerecord their old songs in stereo would be economically prohibitive due to their high fees. But Vipin and Vandana, who are locked into exclusive contracts with Supercassettes, are paid between Rs 10,000 and Rs 15,000 per C-60 cassette recording. The only other costs are of the music and the studio. The total production costs per recorded cassette vary from between Rs 15,000 and Rs 30,000, but the volume of sales ensures a good profit. Supercassettes does original recordings as well. For example, Manhar has just recorded 16 original ghazals for a special release by Supercassettes to take place within the next two months.

"The funny thing is," says Arora, "that when these old songs start selling again there is also a renewed demand for those old movies as well." Increasingly, the music scores from new movies, or movies still under production, are sold by the producer to Supercassettes. The company, having paid a lump sum for the rights to the music then produces the tapes in its own studios—either mixing them for better quality, or, as it did in the case of *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*, using its own artistes to sing the songs with better stereo recordings. As several producers have attested in their letters to Supercassettes, the release of their music scores have helped fan demand for their films. Today, Supercassettes has made outright purchases of music scores from all the leading new films including *Dance Dance*, *Kalyug aur Ramayana*, *Loha*, *Ek Chadar Maili Si*, *Nagina* and dozens of others.

And all this is legitimate under the Copyright Act which requires only that proper royalties be paid to the producers who own the sound-track and that the songs and music not be distorted or their tunes changed from the originals. Last year, Supercassettes shelled out about Rs 2 crore in royalty for outright purchases as well as for individual "version" songs.

Arora does not like to talk about his business acumen. He ascribes his success entirely to a miracle performed by Mata Vaishno Devi whose shrine he visits five or six times a year and whose statues adorn every factory and compound he owns. The 'T-series' is derived from the Devi's symbol—the Trishul. "Even when I was in college," he says, "I hated studies. I loved entertainment and music and each time I went to Vaishno Devi I prayed to her for a job and success only in a field involving music."

Even as he helped his father in the fruit business, Arora rented a small shack in Delhi's Gulmohar Park in 1979 where he tinkered with radio repairs and a small time cassette retail business that earned him between Rs 50 and Rs 100 a day. His brother Gopal, a self-taught electronics wizard, would borrow money to travel to Hong Kong, Korea and Japan to study state of the art machinery (he is the genius behind the Supercassettes hi-tech establishment).

As business improved, the brothers bought a Sony-123 high-speed duplicator on which they began to record original Garhwali, Bhojpuri and Punjabi songs in makeshift studios. The investments were low, the sales high. With their profits they began to trade in imported components like magnetic tape and silicon paper, again with good profit margins. Meanwhile, the cassette market boomed and the Aroras began parlaying their profits into manufacturing ventures.

"The most important thing," says Arora, "is that we can do anything the foreigners can do and do it better. For us it is only a question of getting the know-how. Once we get the know-how, there's never any looking back."

—INDERJIT BADHWAR

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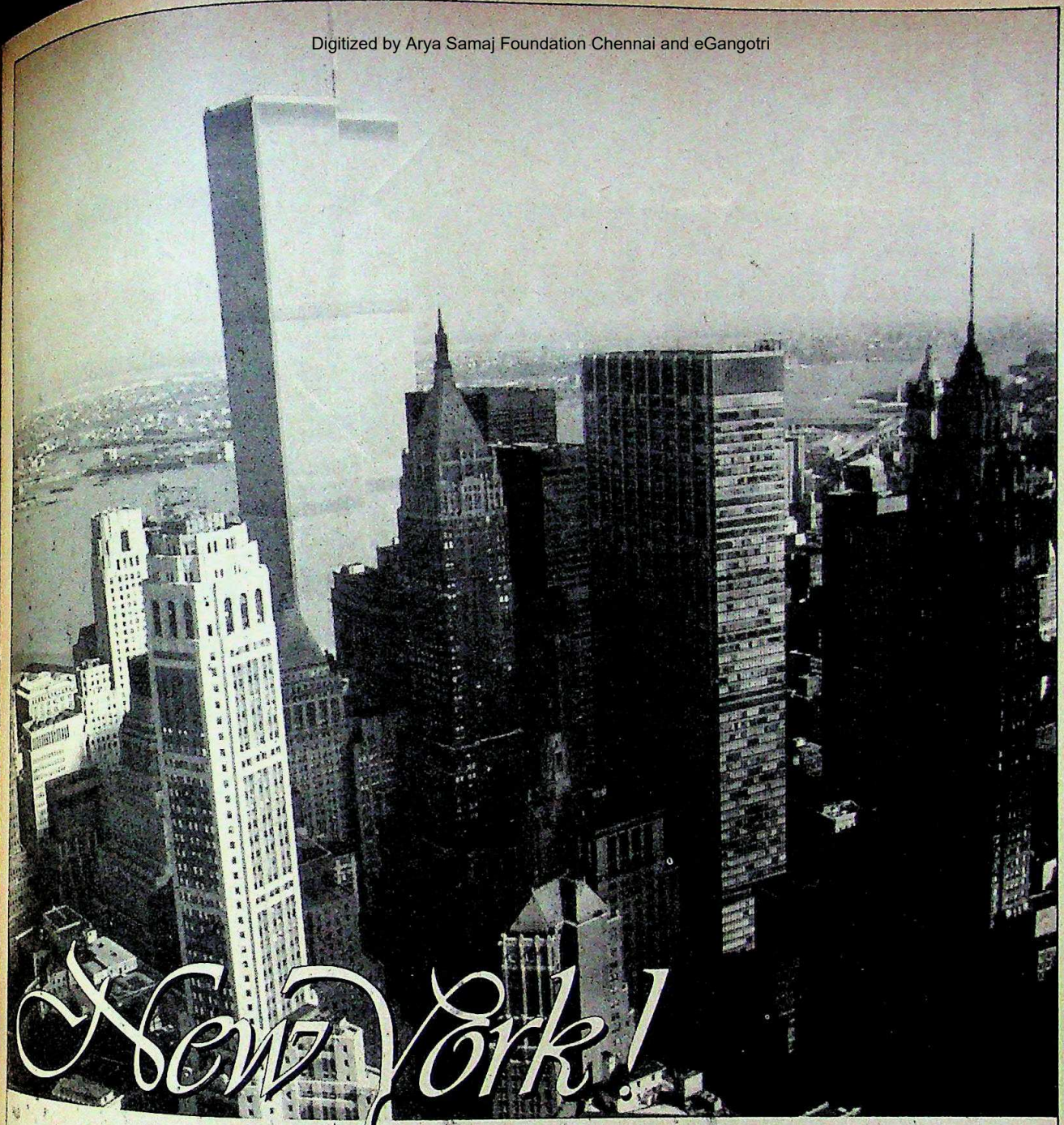

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INDO-SOVIET COLLABORATION

A New Thrust

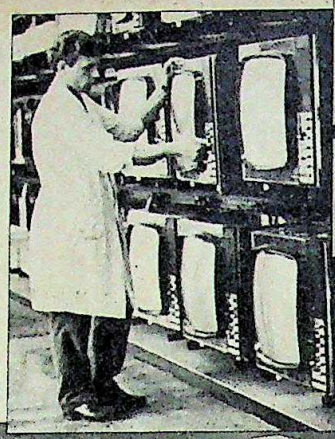
THE Russians are coming—and this time they are hotly wooing the private sector and taking on the Japanese and the West. After years of offering technical expertise to state-owned power and steel companies, the Soviet Union is sewing up deals in cars, computers, colour television sets and trucks. What is more, it is for the first time putting up part of the money for these ventures.

Spearheading the new push are over a dozen Soviet delegations which have hit the country in the last one year. Last month, a scientific delegation led by Guri Marchuk, president of the USSR Academy of Sciences, signed two working papers on cooperation in science and technology. And last fortnight, Deputy Prime Minister V.M. Kamentsev paid a visit to India.

The Soviets have good reasons for this new push. Moscow has a hefty trade deficit with India, mainly due to a sudden fall in the prices of oil—which comprises 70 per cent of its exports to India—and the difficulty in finding products acceptable here.

Compounding the problem, private companies account for 85 per cent of India's exports to the USSR but they buy just 15 per cent of the total goods from them. Says former commerce minister Manubhai Shah, who now heads the India-USSR Chamber of Commerce and Industry: "The Government's capacity to import from Russia has peaked. The private sector must now buy from there if the two-way trade target of Rs 13,000 crore is to be achieved by 1992."

Traditionally, Indian entrepreneurs have treated Soviet technology with caution, preferring the West to fulfil their needs. Bureaucratic bottle-necks and a communication gap about the latest advances in Soviet technology have added to their scepticism. As Abid Hussain, member of the Planning Commision, says: "Indian industrialists and bureaucrats have had many misconceptions about Soviet capabilities." But perceptions are changing. Says V.I. Nazarov, head of the economic division in The Trade Representation of the USSR in India: "Indian entrepreneurs have realised that they can deal with the Soviets on the same basis as with the West."



(Clockwise from above) computer, TV and Lada car: wooing India

And, on the other side of the fence, "with Gorbachev, the Russians have become open to the idea of joint ventures with the private sector," says H.S. Sandhu, managing director of Chinar Exports, which trades heavily with the USSR.

Indeed, a new notification permits Soviet manufacturers to deal directly with private concerns. Last year, the Soviets signed up with Asian Vehicles Industries Ltd to make two models of Lada cars, and promised to invest in 30 per cent of the shares. They hope that the Government will clear the one-lakh-cars-a-year project because of the low foreign exchange content. Even if it doesn't, contingency plans provide for a 100 per cent export unit. And truck manufacturer Ashok Leyland sees advantages in Soviet trucks that use cheap gas for fuel. Says M. Sodhi, its chairman: "A memorandum of understanding has been signed last year with Gosplan (the Soviet Planning Commission)."

Even in hi-tech areas like computers, the Soviets are notching up lucrative deals. Computronics India, a leading importer of computers from the USSR, is negotiating for the manufacture of personal and mini-computers with a 40 per cent Russian equity participation. Says company President Vivek Singhal: "While in the '70s, the US was ahead in computers, today the Soviets are just as good." In fact, the Soviets are wooing India to buy theirs at a price lower than the US one.

Even in the television industry, dominated until now by the Japanese and the West, the Soviets are breaking new ground. Chinar Exports is negotiating a joint collaboration for the manufacture of electronic guns for television sets. Says Sandhu: "The advantage is that the Soviets have also agreed to a buy-back arrangement." And Moscow Rubin enterprise is tying up with Sonydive International to manufacture colour television sets.

Even in their traditional areas of strength—like the power sector—the Soviets are now tying up deals with the private sector. For instance, Technopromexport has teamed up with Birla Technical Services (BTS) and has jointly bid for the Rs 730-crore Bakreswar power project in West Bengal. Ironically, their competitor here is Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL), a public sector undertaking the Soviets had helped set up. Says a senior BTS official: "The Russians are offering us proven technology and it will save us scarce foreign exchange."

Technical experts also discount apprehensions of Soviet technology being inferior to the West. S.P. Singh, BHEL's technical director, in fact, says their technology is as good—if not better—than the West. Adds T.M. Malkani, managing director of Advani Oerlikon, which has tied up with the Soviets for a transfer of technology in welding gas pipes: "They have the world's most advanced research institutes for developing heavy duty welding applications."

Despite the spurt of activity, it is too early to judge how far these projects will rectify the trade imbalance. But with many other joint projects on the anvil, Indo-Soviet economic relations are clearly headed for a new phase.

—SURAJEET DAS GUPTA

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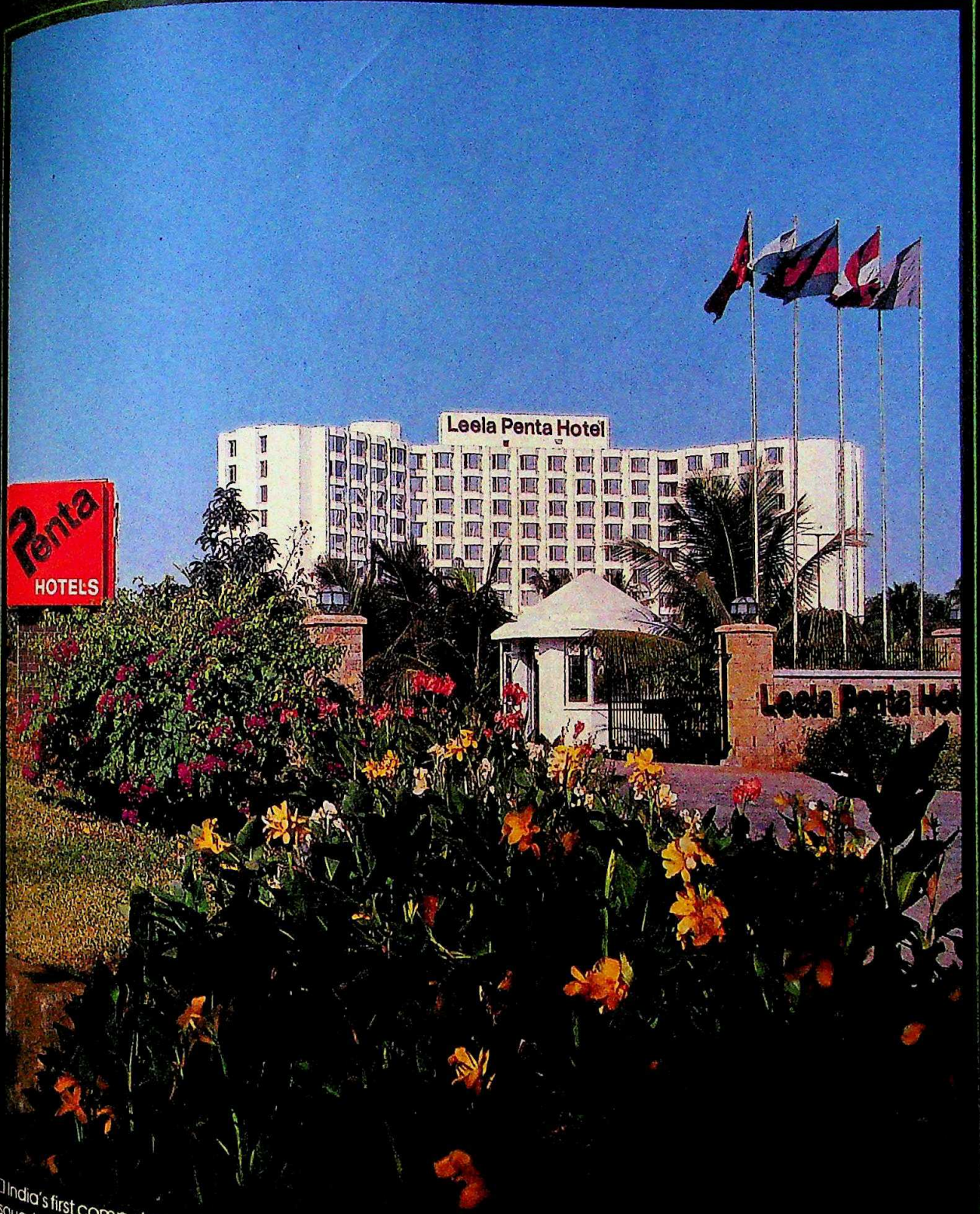
Leela Penta

— the masterpiece

Bombay hasn't quite seen anything like it yet.



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Cowboys. Bowling alleys. And shrinks.
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Today, the postman slipped in a crisp, white envelope.
The sender's address read Cornell.
You started opening the letter.
Beads of sweat fringed your forehead.
You'd got into Cornell the next semester.
Tra-la-la. Attaboy. Hip, hip, hurray.
Hello baseball.
Hello Brooke Shields.
Hello McDonald's.

From McDowell
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"I think I'll have a Thril," you said.

Enterprise D/McD/17 A

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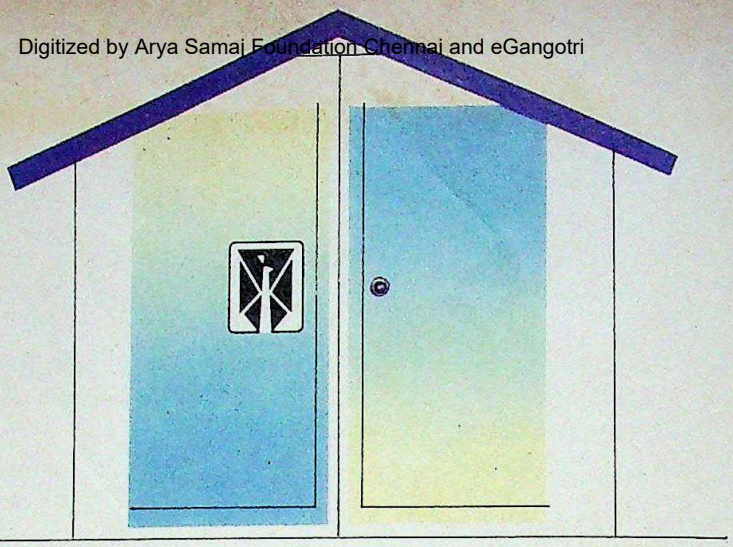

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DETECTIVE AGENCIES

New Role

THEY used to specialise in divorce cases, snooping around for evidence on the basis of which a husband could divorce his wife, or vice versa. Now, however, the name of the game is industrial espionage. Indian counterparts of Fairfax are mushrooming, and doing extremely well for themselves too.

Two decades ago, there were not more than two or three detective agencies nation-wide. Today there are over 150 of them: big and small, good, bad and indifferent. Says Tapan Ganguly, general manager (western zone) of Globe Detective Agency, the leader in the field: "We are growing at about 40 per cent per annum."

The increasing variety of services that these agencies provide for the corporate sector mirror the reasons for their mushroom growth: keeping tabs on labour unions, watching for pilferage, scouting for spurious products, to screening new recruits, and providing security. Many factories today have undercover agents who keep tabs on their employees.

As the director of a large Delhi-based company says: "Nowadays we have to be very careful about the type of people who work with us. Detectives help us not only to keep an eye on the mood of the labour but can also be used to check out a salesman who puts in claims for any extraordinary expenses."

As this list of services makes obvious, most of the clients are companies, both state-owned and private, many of which once looked upon agencies with suspicion. Says P. Ali, director of Security Intelligence Services in Bombay: "Ten years ago only 50 per cent of our clients were from the corporate sector. Today they make up 80 per cent of the total."

Adds V.J. Nathan, who runs Top Professionals, a small Delhi agency: "Industrial growth means more fraud cases—and therefore more work for us." Veteran private eye K.B.S. Gopal also points out that "the failure of the police to deliver the goods has forced people to come to us."

Banks and insurance companies also call in detective agencies in fraud and embezzlement cases while simultaneously lodging a first information report with the police. Says an insurance official: "The agencies try to solve cases faster as they are concerned about their profits, unlike the police who take their own time."

Now, the name of the game is industrial espionage. Indian counterparts of Fairfax are mushrooming.

Big business too is not averse to roping in agencies for a little industrial espionage. Notes P.R. Menon, vice-president of the Association of Investigators and Security Organisations of India: "We do a lot of foreign work, like finding out details of companies in India with whom multinationals are planning to sign collaborations."

Growth has also been propelled by the fact that private eyes do not need a licence to operate. As Ganguly notes: "Anyone can put up a board and claim to be a detective." But things are changing. A bill now before Parliament seeks to make it mandatory for all detective agencies, security guards and sleuths working in these outfits to obtain an annually renewable licence from the police.

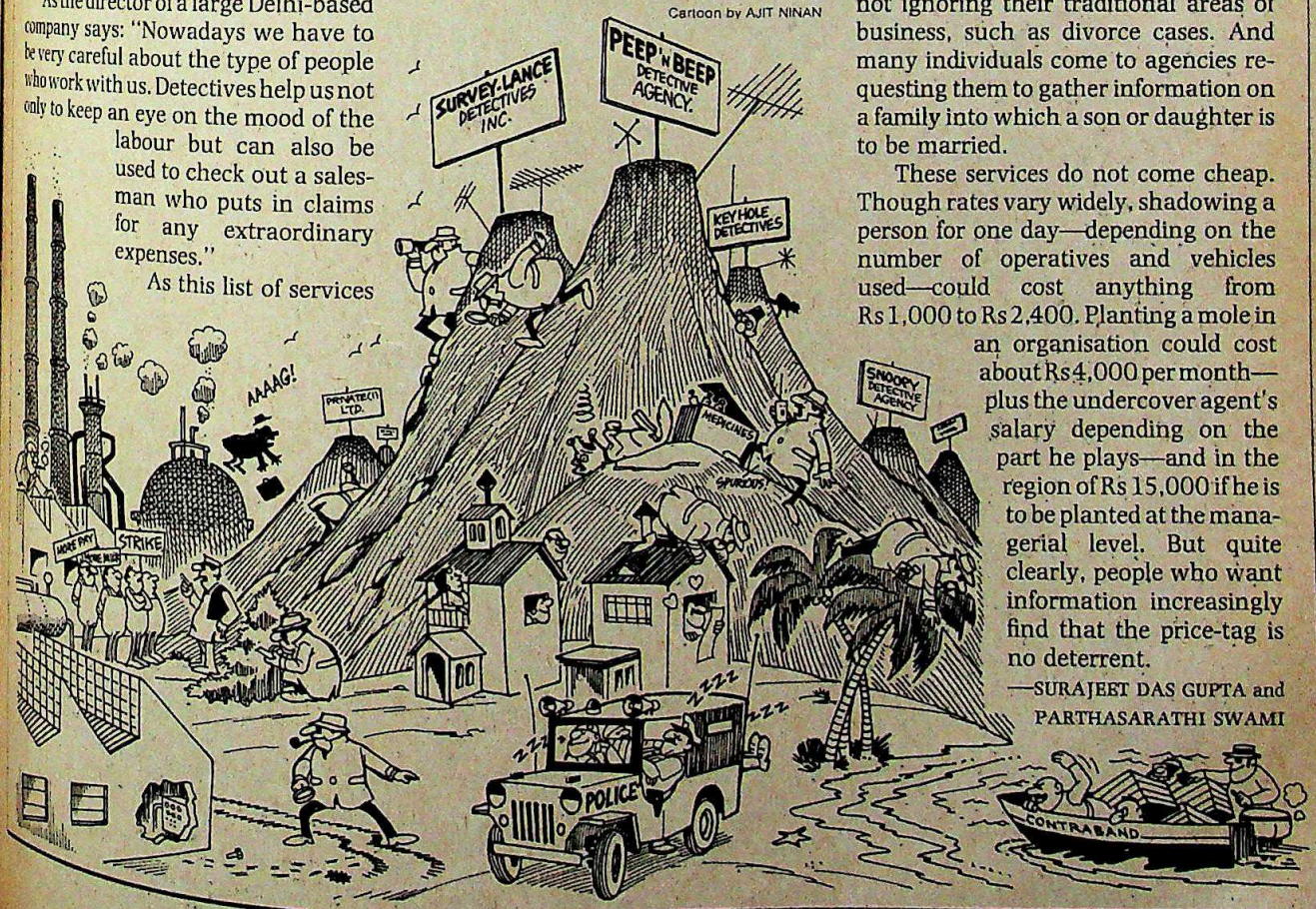
The bill is being supported by a clutch of agencies who fear that professional standards could fall with the proliferation of fly-by-night operators. And if it comes into force, complaints from concerned quarters may even result in licences being cancelled.

In spite of all the forays into new areas, however, detective agencies are not ignoring their traditional areas of business, such as divorce cases. And many individuals come to agencies requesting them to gather information on a family into which a son or daughter is to be married.

These services do not come cheap. Though rates vary widely, shadowing a person for one day—depending on the number of operatives and vehicles used—could cost anything from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,400. Planting a mole in an organisation could cost about Rs 4,000 per month—plus the undercover agent's salary depending on the part he plays—and in the region of Rs 15,000 if he is to be planted at the managerial level. But quite clearly, people who want information increasingly find that the price-tag is no deterrent.

—SURAJEET DAS GUPTA and PARTHASARATHI SWAMI

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



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Why have Usha Water Coolers remained the undisputed market leaders over the years?

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A fact that itself speaks volumes for Usha quality and reliability. Backed by exclusives which make Usha your obvious choice.

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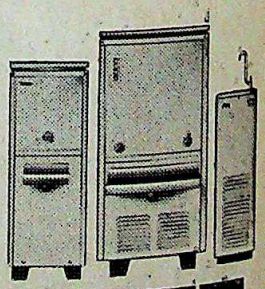

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SCL

The Blue Chip Turnaround

WHEN the chips are down, Semiconductor Complex Ltd (SCL) gets going. Confounding its critics and bouncing out of the red, the state-owned enterprise has posted a profit of over Rs 83 lakh, doubled its capacity utilisation and ended the year with orders worth Rs 13 crore in its pocket.

The country's sole manufacturer of large-scale integrated (LSI) circuits—the miracle chip that has revolutionised electronics worldwide—can expect even better times ahead. So far the domestic market has been too small to permit full use of SCL's production capacity, and exports have been unattractive. But with the rupee's gradual devaluation pricing out imported competition and making exports easier, the market has suddenly burgeoned. "For the first time customers are complaining that we aren't supplying them enough," says company Chairman and Managing Director Virendra Mohan.

The market could get still bigger in the future. For the Government is about to allow big business to get into user industries like digital watches and pocket calculators (reserved so far for the state sector and small-scale units). And best of all, the Government will stipulate that both watch and calculator manufacturers cannot import the key input: the chip. SCL will, as a result, be able to hawk at least an additional Rs 6-crore worth of chips and modules every year. Indeed, it has already tied up with a Tata watch venture to supply up to two million watch modules. "The deal will be very lucrative," admits SCL's Mohan.

Certainly, all this heralds a long overdue blossoming for the chip manufacturer. Kicked off nearly four years ago, the Rs 50-crore project was expected to spearhead the electronics revolution, supply chips for the nascent telecommunications sector and spin-off a host of wares such as low-cost watches and home computers. But SCL has not quite attained its full potential, partly because it was caught between high costs and low volumes of production. The telecommunications market failed to expand as originally envisioned, and computer manufacturers who use 16-bit microprocessors cold-shouldered the company's 8-bit microprocessors. "Companies abroad have declined to sell us the technology for 16-bit chips," explains Pushpendra Mankad, SCL's deputy general manager for marketing.

The result, predictably enough, is that barely 40 per cent of SCL's production capacity has been utilised, and sales have hovered between Rs 7 crore and Rs 9 crore for the last three years. "We were at a dead end in the market and went through a period of gloom," admits Mohan.

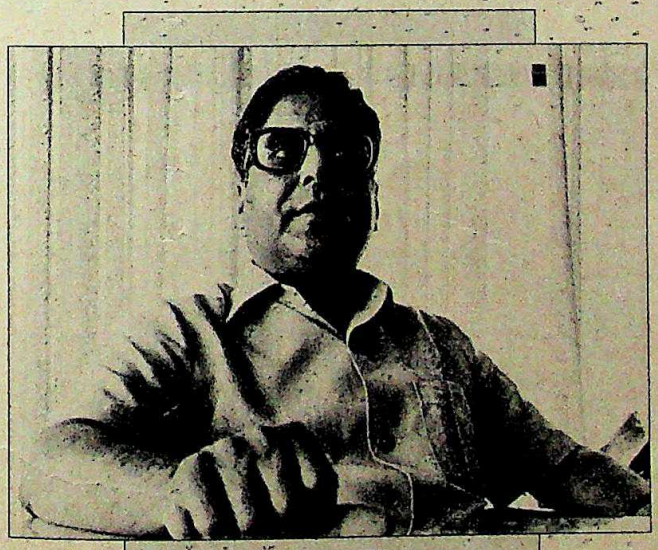
Despondency, however, has given way to a renewed burst of hope at SCL's futuristic plant at Mohali, on the outskirts of Chandigarh. As Mohan puts it: "We see the light at the end of the tunnel. In three years time, we should be a Rs 40-crore company." Others too endorse the point. Electronics Secretary K.P.P. Nambiar believes that the chip market will burgeon so rapidly in the next couple of years that the country will have to go in for another SCL-type unit.

The scenario might have been altogether different were it not for the German mark and the Japanese yen soaring in relation to the rupee, as a result of which foreign modules have become prohibitively expensive for watch manufacturers. Expectedly, they have turned to SCL over the last few months, and the company has had to harness 95 per cent of its production capacities, a far cry from last year's 40 per cent. And even this may not be enough: SCL's chairman talks of augmenting capacity with marginal investments.

For the longer haul, however, SCL has snared orders from Hong Kong for 6 million chips a year, equivalent to almost a third of its current capacity, and this is expected to pep up capacity utilisation at the upstream wafer fabrication facility. Then, a defence services order for advanced circuits to be used for shells and guided missiles is in the bag, and the telecommunications market is looking up. "We expect between Rs 40 crore and Rs 42 crore worth of business from the telecommunications sector over the

SCL plant research lab: bright future

Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



"For the first time customers are complaining that we aren't supplying them enough."

VIRENDRA MOHAN
chairman and managing director, SCL

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next four years," maintains Mankad.

Unquestionably, SCL has flourished in recent months because of the rise in foreign currency values. But successful attempts at upgrading technological processes have also cut costs and contributed to profits, while simultaneously expanding capacity at virtually no additional cost. After using 5 micron (equivalent to one tenth the thickness of human hair) geometry to manufacture chips, SCL switched to 3 micron know-how last year.

"With 5 micron technology, we used to get 800 chips from a four-inch silicon wafer," explains M.J. Zarabi, the company's general manager for research and development. "Now we are getting an average of 2,000, using 3 micron. So for the same amount of money we are getting two-and-a-half times more." The upshot: capacity has expanded from around 9 million chips to 20 million chips. Even newer technological processes are in the pipeline: 2 micron geometry by next March and then 1.5 micron knowhow by 1988-89.

For all the innovation, observers put SCL on the firing line for going the whole hog into low-tech items like watches rather than operating on the frontiers of technology. Argues a former member of the SCL board: "SCL's main purpose was to supply chips to the telecommunications, process control and defence industries. This it has not done fully." Critics also accuse it of having failed to hawk its wares aggressively. "SCL's biggest problem is weak marketing," says the former board member. Secretary Nambiar too echoes the point: "They've not had sufficient interaction with customers."

But Mohan counters: "Is there anyone who's using chips which SCL is not supplying?" Also, in order to stay alive financially, SCL has been forced to hawk its own as well as imported clock and watch modules (for which it was made the canalising agent) and Unicorn computers in order to generate sales volume. But with the market for its own products now picking up, the sales volume may be big enough to help the company stand on its own feet—and to devote more attention to hi-tech areas like space and defence applications.

The biggest point of criticism when SCL was launched was that there would never be a large enough market in India for the chips the new venture would turn out. Now, however, that criticism is being answered. And hi-tech may finally be proved to be viable.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI at Mohali

KERALA LOTTERY

Unlucky Draw

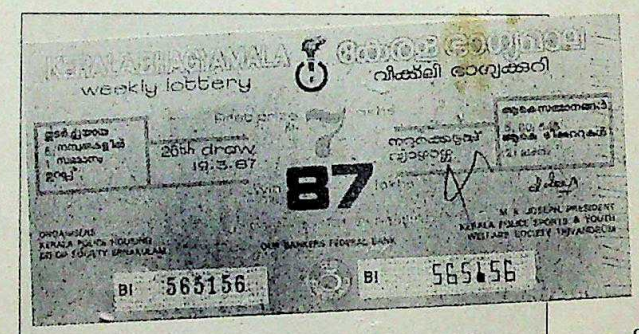
THE Kerala police is attracting media attention and not, for once, because of its failures. On the contrary, the problem is that one of its ventures is doing far too well. The latest controversy revolves around the Kerala Bhagyamala Weekly Lottery which the Police Department has been running since September last. It has developed into something of a rage in a state which first started the tradition of the government-run lottery. But the Finance and Tax Department is unhappy because its own monthly Kerala State Lottery has been seriously hit ever since Bhagyamala appeared on the scene. And now the police organisers are being accused of violating Reserve Bank of India (RBI) guidelines for the business.

The Bhagyamala was started in the hope of off-setting the Rs 2-crore expense the Police Department had incurred in not only sponsoring last year's Nehru Cup football tournament but in also renovating the Chandrasekharan Nair Police Stadium in Trivandrum for the occasion. Former chief minister K. Karunakaran gave the project the go-ahead and a right to conduct 52 weekly draws, overruling the Finance Department's objections.

Bhagyamala was a runaway success and it is not difficult to see why. Eighty-three per cent of the Rs 1.05-crore collected every week from the sale of 21 lakh tickets is given back as either prize money or agents' commission. Though its ticket is priced at Rs 5 compared to Kerala State Lottery's Rs 2, the top prize is seven times higher at Rs 7 lakh.

The effect on the other rival government lottery has been unnerving. In September 1986, when Bhagyamala started, Kerala State Lottery's monthly profit was Rs 17.75 lakh but by February 1987, it had already sunk to Rs 5.1 lakh.

The Finance Department's frustrations spilled out last month after former finance minister Thachady Prabhakaran was denied an assembly ticket. Before resigning, he prepared a report on Bhagyamala's flouting of RBI regulations and circulated copies. For one, the report said, the first prize was in excess of RBI's latest stipulation of Rs 1 lakh. Second, though permission had been given to the Kerala Police Sports and Youth Welfare Society, it was being conducted by the Kerala Housing Co-operative Society. Third, instead of depositing the money with the treasury, it was being kept with a scheduled bank. And last, it said that Bhagyamala should be discontinued by March 31 because it had not only violated RBI guidelines but had already made profits of Rs 6.11 crore instead of its targeted Rs 2 crore.



A runaway success, the Bhagyamala Lottery has now brought bad luck to its organisers, the Kerala Police.

However, Inspector General of Police (IGP) T.V. Madhusoodanan, who is in charge of the lottery, says: "We have not violated any RBI guidelines. The government order says that we can charge anything from Rs 5 to Rs 10 for a ticket and can conduct it for 52 weeks." He also denied the Rs 6-crore profit saying that though the accounts have not been worked out, "it took us about five draws just to break even".

But after making a noise about the alleged violations by Bhagyamala, the Kerala State Lottery has turned weekly, and by hiking its own first prize to Rs 9 lakh, has laid itself open to the same charges of rules violation. Said a top Finance Department official: "The agents and the people want us to xerox the Bhagyamala success formula." While the fate of Bhagyamala is as yet undecided, its organisers have added a humorous twist to the inter-departmental wrangle by issuing an advertisement in the papers. It reads: "There is no cure for baldness and jealousy."

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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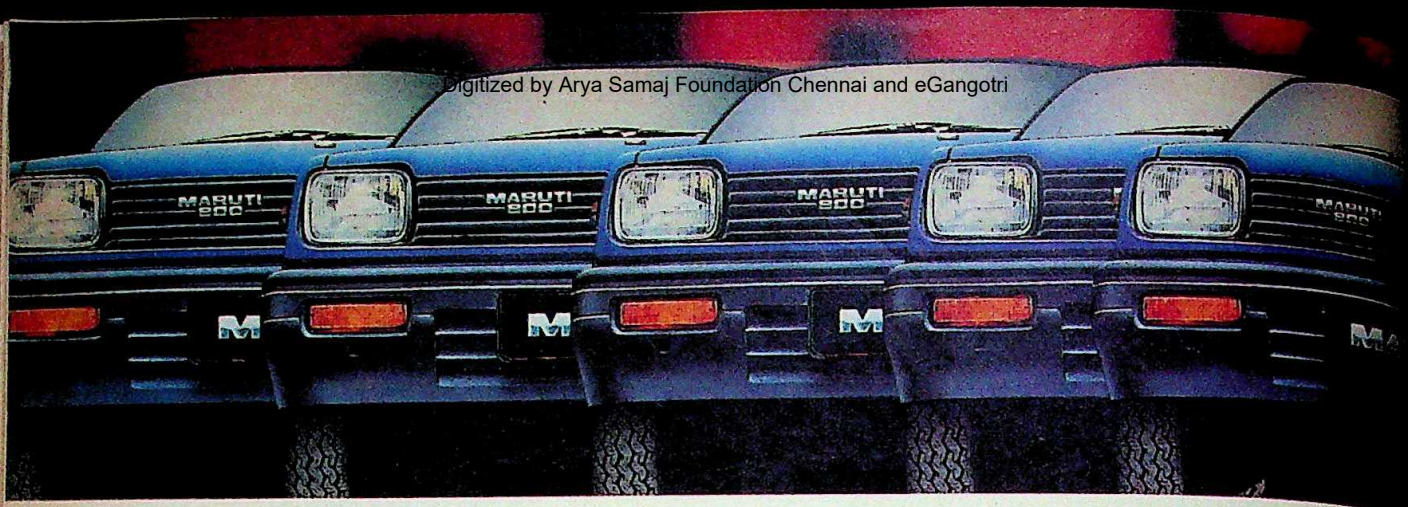

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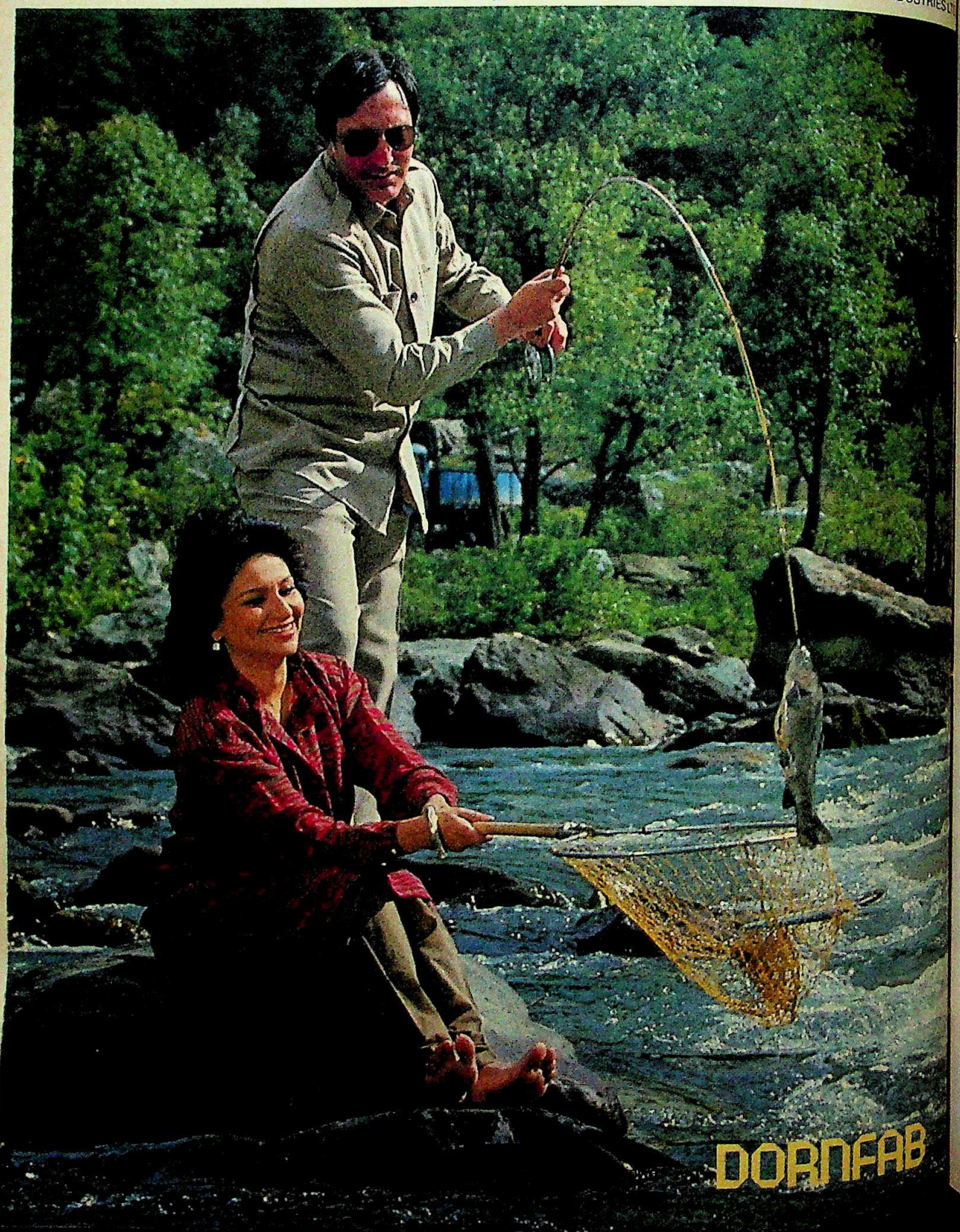

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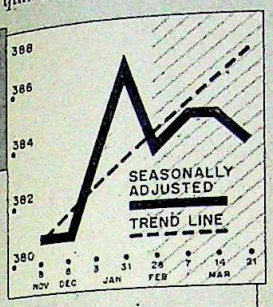
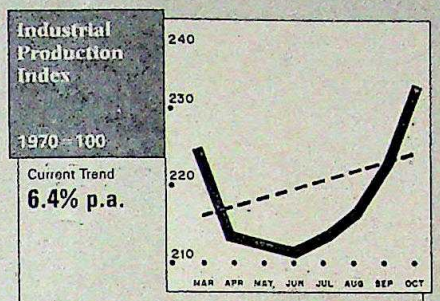
MODERATE growth in industrial production and almost full-blown growth in infrastructure, a slight slow-down in the growth in money supply, and a substantial slow-down in the rate of inflation are the highlights of the economic scene.

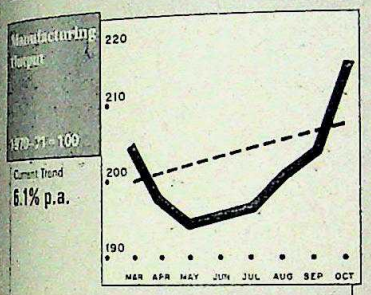
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months (weekly data) or two years (monthly data) figures. The quarters referred to in the text are calendar year quarters.



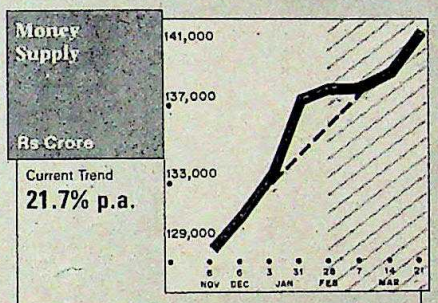
A substantial slow-down in the inflation rate is indicated. In spite of the budget, prices are at the same level as in early January.



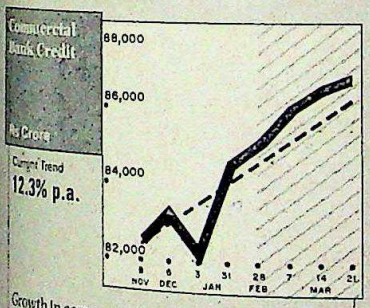
Data on industrial production, which is available only till October 1986, show a moderate growth of 6.4 per cent.



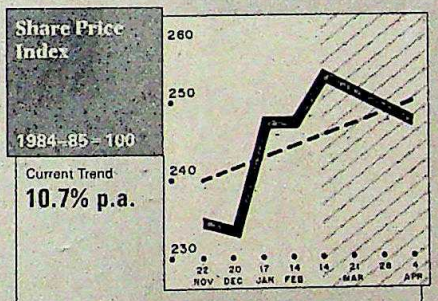
Manufacturing production, the chief component of industrial production, indicates a growth of about 6 per cent up to October.



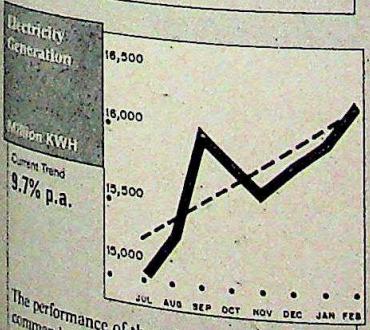
The growth in money supply, though very high at 21.7 per cent per annum, has slowed down somewhat since end-January.



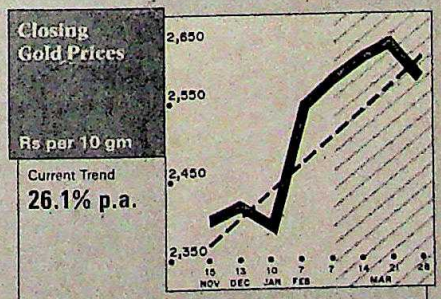
Growth in commercial bank credit to the private sector seems better. Yet, the trend rate—12.3 per cent per annum—is lower than last year.



The stock-market continued to be subdued till March-end. The budget has certainly served to dampen trading enthusiasm.



The performance of the infrastructure sector is commendable. An indication to this is the near double-digit growth in electricity generated.



After rising steadily till the third week of March, gold prices suddenly dipped in the closing week of the financial year.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

Growth of items in October, 1986

	% Growth
Sugar Machinery	65.40
Paper Machinery	53.67
Coffee Curing Works	41.32
Cement Machinery	33.37
Linolium & Similar Products	25.58
Electrical Motors	23.25
Earth-Moving Machinery	19.98
Air & Gas Compressors	19.73
Razor Blades	19.19
Matches	17.02
Drugs & Pharmaceuticals	16.93
Mining Machinery	16.66
Conveying Equipment	14.81
Generation & Transmission Equipment	14.02
Paints & Varnishes	13.34
Iron & Steel Structurals	13.08
Non-Ferrous Basic Metal Industries	11.96
Paper	11.62
Bolts & Nuts	11.62
Tyres & Tubes	11.17
Rubber Footwear	11.05
Textile Machinery	10.98
Paper Board & Straw Board	10.43
Dry Cells	10.41
Cosmetics	10.19
Cotton & Blended Yarn	9.78
Metallurgical Machinery	9.14
Newsprint	9.01
Ferro-Alloys	8.96
Typewriters & Duplicators	8.24
Electrical Lamps	7.99
Pens & Pencils	7.93
Dye Stuffs	7.91
Soap & Glycerine	7.05
Mining & Quarrying	6.05
Machine Tools	5.66
Iron & Steel Pipes	5.63
Buses, Trucks & Jeeps	5.48
Bakery Products	5.39
Cotton & Blended Mixed Fabrics	5.36
Hurricane Lanterns	5.28
Storage Batteries	4.81
Grain Mill Products	4.65
Artificial Leather & Oil Cloth	4.53
Beverage Industry	4.40
Organic Chemicals	3.83
Jute Textiles	3.73

Of the 86 series considered, 62 of them with a total weight of 61.58 had a positive growth and 24 of them with a total weight of 26.4 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1987	1986
Coal Thousand Tonnes, February	16,530	15,900
Saleable Steel Thousand Tonnes, February	776.8	692.0
Cement Thousand Tonnes, February	3,080	2,713
Fertilisers Thousand Tonnes, February	620.0	495.2
Thermal Plant Load Factor Per cent, February	58.0	57.4

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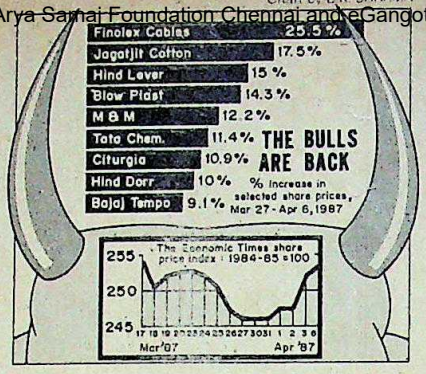
THE MARKETS

Levering Up

HINDUSTAN Lever has done for the market what the budget failed to do. Almost overnight, there was new cheer in the trading ring last fortnight after the consumer products giant announced a handsome bonus issue plus an increased dividend. Lever's share spurted from Rs 176 to Rs 204 in a single day, and took a grateful market up with it. The *Economic Times* stock-market index, after sliding to a low point of 246 towards the end of March, recovered to 253.3 by April 6.

After a month of depression—reflected in the fate of the Unit Trust's Mastershares, which have been selling at a discount—there were other positive developments too. For last fortnight saw the announcement regarding the reduction in overall interest rates, there was institutional support for several shares, and the ban on short selling continued to put pressure on the bears. On top of all these, there were hopes that some of the negative measures announced in the budget would be modified.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Because of these and other factors, the gloom that prevailed on the market throughout March lifted and most scrips gained ground in the second half of last fortnight. Finolex Cables led the upsurge with a dramatic rise from Rs 127.50 to Rs 160, Jagatjit Cotton gained handsomely, as did Blow Plast and Mahindra & Mahindra. Tata Chemicals and Bajaj Tempo were also favoured by buyers.

Among the few companies that fared poorly were ITC (presumably because of the company's problems with the taxman), Orkay (which seems to remain in the dumps), and Peico and Associated Cement (both of which have announced poor half-year results). Several Birla companies too seemed to be continuing their slide, with Grasim, Hindustan Aluminium, Hindustan Motors and Indian Rayon all losing ground.

The next big event for the market might well be the 1986 results of Reliance Industries. This has been expected for some time, and speculation is rife as to what lies in store. The company's share dropped well below the Rs 200 mark, nearing the lowest point in the year, before attracting some buying support late in the fortnight. Investors may also have become nervous following the to-do in Parliament over the hiring of the American Fairfax Group to investigate some of the company's deals.

It also remains to be seen whether the recovery in the first week of April will be sustained in the coming weeks. A lifting of the ban on short selling, for instance, could still precipitate a slide. If the mood is to stay cheerful, what is probably needed is some more upbeat corporate announcements and the long-awaited modifications in the budget's provisions relating to minimum tax and tax deduction at source.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1987 HIGH	1987 LOW	CLOSE 6.4.87	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	35.50	28.00	32.00	1.25 +
Associated Cement	241.50	191.00	196.00	14.00 –
Asian Paints	251.25	207.50	244.00	14.00 +
Atlas Copco	150.00	112.00	148.00	7.00 +
Avery India	169.00	150.00	159.00	6.00 +
Bajaj Auto	4925.00	3950.00	4760.00	325.00 +
Baroda Rayon	250.00	205.00	223.75	3.75 –
Bata India	160.00	128.50	143.00	9.50 –
Bayer	785.00	600.00	770.00	110.00 +
Bharat Forge	75.00	63.00	74.00	2.00 +
Birla Jute	50.75	47.00	48.00	1.25 –
Blow Plast	126.00	92.50	120.00	10.00 +
Bombay Dyeing	75.00	40.50	68.50	nil
Brooke Bond	101.00	77.00	99.50	4.00 +
Ceat Tyres	60.00	48.00	60.00	0.50 +
Century Spinning	810.00	670.00	715.00	6.00 +
Chloride India	148.00	89.00	96.00	1.50 +
Colgate	378.75	327.50	372.50	7.50 +
Eskayef	247.50	171.25	235.00	13.75 +
DCM	39.00	27.25	28.00	1.75 –
Dunlop	77.75	71.25	74.00	nil
Elecon	107.50	86.25	97.50	2.50 +
E.I.Hotels	56.00	44.00	44.50	1.25 –
Escorts	84.00	47.00	52.00	3.00 +
Finolex Cables	182.50	114.00	160.00	5.00 –
Food Specialities	188.50	164.00	171.00	0.50 +
Garware Polyester	97.00	69.50	81.00	1.00 –
G.E. Shipping	22.50	16.00	17.50	nil
Gujarat St Fertilisers	183.50	120.00	143.00	2.00 –
Grasim Ind.	95.00	80.00	87.00	2.00 –
Hind. Aluminium.	126.00	71.00	114.00	6.00 –
Hind. Cocoa	262.50	223.75	242.00	5.75 +
Hindustan Lever	212.00	165.00	207.00	23.00 +
Hindustan Motors	35.35	25.80	27.10	1.00 –
Hind. Dorr	390.00	295.00	385.00	30.00 +
IEL	61.50	50.50	51.50	2.50 –
Indian Organic	78.00	62.00	65.00	nil
Indian Rayon	76.50	60.00	61.00	2.50 –
Indrol	510.00	255.00	282.50	nil
Ingersoll-Rand	340.00	272.50	340.00	12 50 +
ITC	78.00	45.50	49.00	11.50 –
J.K. Synthetics	93.50	67.00	70.00	2.50 –
Kinetic Engineering	312.50	225.00	255.00	2.50 +
Kirloskar Cummins	87.50	67.00	87.50	7.50 +
KSB Pumps	355.00	220.00	355.00	25.00 +
Larson & Toubro	100.00	76.50	79.00	5.00 –
Lipton	79.50	60.00	78.50	4.00 +
Lohia Machines	32.00	20.00	23.00	nil
Madura Coats	73.00	66.00	72.00	2.00 +
Mahindra & Mahindra.	47.00	38.00	46.00	4.00 +
Motor Industries	390.00	342.50	365.00	15.00 +
Mukand Iron	80.50	63.50	76.50	0.50 +
National Organic	577.50	490.00	512.50	12.50 –
Nirlon	26.00	15.50	16.00	3.00 –
Orkay Silk Mills	115.00	73.00	76.00	7.00 –
Peico Electronics	57.25	36.00	39.75	5.75 –
Otis Elevator	200.00	155.00	199.00	7.75 +
Ponds	375.00	325.00	365.00	2.50 +
Premier Auto	30.00	21.00	28.25	3.25 +
Ranbaxy	135.00	111.00	123.00	5.50 –
Raymond	79.00	68.00	72.00	1.00 +
Reckitt & Colman	200.00	167.00	175.00	9.00 –
Reliance Industries	277.00	182.00	205.00	9.00 –
Sandoz	140.00	87.50	102.50	2.50 +
Shriram Fibres	36.00	25.50	26.00	2.50 –
Siemens India	144.50	90.00	95.00	42.00 –
SPIC	53.50	36.50	41.50	2.75 +
Tata Steel	1207.50	982.50	1060.00	27.50 +
Telco	665.00	550.00	585.00	5.00 –
Vulcan Laval	57.50	45.00	47.50	2.50 –

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.1435	9.0640
Austria	Schilling	100	100.6763	99.7259
Bahrain	Dinar	1	34.1664	34.1480
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.3500	42.1600
Canada	Dollar	1	9.8864	9.8122
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.8774	1.8635
Egypt	Pound	1	9.7986	9.7332
France	Franc	1	2.1276	2.1074
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6524	1.6410
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0786	0.0699
Iran	Rial	100	17.8630	17.8229
Italy	Lira	100	1.0000	0.9900
Japan	Yen	100	8.90	8.10
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.8100	0.7998
Kuwait	Dinar	1	47.1256	47.0388
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1652	5.1210
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.9988	0.9732
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.5732	0.5660
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.2710	6.2253
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7490	0.7332
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.0346	5.9864
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1012	0.0982
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4432	0.4339
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.0335	2.0183
Switzerland	Franc	1	8.5288	8.4665
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.2560	0.2500
Thailand	Baht	100	50.3000	50.0000
UK	Pound	1	20.8702	20.7430
USA	Dollar	1	12.9025	12.8125
UAE	Dirham	1	3.4976	3.4660
USSR	Rouble	1	20.0660	20.0000
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.0671	7.0126

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 8.4.87.

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DENIM: HOW TO TELL THE GOOD GUYS FROM THE BAD 'UNS.

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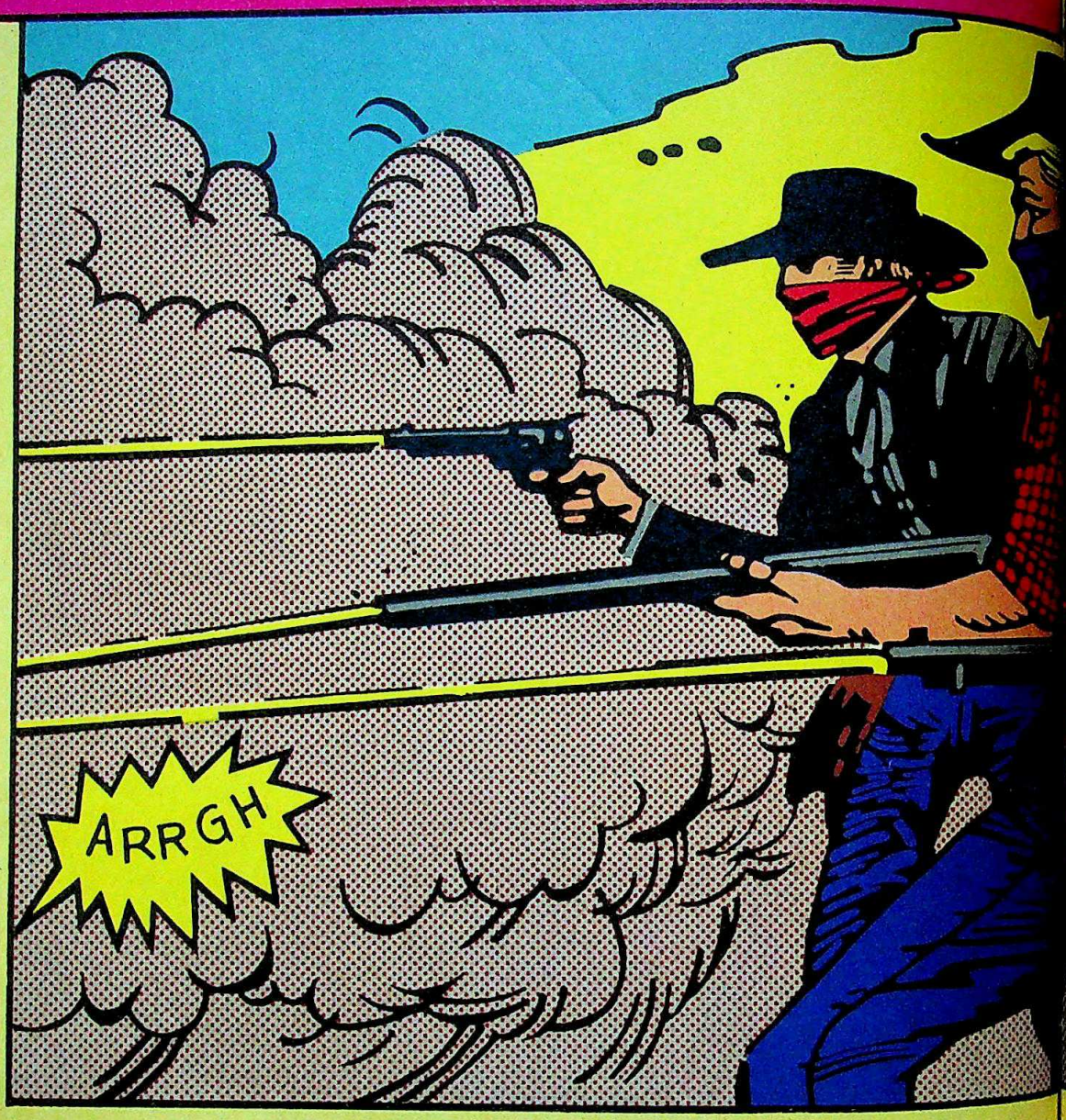

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It's easy for an expert. But the rest of us common folk might need a bit of training.

Because the bad guys aren't really all that bad.

They're just not quite as good as the real thing.

To recognise original denim, you've got to be familiar with two of its unique properties.

One, the yarn is first dyed indigo blue — then interwoven with white yarn.

So if you look closely at original denim (through a magnifying glass if possible) you'll always see both blue and white yarn.

Two, original denim retains its brightness as it fades (a special feature of indigo dye).

But that's something you'll need months to test.

So if you'd rather be on the safe side, here's an easy way out: just sneak a look for the Arvind symbol.

Because Arvind is now making the world's best denim.

Original denim, for the first time in India.

Good enough for Levi, Calvin Klein, Vanderbilt and Co.

Tough enough for Buffalo Bill and Co.

While this is sure to delight you, it shouldn't surprise you.

After all, don't the good guys always win?

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ARVIND. THE LONE RANGER OF ORIGINAL DENIM.

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CENTRAL PROOF ESTABLISHMENT

Tribal Testing Range

LAKSHMI Korku and Lakshmi Katia did not return home on their own that evening. Their fathers brought back their badly dismembered bodies. Like hundreds of other tribals in Kesala area of Hoshangabad district, the two friends had gone to the Central Proof Establishment (CPE) range in search of their livelihood—scrap metal from exploded bombs—and discovered death, instantaneous and ghastly.

Katia, 20, was married only a few months ago. "His wife has come to our house for the first time, as a widow," said the bereaved father, Kinjulal, 55. The widow, Phoolkali, 16, was numb with sorrow. But the crowd of mourners at their home in Saheli village seemed almost unaffected. "Death in the range is so common in this area," said a relative.

Korku, 22, has left behind him a widow and a two-year-old daughter. "It is the greed for easy money that killed him," wailed his grandfather.

Some 20 km away from Saheli village, in Itarsi's government hospital lies Bikku Gond of Sula, swathed in bandages. Last fortnight, a shell hit him as he entered the forest near the range "in search of bamboos". Even if he gets well, he faces prosecution for entering the prohibited area.

Things would have been different had the Madhya Pradesh Government implemented even half the recommendations made by Hoshangabad division commissioner H.R. Obhrai in the wake of a public interest writ in the Supreme Court almost four years ago. But the Government has so far not implemented vital recommendations made by the inquiry, despite a Supreme Court directive to the Government to take measures designed to wean the tribals from their lemming-like way of life.

The skull and cross-bones signs that greet a visitor to the CPE have become symbolic of the 'death range'. Ever since the Rs 2.54-crore range was established 15 years ago, poor villagers, most of them tribals from surrounding villages, have been getting killed while picking scrap—their only means of livelihood.

While official figures put the death toll at a little over 100 during this period, unofficial sources say many more have perished. Hundreds of others, including children, have been maimed in the pursuit of this macabre business. Kesala police station records show that during the first three months of this year, six deaths have already taken place—a death every fortnight.

The tribals' troubles began in 1972 when the CPE established an ammunition testing range over 10,500 hectares of hilly and thickly-forested terrain near Itarsi to test bombs and shells produced in ordnance factories as well as imported weapons and ammunition. In the process, 23 villages, mostly tribal, were uprooted and got a pittance as compensation. "I was paid at the rate of Rs 100 per acre for my 70 acres of land," said Ramkishan Yadav, who got only five acres of land for his 70 acres and now lives in Chhindapani village.

But he was fortunate. Of the 1,085 families dispossessed from their lands, only 652 were given alternative land, most of it infertile rocky plots of five acres each. The rest have settled in other villages surrounding the range. In the wake of press reports on the 'death range', Obhrai sent a detailed report to the state Revenue Department on February 2, 1983, recommending rehabilitation of the 433 other families. The file is gathering dust in the state secretariat since then. And those who did get land have not got the transfer deeds even after 15 years, because they couldn't pay the premium for the land.

The villagers' lives have become cruelly intertwined with the range. Jham Singh, 25, of Chhindapani who lost a leg, is now a shepherd,

Notice at CPE range (left); and victim Jham Singh: unsafe

Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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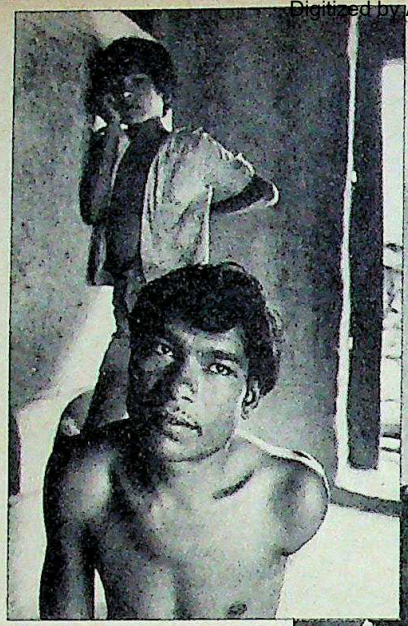

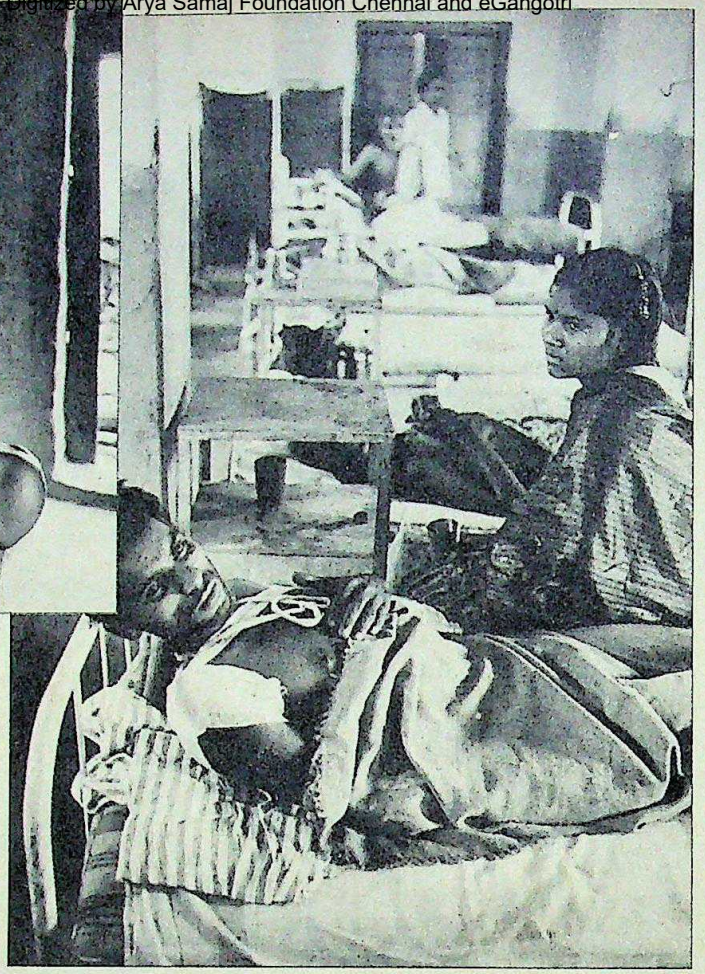

A maimed youth (left); and Bikku Gond in hospital: rising toll

often taking the goats for grazing in the very range that maimed him. Says the 70-page 'confidential' report of the Hoshangabad commissioner: "The range seems to have affected the socio-economic structure in the area and vested interests have developed at various levels. The local inhabitants, petty traders, businessmen of Itarsi, politicians, some delinquent policemen and sometimes even army personnel join hands in the racket to derive benefits for themselves."

Not long ago, a jawan of the defence security corps died in the range while collecting scrap. "The scrap is often bought by the army jawans," said Preetam Singh, detained last fortnight by the police in connection with a theft.

With the entry of big sharks, who profit by purchasing scrap at throw-away prices, the operation has become quite organised, the scrap finding its way to the metal markets of Indore, Bombay, Moradabad, Aligarh and Bhandara. Because of the stiff competition, the tribals are forced to enter the unguarded range even when firing is on in full swing. Expert pickers hide near the target and run to put a mark of ownership, a piece of cloth, on the scrap before another bomb strikes. The report says that some of the scrap-gatherers have developed "expertise" in exploding projectiles which remain unexploded either on the surface or underground. They have developed a tool kit for the purpose. "Indirectly, they provide service to the range," says the report.

In his inquiry report, which the Government has conveniently forgotten, commissioner Obhrai had made several recommendations which, if implemented, can solve the problem to a large extent. These suggest that:

► scrap-collection be legalised and regularised under army supervision and a centralised agency created by the Government for buying scrap;

► an industrial unit using scrap as raw material as well as an industrial estate be established near the range itself, providing employment to some tribals;

► alternative jobs like employment in the Forest Department, self-employment by giving of bullock-carts, biogas plants, training in fishing and sericulture be provided, and displaced persons given priority in jobs in the defence establishments coming up in the area;

► displaced tribals be resettled, and the premium waived for those who have been allotted land, because of the area's rockiness, and land allotted to others;

► the police network be strengthened, the penalty for trespassing on the range be raised from the existing Rs 10, the possession of scrap belonging to the Defence Ministry made an offence and brought under the NSA.

After the Hoshangabad commissioner's report which indicted the police for inaction "because of possible connivance between the dealers and the lower functionaries of the police who get a share from the spoils", some of these influential traders in human misery were caught. Last year an imported car, used for carrying the scrap, was seized by the police.

Ironically, tribals agitating for proper rehabilitation of those displaced by the range have received lathis and jail terms instead of a sympathetic ear from the Government. In February, a group of tribals, including women, was lathi-charged and sent to jail when they tried to gherao a Hoshangabad district official to protest delays in opening relief-works in their area. The tribals have organised several 'long-marches' to Hoshangabad and Bhopal to voice their demands and received a number of promises which were never fulfilled. "The proof range and the Tawa irrigation project, instead of improving the lot of the tribals, have made them homeless and jobless," said Rajnarain, an activist in Saheli village.

Except erecting some biogas plants and providing loans for bullock-carts, no other recommendation has been implemented so far. At present, 90 per cent of the biogas plants have stopped functioning and the Government has received complaints of corruption in distribution of loans for bullock-carts. "I want to motivate them towards sericulture and fisheries," said present Commissioner Arun Gupta. If the relief measures are anything to go by, perhaps the tribals will prefer the range of death.

—N.K. SINGH in Itarsi

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CRIME

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BOMBAY

Underworld Hit

NOTHING personified the power of the Dholakia brothers more than the throbbing, gyrating night life at Hotel Caesar's Palace in a Bombay suburb. For years the hotel, mainly its "disco" restaurant Cleo, owned by the Dholakias, was the favourite night spot of rich men looking for fun and women of easy virtue. It was a veritable high-class bordello and for years the police seemed unwilling or unable to take action. The operation was such that it did not implicate the hotel management directly. And the Dholakias maintained their political connections.

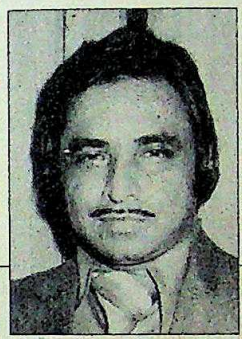
But last November the police raided the place, rounded up 28 prostitutes and arrested Arvind Dholakia and his two managers. And finally, in March, Police Commissioner D.S. Soman cancelled the hotel's licence and closed down the discotheque. In less than a month, the Dholakias suffered another blow—Mahesh Dholakia, 40, the younger of the two brothers, was shot dead barely 200 metres from his Peddar Road apartment. Suddenly, things were going wrong for the Dholakia clan.

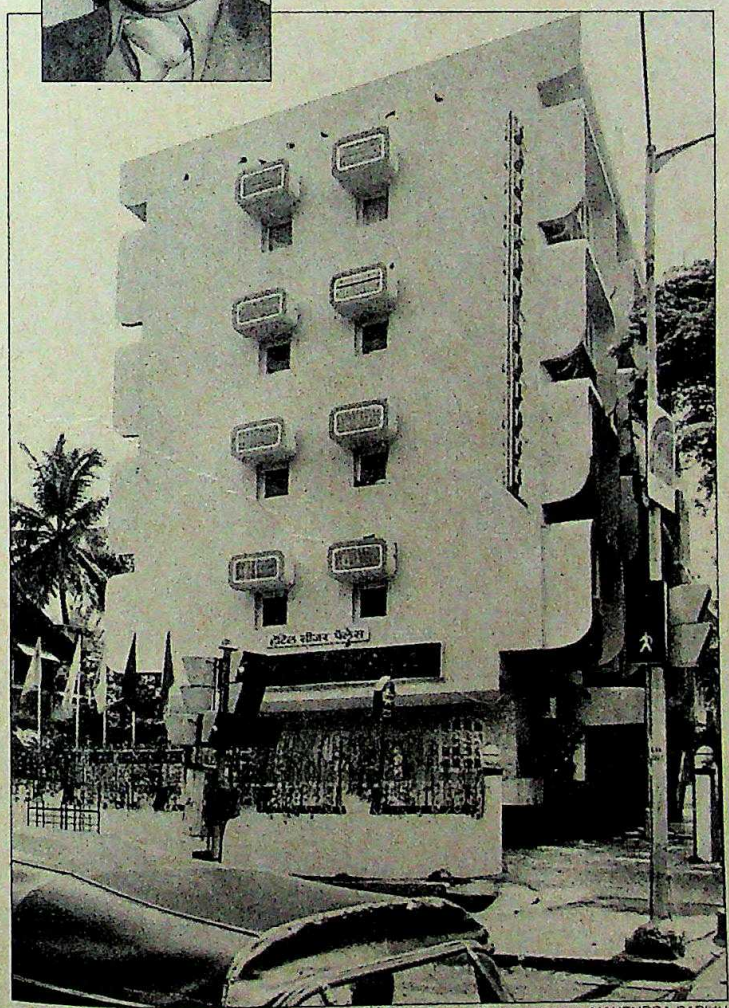
The shooting of Mahesh Dholakia shortly after he emerged in a brand-new white Maruti from his building bore all the hallmarks of a gangland slaying. The police investigating the murder were working on the theory that Dholakia was shot dead in retaliation for dreaded gangster Babu Reshim's killing in a police lock-up earlier in March.

The circumstances of the murder made it seem apparent that Dholakia had recognised his killers and tried to escape before he was gunned down in the driveway of a building where he tried to take shelter. Dholakia drove out of his own building Himgiri on Peddar Road and was tailed by another car with six men inside. He turned into a side road, abandoned his car and ran into a building. But the killers shot him in the leg and, as he lay in front of a garage, pumped 10 bullets into his chest and head from pointblank range and fled.

But the family, which had branched off into hotels and construction after Mahesh and Arvind initially set up a thriving smuggling operation, deny that his death was a gangland slaying and insist that they are businessmen who have never been involved in any illegal activity. Mahesh was the youngest of five brothers. "He had no enemies, so we cannot say who could have killed him," said his elder brother Lalit Dholakia.

The Dholakia brothers' links with the Congress(I), BJP and the Shiv Sena were well-known, and though Lalit later denied it, Arvind even told an evening paper immediately after the killing that they had "spent Rs 7 lakh for the Congress(I) in the last assembly and Lok Sabha elections".





Hotel Caesar's Palace and; (inset) Mahesh: fatal blow

Photographs by MAHENDRA PARIKH

The police believe that Mahesh could have been shot dead in retaliation for Reshim's killing. Mahesh and Arvind were close to the Shetty gang, which has had a long standing feud with the gang controlled by Reshim and Ramakant Naik. The link with the gangs began for the Dholakias after they entered the lucrative smuggling trade while functioning as small-time traders in the Khetwadi area of the city. But of the two brothers, it was Arvind who was said to be more closely involved in underworld operations. "Mahesh was more the financial man, while Arvind was the more hot-headed boss, and it is even possible that Mahesh was killed when they could not get Arvind," said an investigating officer.

Arvind was arrested first on the charge of smuggling in 1974 alongwith more well-known figures like Haji Mastan and Yusuf Patel, and released along with the rest under Jayprakash Narayan's amnesty scheme for smugglers. It was then that the Dholakias got into the construction business, even putting up a colony named after them in the suburbs, and also acquired the hotel which made them famous. Arvind and Mahesh were arrested again in 1985 under NSA but were released after two months by the review board. Since 1979 Arvind has also been charged in seven cases of rioting and murder.

Though the Dholakias' names have been linked with the smuggling network, there were no charges against them of continuing with the illegal operations after the Emergency. But their notoriety in the media continued with the disco at Caesar's Palace and they had recently opened another set-up called The Fisherman's Wharf further downtown in Worli. With the Chicago-type slaying of Mahesh, the Dholakias are back in the headlines with a bang.

—M. RAHMAN

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PHOTO FEATURE BY BHAWAN SINGH

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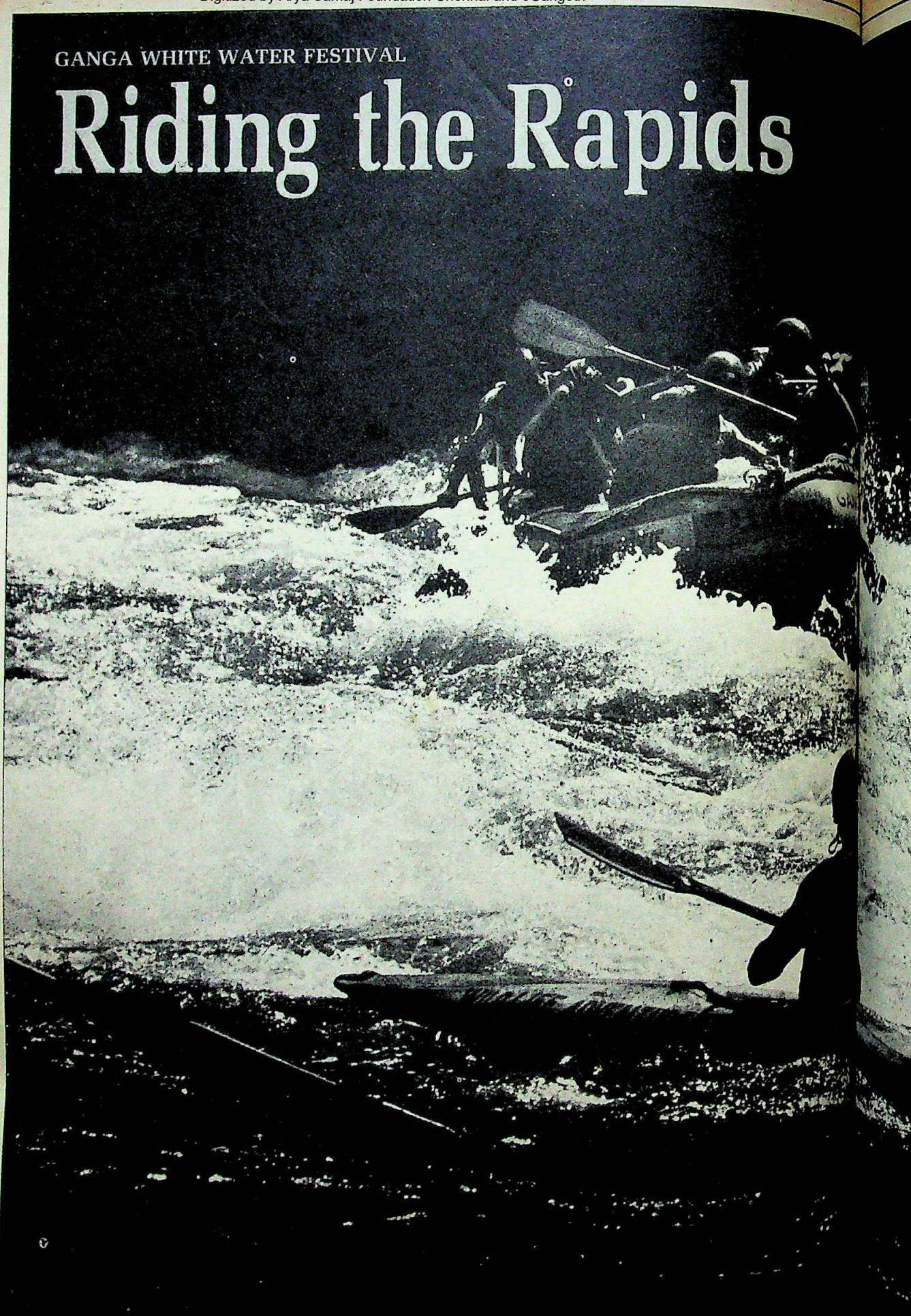
GANGA WHITE WATER FESTIVAL

Riding the Rapids



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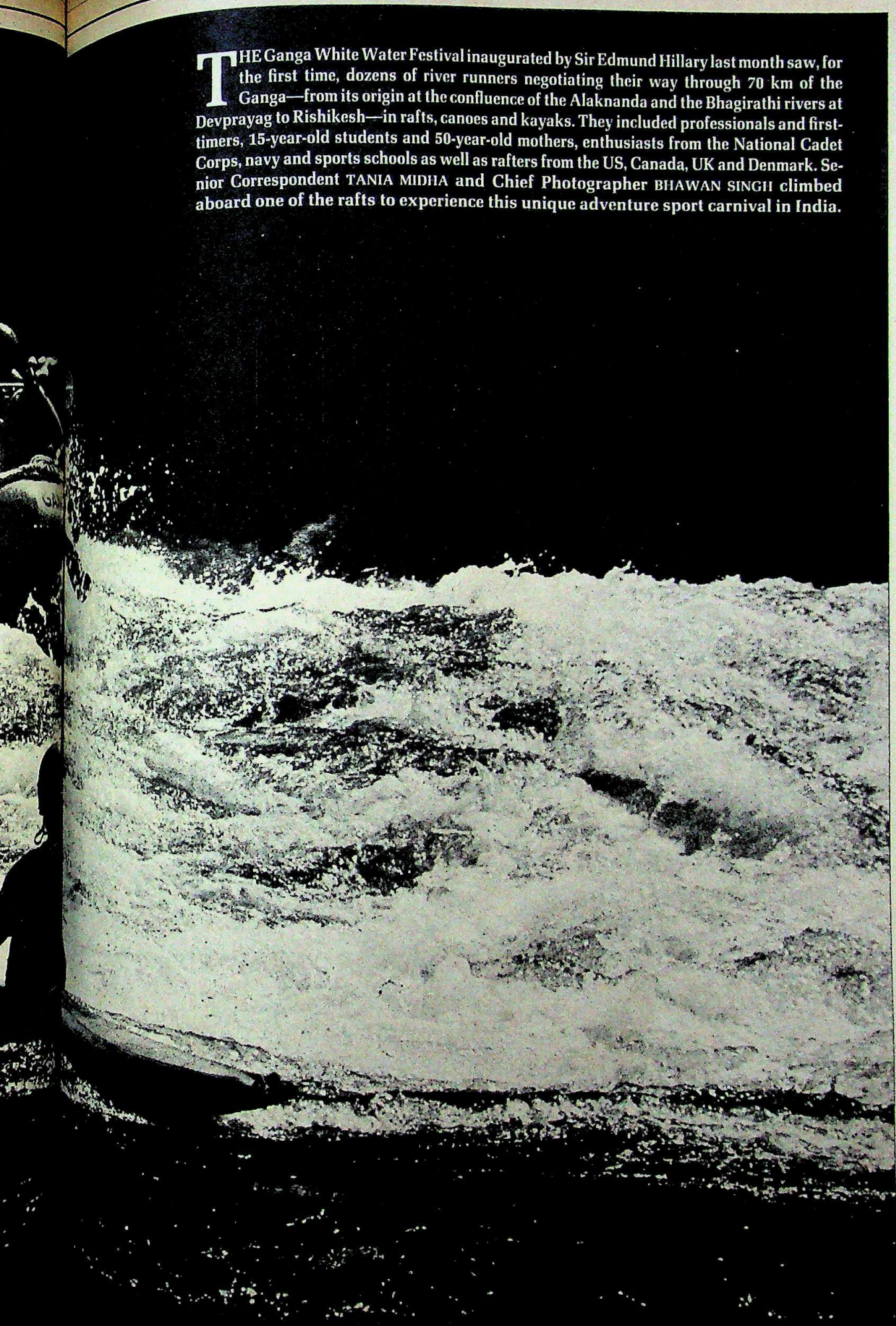
THE Ganga White Water Festival inaugurated by Sir Edmund Hillary last month saw, for the first time, dozens of river runners negotiating their way through 70 km of the Ganga—from its origin at the confluence of the Alaknanda and the Bhagirathi rivers at Devprayag to Rishikesh—in rafts, canoes and kayaks. They included professionals and first-timers, 15-year-old students and 50-year-old mothers, enthusiasts from the National Cadet Corps, navy and sports schools as well as rafters from the US, Canada, UK and Denmark. Senior Correspondent TANIA MIDHA and Chief Photographer BHAWAN SINGH climbed aboard one of the rafts to experience this unique adventure sport carnival in India.



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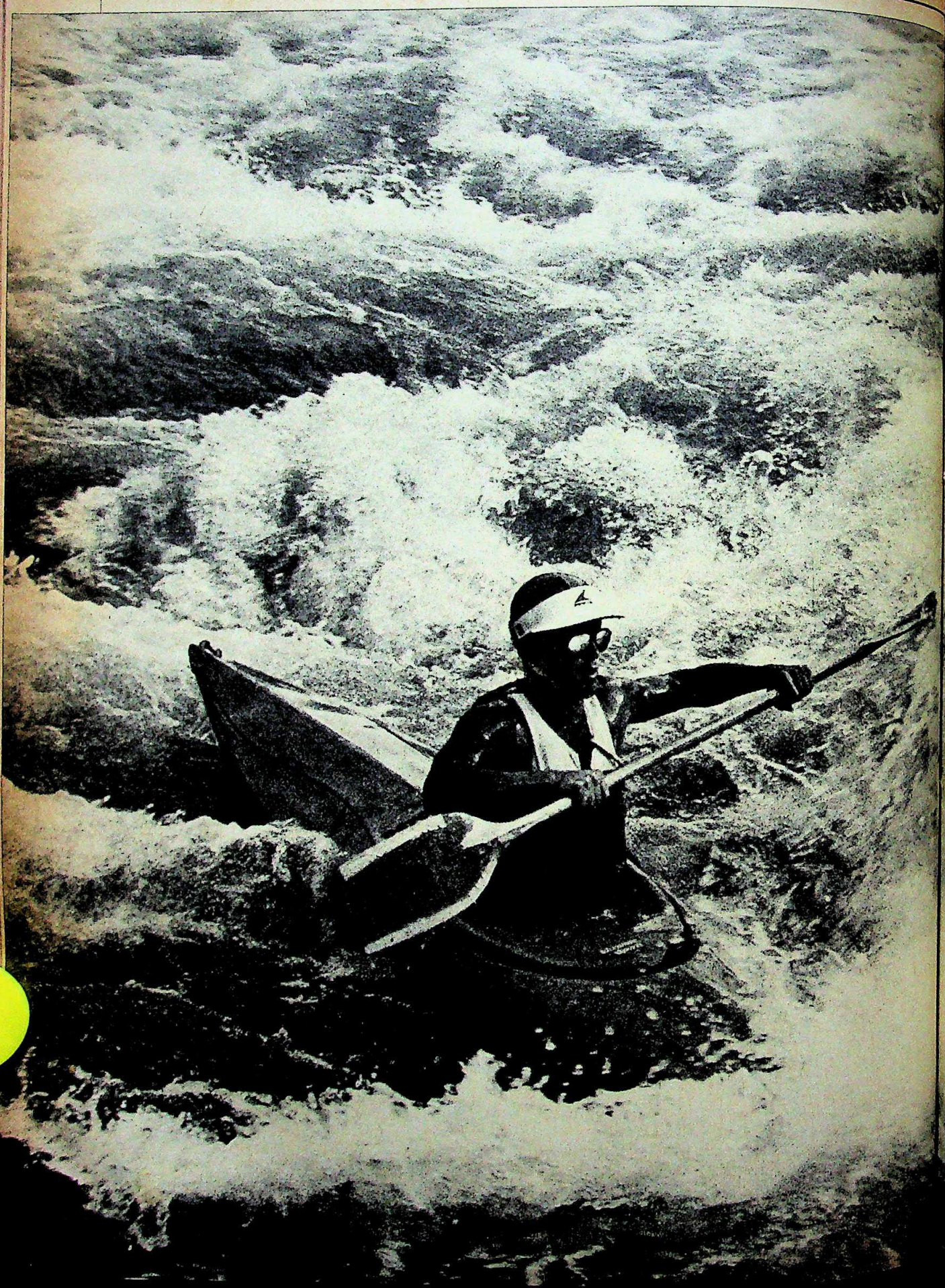

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FOR five magnified seconds all laughter stops and a chilling silence blots out the roar of the waves. Members of the NCC rafting team watch helplessly as young Vijay Mishra, 16, falls over the side of their raft and disappears into the frothing waters. The boys freeze in panic. Mishra is trapped under the raft buffeted by the waves crashing against jagged rocks. But a moment later, he bobs up beside the raft and is yanked in.

It is the first day of the Ganga White Water Festival and the message has come through loud and clear. White water rafting is fun, but in this sport safety is priority one. Mishra had flipped over in a small rapid—not a patch on the big monsters that lay in wait ahead. But not having secured himself well, even a small tilt had been enough. The mishap has made its point, but it does little to dampen the enthusiasm—not just among the participants in the expedition, but also among every resident of Devprayag.

Even the pandit had laughed as he blessed the expedition members. At sleepy little Devprayag any excitement in his life had always had religious connotations. And now his son wanted to become a river rafter.

The little boy had watched curiously as his father blessed Sir Edmund Hillary, Avinash Kohli, convenor of the festival, and Sunil Pant, grandson of Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant in whose name the festival had been organised. And sharing his curiosity were hundreds of amused Devprayagis gathered at the ghats to watch the whooping and yelling river runners boarding their rafts, canoes and kayaks to begin their run down to Rishikesh.

The participants came in all sizes. Nervous teenagers with butterflies in their tummies to greying grandparents trying to keep calm. Nobody wasted time after the prayers, making a beeline for the rafts as Hillary exhorted: "Let us sweep over the rapids and crash through the stopper waves. We will all get wet—that is for sure—but with stout hearts and strong arms we will hopefully reach our destination at Rishikesh." One by one, the eight rafts slid into the water with half-a-dozen kayaks and canoes wriggling along—the festival had begun.

The thrills come in small doses. Still water at first, the Ganga ambles along revealing little of the fury beneath, letting you enjoy its majestic setting in the Garhwal hills. But soon the raft leaders prepare their teams for the ordeal ahead. "Come on up everybody. Rapids ahead. Check your life-jackets. Hang on tight. If you fall into the water, don't panic. You'll be carried into the still waters and one of the rafts will pick you up." These are small rapids, so the old-timers are unruffled. But for the uninitiated, it is difficult to maintain the brave expressions of confidence for long as the rafts dip teasingly, allowing the waves to wash over the sides. Those indoctrinated by their first spray cannot contain their exhilaration at the experience. "I can't believe I am doing it myself. I had only seen it on TV so far," gushes 19-year-old Manish Joshi of Kumaon University. "I just love it," says Nanika Krishnatraye simply. A mother at 28, Nanika has already decided that she will train to be a professional river guide. "I'm feeling young again," exults Suman Narain, 51.

'Sir Ed' (as Hillary came to be called during the trip) is quiet and underplayed in his emotions, but completely at ease with the swirling waters. He fondly reminisces about the old days of scaling Mt Everest and running upstream on the Ganga in the Ocean to Sky Expedition, but seems to be having nearly as much fun with his latest

A short inauguration at Devprayag (below) and off for the big splash in a kayak: frothy fun

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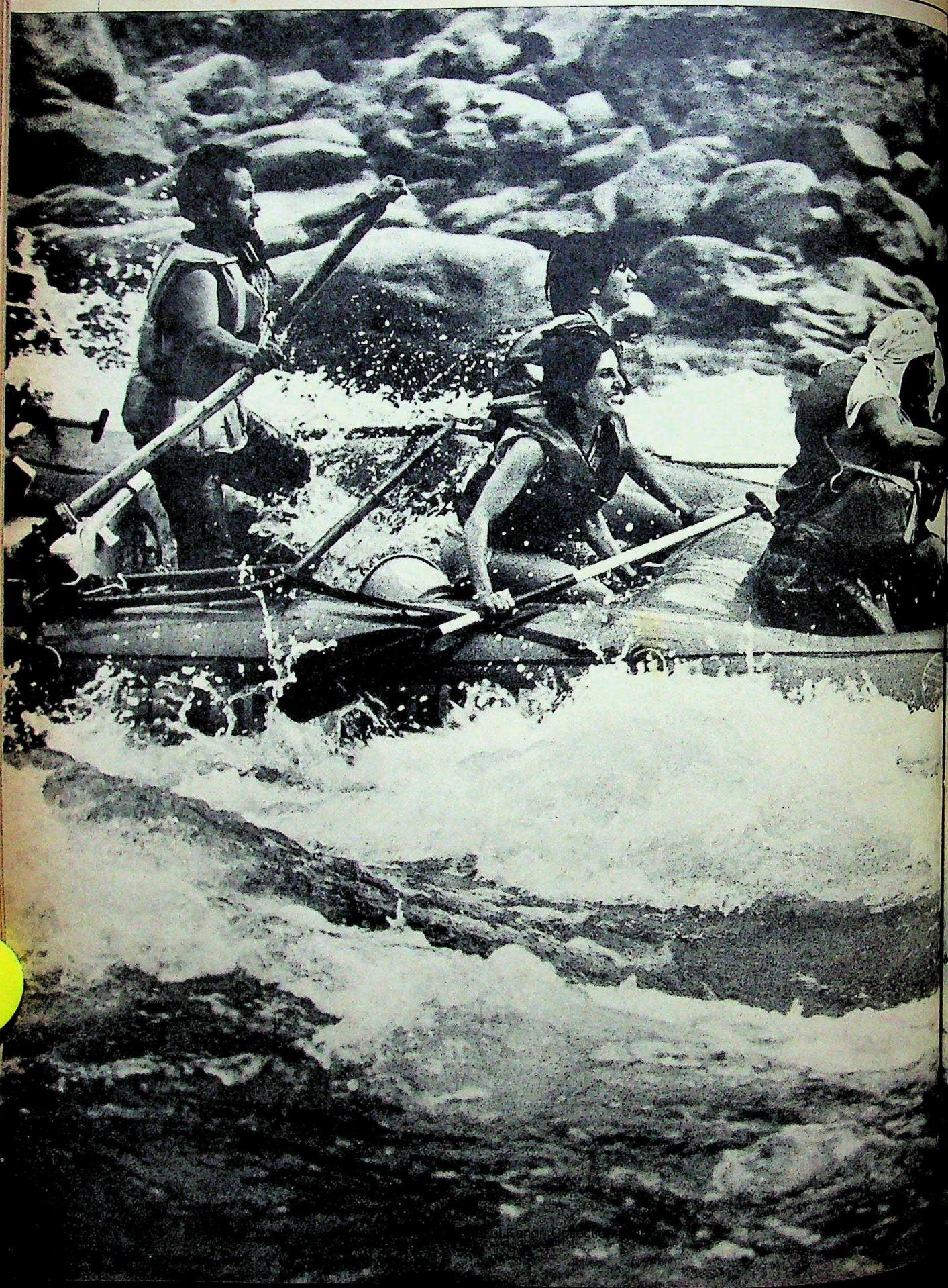

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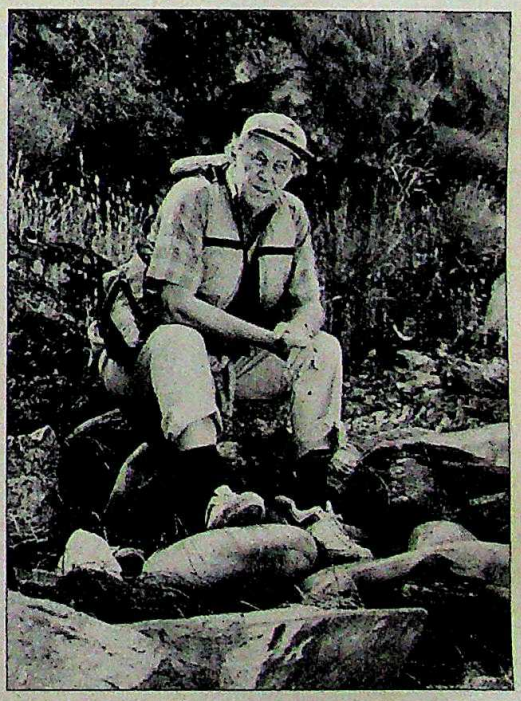
adventure sport—diplomacy—as New Zealand's high commissioner to India. "Meeting dignitaries, cocktail parties, trekking down the countryside and floating down the Ganga are all a part of this game," said Sir Ed.

A short stop for lunch and off again in search of the big splash. The first comes at the fag end of the day—Daniel's Dip, which got its name in rafting circles after Mark Daniel, a professional kayaker from Canada, took a dip while steering his kayak through it. The suspense begins to build up as the rafts stop before the rapid to take stock of the spray-spouting monster from the shore. The boulders look menacing, enhanced by the deafening roar of the waves breaking over them. Several jittery nerves contemplate the wisdom of walking to the night camp, just a few hundred metres beyond the rapid. Those who have done it before quietly reassure the uninitiated. Back onto the rafts, silent prayers quickly said, and then headlong into the roaring waves.

SPLUTTERING paddlers help the main oarsman steer the rafts out of the breakers, furiously fighting their fright as well as the current threatening to toss them onto the rocks. Some fling themselves on the nose of the raft to keep it down, others cling onto the lifelines struggling to stay aboard. A triumphant thrill is evident on each and every soaking face of the crew as the rafts emerge gradually through the waves. "Initially I was frightened," admits Satish Dahiya, 15, "but now, the bigger the rapid, the better the fun."

Feats and adventures during the day are discussed over dinner. Digs at goof-ups, though

Sir Edmund watches quietly (below); rafters crash through the waves: high excitement



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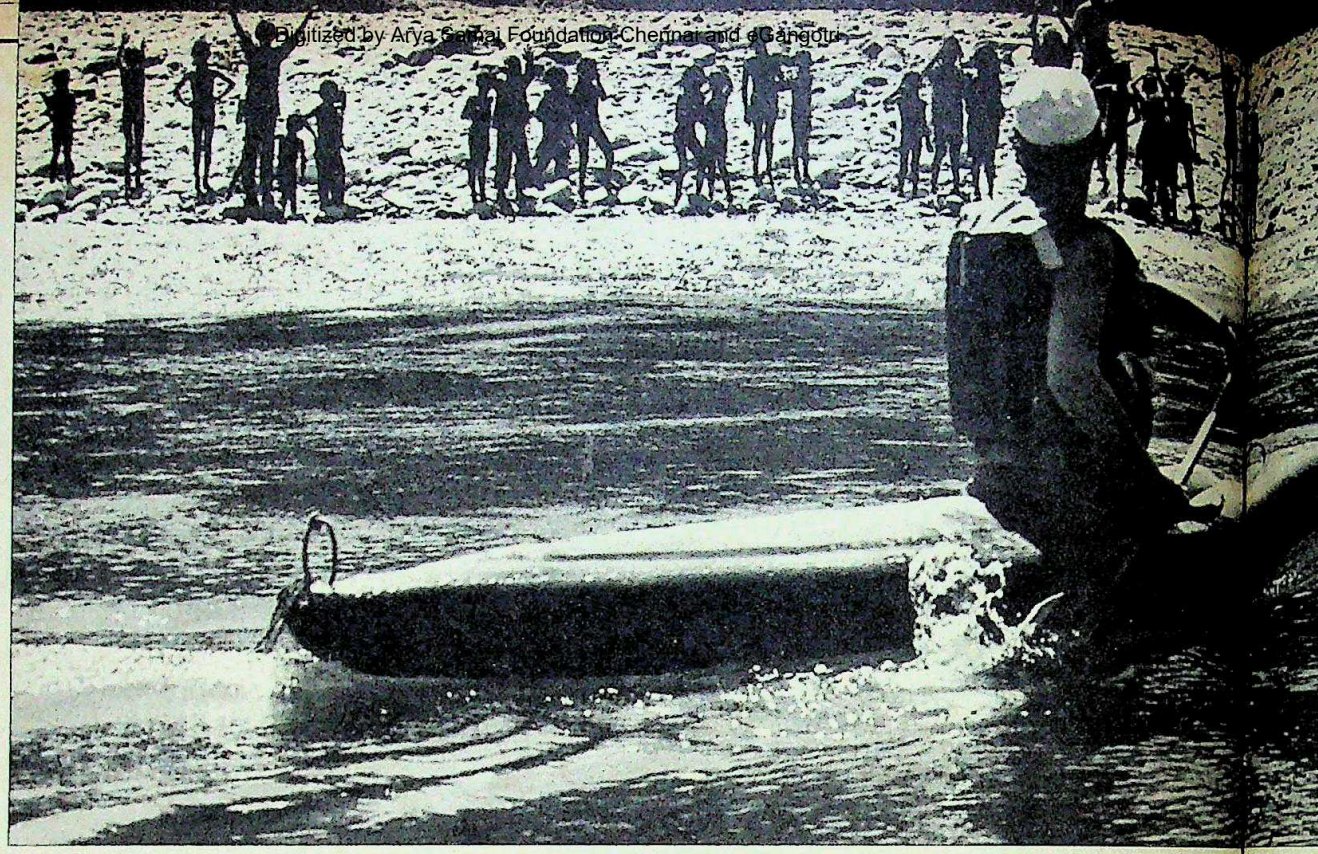

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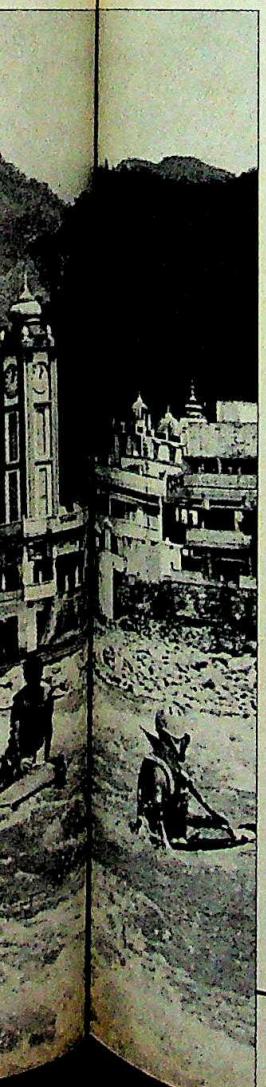
coated with humour, are delivered with an underlying warning for tomorrow is serious business. In a gradation of rapids from 1-to-6 (six being impossible to encounter like the Niagara Falls) most of those to be encountered the next day are grade 4. "So far you've only seen the tip of the iceberg," grins Ajay Mehra, a professional river navigator. "Just wait till you feel the adrenalin rush when you stare one of those rapids in the face," adds Yousuf Zaheer, river manager for Kohli's Wildlife Adventure Tours. "But you'll love every minute of it," assures Ajit 'Baggage' Bajaj who, at 21, has been training groups from the NCC and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police in river rafting for the last year. Manoj Kriplani and Jamy Dalton teach "rafters' concentration games" around the campfire. Others listen in awe to rafting tales.

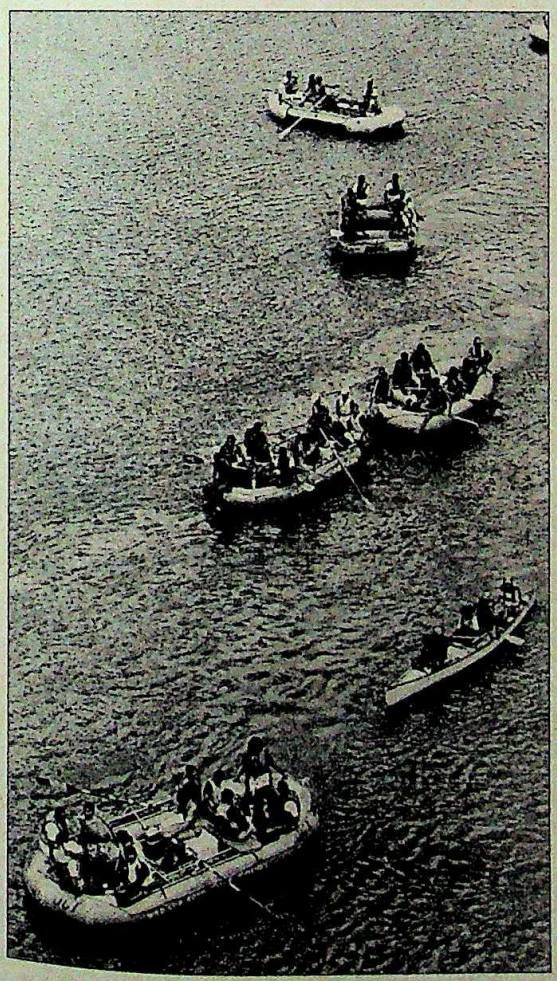
The next morning brings a dip in the Ganga for everyone—the believers wash away their sins while the atheists call it a bath. A quick bite and everybody is ready to move, when suddenly there is a flutter of excitement among the organisers. The enthusiasm about the festival has spread wide. Skip Horner heard about it in California from Peter Hillary, Sir Ed's son, and flew halfway round the world to join the rafters midway down the stream. Horner, who has rafted in all the seven continents, wouldn't miss this chance for all the rushing around it entailed.

A quick reshuffle in raft leaders and the second day's journey begins. This time it doesn't take long to come to the first challenger—The Wall. The rapid has been appropriately named as the water drops at a near 90 degrees to crash into a narrow corridor of rocks before clearing out into a pool. A long survey, a deep breath, a tautening of muscles and in we go. Thunderous waves tilt the rafts mercilessly, tossing them towards the jagged teeth of the rocks. Each one tumbles out, ruffled but jubilant.

A small breather and then come the wilds—one on the heels of the other—each with its own special name: Return to Sender, threatening to fling you right back to its start; Roller Coaster, literally taking you for a ride; Golf Course, challenging you to avoid its nine hydraulic holes (Golf Course is appropriately encased by smaller rapids—Tee off to help you warm up and Club house to unwind). Rafts hang onto waves, balanced delicately, just waiting to be flipped over; others bump over "sleeping" boulders under the water. Baggage goes through Roller Coaster with just one oar, Skip Horner deviates from the tested path and carves out a new route through Golf Course. But each one comes through without a scar. The festival has been a runaway success—no accidents, no set-backs. "From now on there'll be laughter all the way," promises an excited Avinash Kohli for whom this festival has been a dream. "I'm exhausted through but I've done it," he says with a satisfied grin. "Now the tension moves to the kitchen," grins expedition leader Ben Webster, roasting scrumptious mutton chops at a barbecue on the campfire. Relief is evident on the organisers' faces as the toughest part of the journey is over. The halt is just 12 km from the destination, Rishikesh.

It is a boisterous party that moves on to complete the last short stretch to Rishikesh. But a quiet gloom creeps in with the approach of civilisation, which is evident in the changing colour of the water. Crystal blue gives way to a fudgy blue-green and finally a muddy black at the ghat where we disembark to a rousing welcome of garlands and prayers and the touchstone of civilised receptions—speechmaking. The resistance to return to worldly customs surfaces in intolerant restlessness and the bewildered welcome committee at Rishikesh cuts short its prepared speeches, beats a hasty retreat and leaves the rafters recoiling against human contact that threatens to blot out upstream memories of a clean, refreshingly dehumanised Ganga.





(Clockwise from top left) Enthusiastic waves for a kayaker; reaching calm waters and; the tossing and tumbling voyage ends at Rishikesh: spills and thrills

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VAYUDOOT

Engine Trouble

ON March 9, Harsh Vardhan, the bespectacled, mild-mannered general manager of Vayudoot—India's fledgling commuter airline—sent the following SOS to the Dornier Company in West Germany, the Garrett Engine Co in the US, and Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) in Bangalore: "We had one more Garrett Engine failure on March 5. Dornier aircraft had an in-flight shut-down of starboard engine (assembled by HAL) during cruise at 7,600 feet on operational schedule flight from Jaipur to Vishakhapatnam. The aircraft made safe single engine landing at Vizag. Preliminary investigation shows suspected cause to be torque sensor bearing failure. Engine had done 750 hours and had been snag free."

Four days later, another German-built Dornier 20-seat passenger plane, equipped with the Garrett turbo-prop engine and assembled at HAL, had an engine failure as it approached Calcutta. But the pilot was able to land the aircraft safely. Again, the preliminary inspection pointed to failure of the torque sensor bearing. Two weeks later, another engine failed in similar circumstances.

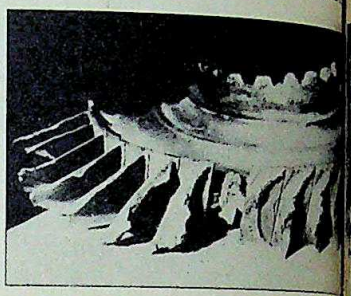
This was the sixth engine failure during flight of a Vayudoot plane within two years of the airline's inception. By year-end, Vayudoot will be flying in and out of 92 stations and an added 45 by the end of the seventh plan. But whether Vayudoot will be plying these routes with the HAL-assembled Dorniers is in serious doubt.

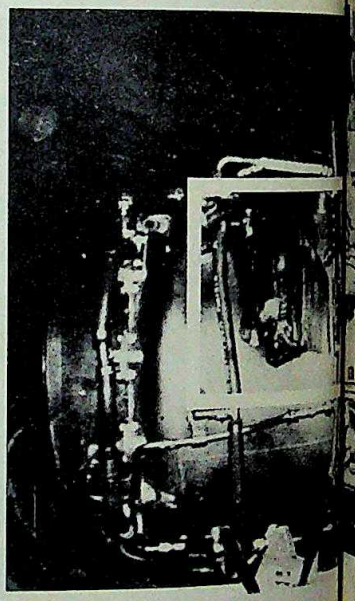
Last fortnight as word about Vayudoot's engine troubles spread among the public, airline managers hinted that they would ground the entire fleet of 10 planes until the mechanical defects—which Vayudoot blames squarely on the manufacturers—were sorted out and the airline compensated monetarily. Incensed by the growing insecurity, angry Congress(I) MPs moved a calling attention motion and one of them referred to Vayudoot as 'Yamdoot' (God of Death). The Government has now appointed a committee consisting of the director-general of airworthiness, and representatives of HAL, Vayudoot and the Ministry of Defence to examine the reasons for the engine failures which threaten to deliver a severe blow not only to popular confidence in the safety of India's third airline but also to the entire Rs 250-crore Light Transport Aircraft (LTA) project approved by the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs in 1983. As part of the project, 150 Dorniers were to be assembled by HAL for the air force, navy, Coast Guard and Vayudoot under a tripartite arrangement between HAL, Dornier and Garrett.

So far, 10 aircrafts have been delivered to Vayudoot, two to the Coast Guard and two to the Oil and Natural Gas Commission. According to highly-placed sources in the Defence Ministry, the services are unlikely to jam HAL with orders in the light of Vayudoot's experience. The six in-flight failures are not the only reason that has caused Vayudoot and the Government to press the panic button. The three most recent failures in March were in addition to 16 others—many of them discovered on the ground during routine inspections—and followed an inspection by a team of Garrett representatives, who visited India during January-February following Vayudoot's complaints about the reliability of the engines.

All the failed engines have had to be repaired or replaced at a huge cost to the airline. Vayudoot is insisting that the manufacturers reimburse the costs incurred, provide spare engines and critical spare parts for free, and make up for the revenue losses suffered. The manufacturers have not agreed to do so. According to government reports, increased maintenance and repair costs, among other factors, have increased the Dornier operating cost from Rs 4,850 per hour to Rs 6,800 per hour. Also, the actual purchase price of a Dornier has risen astronomically from the original listed cost of Rs 1.2 crore to nearly Rs 6 crore. This increase reflects both the increase in the value of the Deutschmark (the foreign exchange financing component) against the rupee as well as some

HARI OM GULATI





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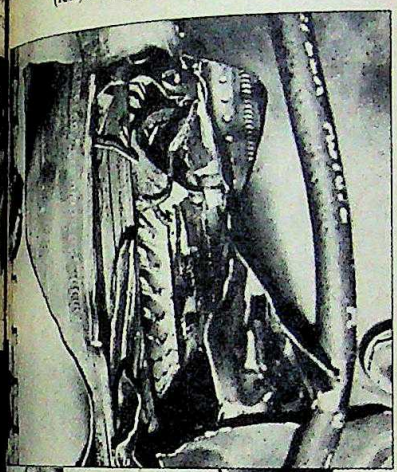
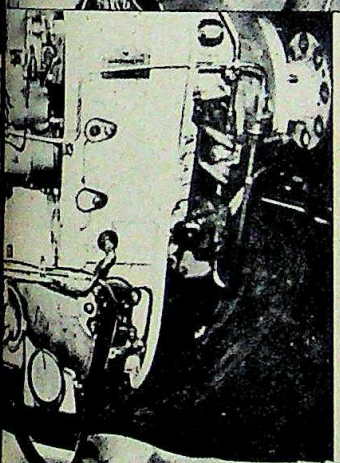
erhead costs charged by HAL, which
ow amount to nearly Rs 50 lakh per
lane. Vayudoot has already shelled out
Rs 24 lakh for the repair of some of the
led engines and is expected to cough up
nother Rs 60 lakh for the rest. Moreover,
loss of revenue due to the grounding of
rt of its fleet for nearly 1,400 hours, is
timated at over Rs 1 crore.

The engine failures are being de-
scribed as "premature failures" by experts

Dornier engine (below); with damaged
plenum chamber and turbine wheel
(left): design defects





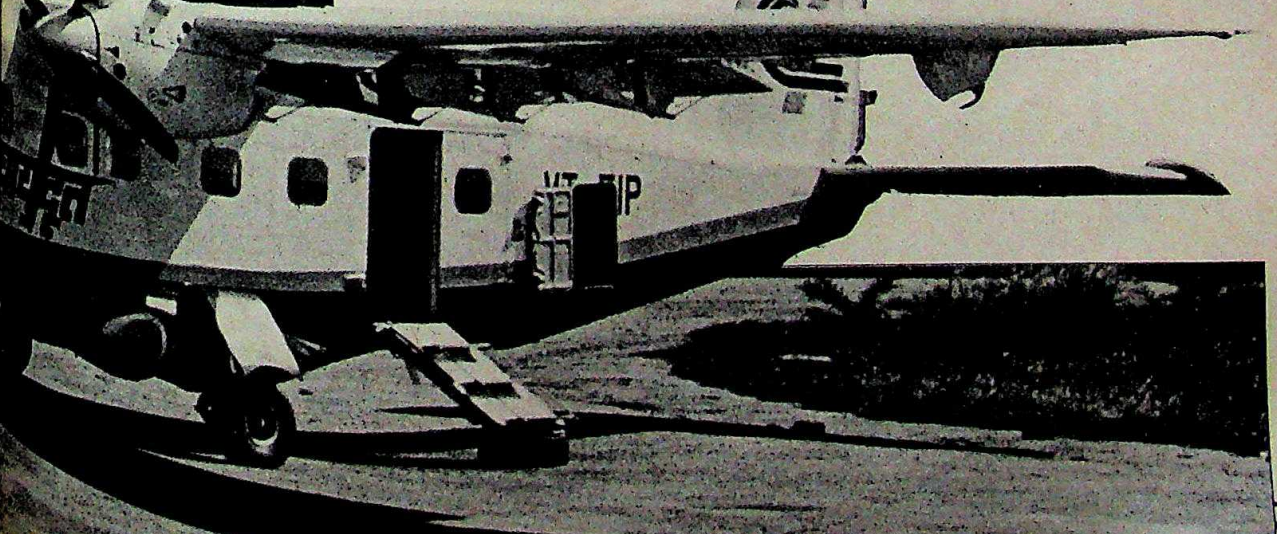
because none of those removed for repair had even performed for half the period recommended before overhaul. According to manufacturer specifications, each engine must be overhauled after functioning for 6,000 hours. And a detailed "hot section" inspection—examination of the three-stage turbines where fuel is converted into energy—is required after 3,000 hours have been logged. But the most one of the 19 failed engines had logged was 2,635 hours. And many of the engines failed or were damaged after working for only a few hundred hours.

And now, a bitter controversy has erupted between Vayudoot on one side, and HAL, Garrett and Dornier on the other, over the reasons for the failures. While HAL has sided with the foreign companies, Vayudoot blames the manufacturers for the engine malfunction. Of the 19 failures so far, 11 occurred within a six-month period—between October 1986 and March 1987. Vayudoot's analysis showed that 10 of them were due to basic engine defects, the most serious of them being a failure of the torque sensor bearings (rotating discs which propel fuel into the turbine—a malfunction can cut off fuel flow into the engine). Other causes identified included chipped and broken carbon seals, unexplained cracks in the second-stage turbines, and dangerously high oil consumption. A Garrett-Dornier inspection team that visited India in January—when 16 engines had been removed after suffering damage—agreed that six failures were due to basic design defects: two exhibited torque sensor bearing failure. Garrett has agreed to redesign the system. But it will be available only in 1989.

Since that visit there have been three more failures in engines which had been declared trouble-free by the inspection team. These three failures—bringing the total to 19—have also been attributed to faults in the torque sensor bearings. But the remaining cases, the manufacturers concluded, are due to other causes, including poor maintenance, improper engine rigging adjustments, damage from foreign objects like bird hits, and poor pilot performance, especially in starting procedures.

Several of the damaged engines, Garrett-Dornier representatives argue, were ruined because of "hot starts". They charged that the pilots were starting the engines at temperatures much higher than the maximum internal turbine temperatures permitted during start. But Vayudoot technicians argue that, in the light of Indian operating conditions, this is a design flaw. The margin between a "normal start" temperature and the maximum allowable is so low that it can be exceeded within seconds, especially in conditions where the outside temperature—often over 40 degrees celsius—influences the engine temperature, giving the pilot no more than a few seconds. In fact, Vayudoot representatives have asked Garrett to provide intermediary safeguards against this phenomenon, but Garrett has said that it is not possible to institute any immediate changes.

Three of the engines were removed during this two-year period because of bird hits. While repairing the external damage, Vayudoot stripped the engines to examine their interiors which should not have been affected. Even these engines, when dismantled, showed extensive "hot-section distress"—damage to combustion chamber and turbine parts. As an internal government inspection states: "Even engines that are removed for causes other than over-temperature/hot starts, or carbon seals damage,



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have shown extensive damage including cracks of the turbine wheels. This only proves our conviction that the engine is prone to hot-section distress, irrespective of the primary cause of removal due to design deficiency and/or material failure."

But spokesmen for Dornier and Garrett maintain that their representatives had warned as early as 1985 that the Vayudoot operation was heading for trouble because of a lack of proper tooling facilities, absence of hangars, improper maintenance—such as the failure to check fuel nozzles periodically—inadequate pilot training, and virtually no planning for ordering and keeping spare parts. They also note that a total of 181 engines in service the world over have not run into the engine snags exhibited by the Vayudoot fleet.

Vayudoot managers bristle at these charges and point out that, in fact, the first batch of commanders and co-pilots were trained by Dornier. Even now, only pilots with several thousand hours of flying experience are hired by Vayudoot. And before they are given command they must complete a successful conversion course and then log in an extra 100 hours as co-pilot. Besides, Vayudoot now maintains full-fledged hangars at Delhi, Hyderabad and Calcutta and has spent Rs 85 lakh on workshops and hot-section inspection facilities.

But spares and replacements continue to be a problem. Engines sent to HAL for repairs have languished there for two months and two aircraft have been grounded without engines for two months. And in the last three years, even though Vayudoot has purchased nearly Rs 3 crore worth of spares from Garrett, inventories, spares and repair items worth Rs 90 lakh—many of them sent for replacement or repair under warranty—have been held up at the US company for as long as nine months.

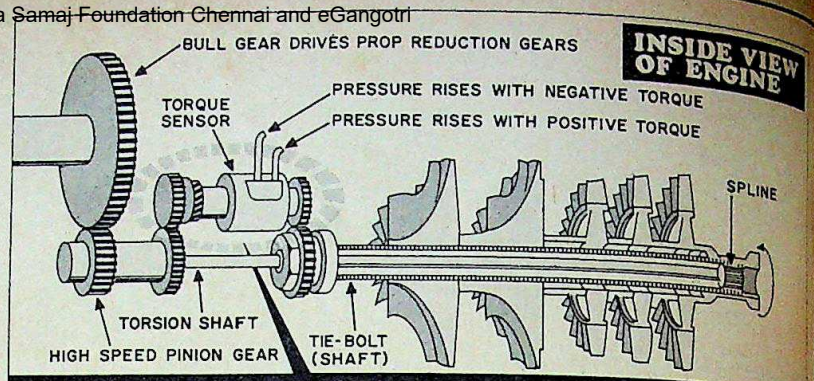
In overall terms—taking into account only the engine shut-downs that occurred during flight—the premature engine removal rate for Vayudoot works out to 0.100 per thousand engine hours, far in excess of the world figure of 0.008 per thousand engine hours. A more accurate comparison would perhaps be with the US-based Precision Airlines, the second largest operator of the Dornier after Vayudoot. Vayudoot's Dornier fleet, which has clocked a total of about 50,000 flying hours, averages an engine removal rate—for all causes—of 0.355 per thousand engine hours. Precision, with 22,500 hours, averages an engine removal rate of 0.359 per thousand hours, a statistic that appears to indicate that Vayudoot is not the only operator facing problems with the same aircraft.

Vardhan says his airline has now redoubled its efforts to keep the planes flying safely against tremendous odds. The manufacturers, he said, "rather than showing a helpful attitude have preferred to get involved in technical bickering. In similar situations, other engine and aircraft manufacturers have shown quick responses, rushed spare engines and absorbed a lot of the costs". But in this case, Vardhan pointed out angrily: "We are saddled with failure after failure. We have to keep sending them messages for months to visit India while simultaneously paying through our noses for buying new engines and spares at premium prices."

This merely highlights the trouble for the entire LTA project. Its cost is expected to quadruple from the original Rs 250 crore. If the project is abandoned it will be one more blow to the concept of indigenisation visualised by the technical committee which recommended the deal.

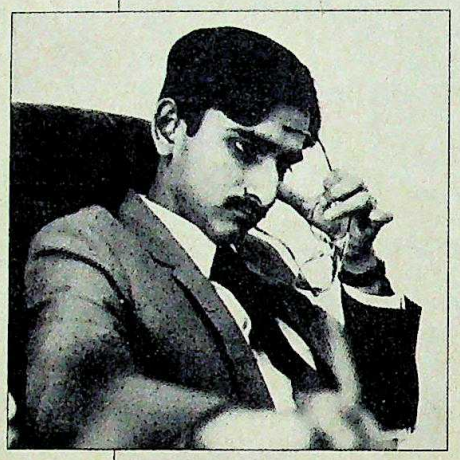
The high-powered government committee now investigating the issue has a tough row to hoe. It must examine not only the engine failures but also the circumstances under which the government committee approved the purchase of an aircraft which is beginning to show early design defects and probable unsuitability to operating in Indian conditions. After hectic lobbying, the Dornier was picked over the Spanish-built CASA-212 and the Canadian-built DC-6 Twin Otter. And now, senior aviation officials have once again begun to look favourably at the Otter which has been around for two decades and proved itself a dependable work-horse. But whatever decision the Government takes, there is no immediate solution to Vayudoot's Dornier nightmare and the continuing concern for the flying commuter's safety.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR and PRABHU CHAWLA



FAILED PART : *Failure of Torque Sensor results in cut-off of fuel supply*

Diagram by B.K. SHARMA



"Rather than showing a helpful attitude, the manufacturers have preferred to get involved in technical bickering. In similar situations, other engine and aircraft manufacturers have shown quick responses."

HARSH VARDHAN
chairman, Vayudoot

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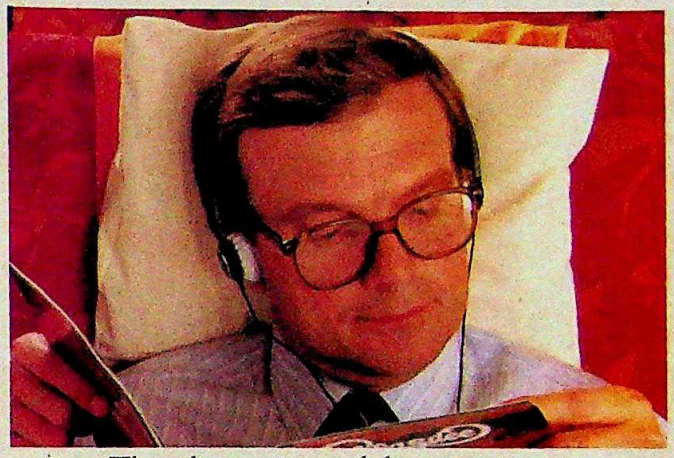

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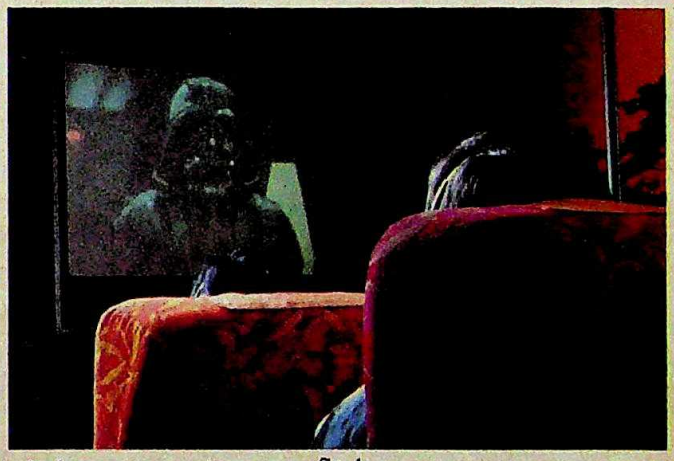
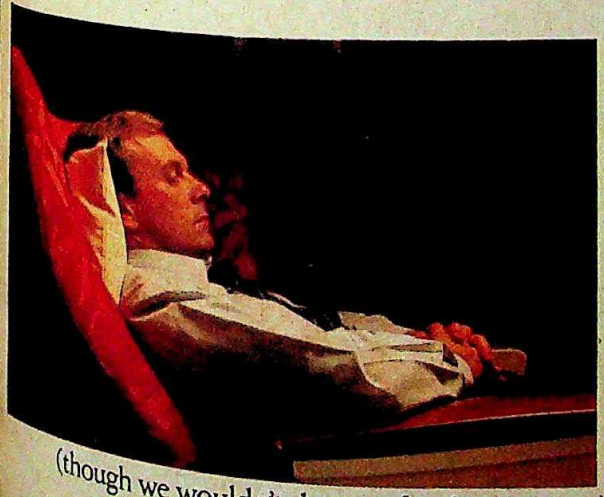
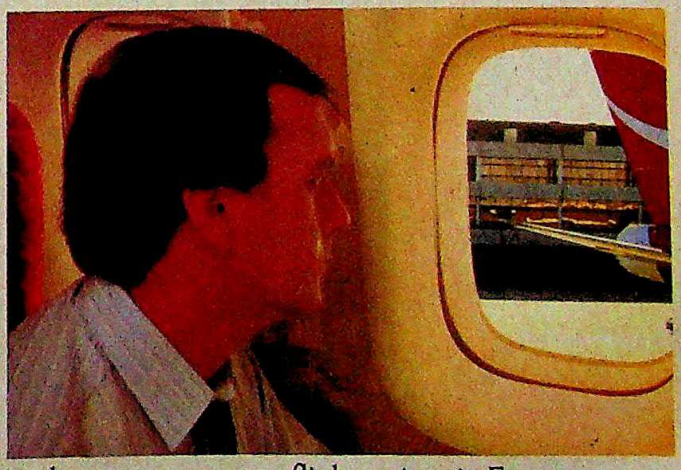


the drinks and the food and all those little things that help you to enjoy your flight come non-stop...





(though we wouldn't dream of waking you up) so, when your non-stop flight arrives in Europe you'll be almost wishing it wouldn't stop.

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Thai
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Checks... perfect body language

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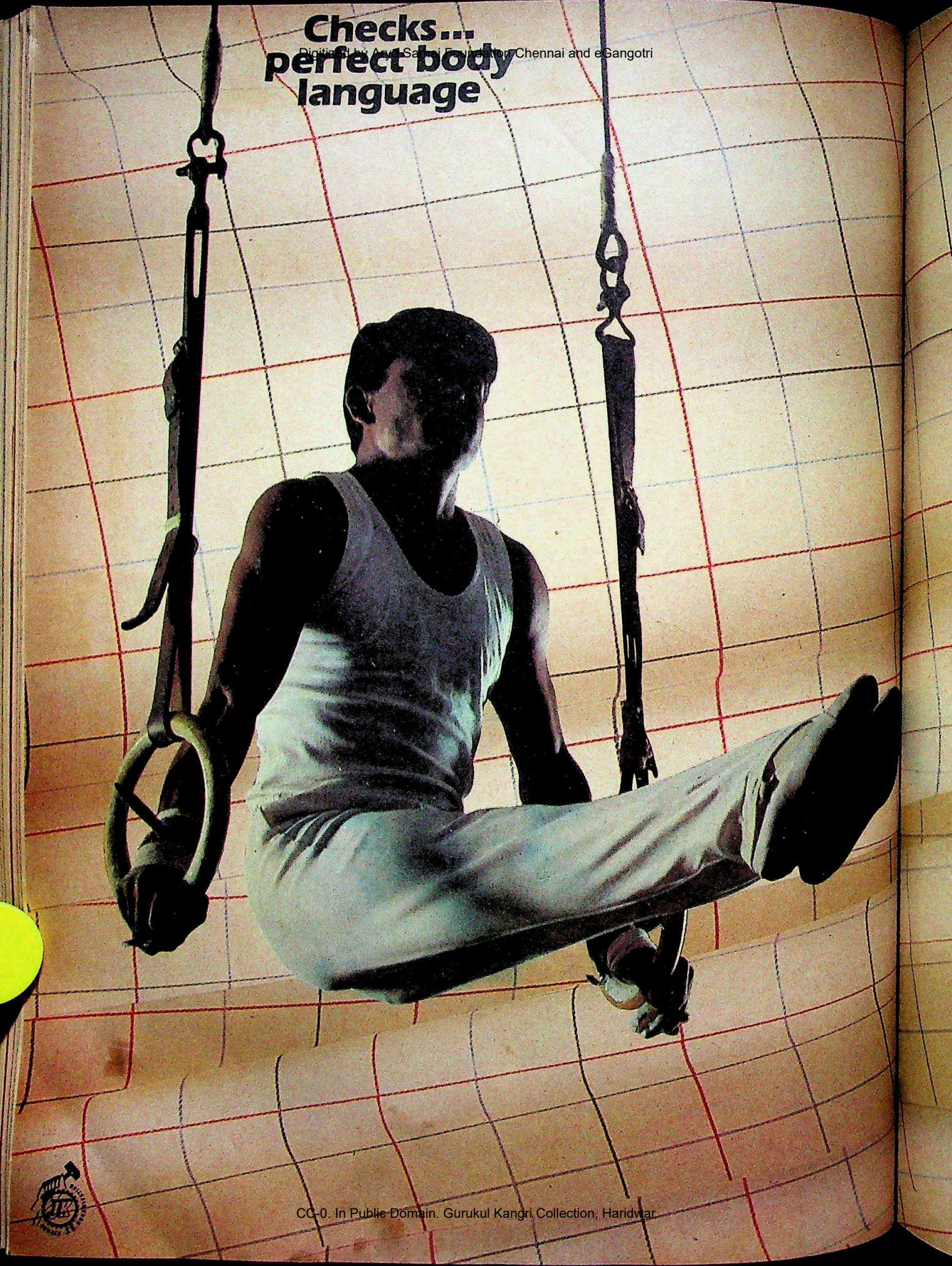

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Raymond's
Shirting Fabrics
Checks. Stripes. Plains.

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FILMS

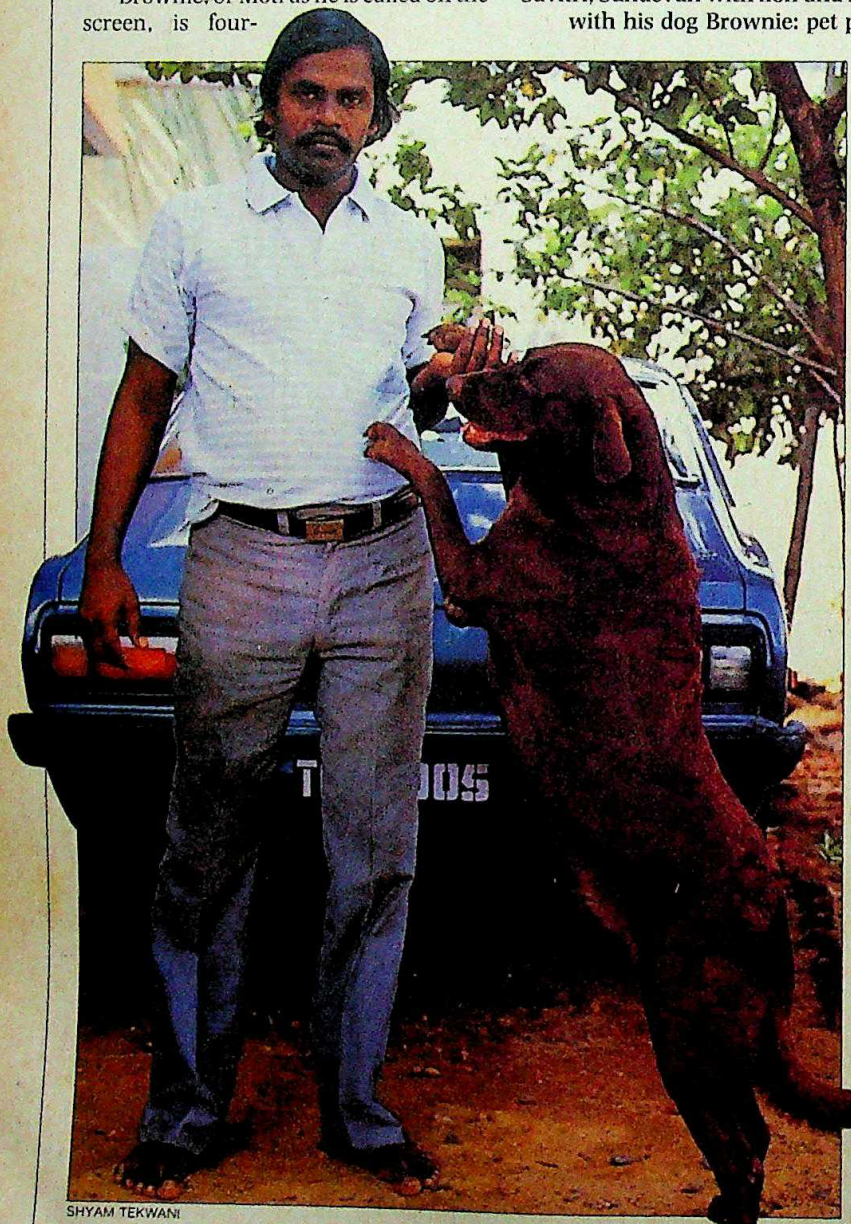
The New Breed

IN the dog-eat-dog world of the Hindi film industry, there is rarely any unanimity when it comes to praising a star. Except, it appears, when the star stands just over two feet tall, sports a tail, and has four legs. His name is Brownie, a friendly brown labrador who is rapidly becoming something of a legend in Indian cinema. Brownie has not only starred in several Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali and Malayalam films but has just returned from Bangkok after a shooting assignment for a Thai film.

Brownie, or Moti as he is called on the screen, is four-and-a-half year old but already commands a fee of between Rs 1 lakh to Rs 2 lakh per film, and as is to be expected for a performer who charges such high fees, travels by air and lives only in air-conditioned hotel rooms. Brownie's success has come at a time when the Hindi film industry, reeling under the combined effect of several major flops, has been desperate to try any formula to produce a box-office hit. "Just now Hindi cinema seems to be going through yet another cycle of films featuring animals," says producer Amit Khanna. "We have seen in the past, as far back as Gemini's *Insaniyat* in the '50s which had Dilip Kumar, Dev Anand and a chimpanzee. Then of course there was *Haathi Mere Saathi* in the '70s."

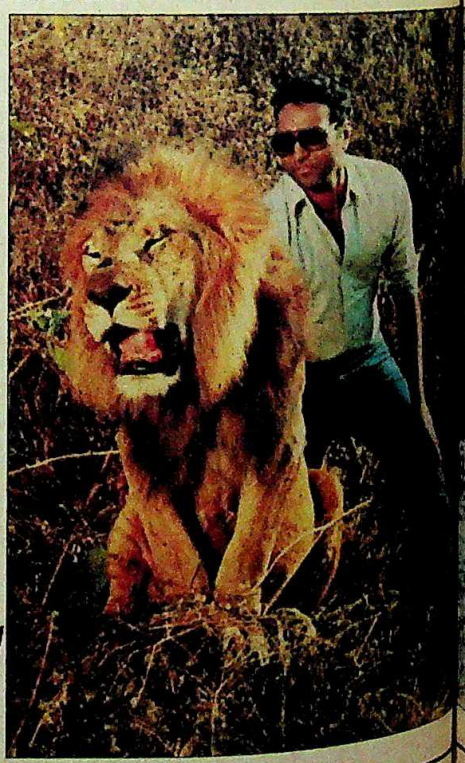
Director Shashilal Nair is busy completing the shooting of his latest film *Parivar* which features, besides Mithun Chakraborty and Meenakshi Sheshadri, a monkey called Savitri and Johnny, a German shepherd from the late Chinappa Devar's famous

(Clockwise from right) Mithun with Savitri; Sahdevan with lion and N. James with his dog Brownie: pet play



SHYAM TEKWANI

NAMAS BHOJANI



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menagerie of film animals in Madras. Savitri is another star brought up by Brownie's owner, N. James, and she made her debut in the Gemini film *Do Phool* nearly 15 years ago. She was paid Rs 500 for the film but today, after featuring in nearly 150 films, can reportedly fetch as much as Rs 1 lakh for a major role. Named after a famous Tamil actress, she is also something of an international star, having featured both in David Lean's *Passage to India* and Kabir Bedi's *Sandokan* series. In those days when I bought Savitri for Rs 50, animals were not paid well," recalls James. "But now they are paid much better since many films with animals have been successful."

In fact, not only are animals being paid better but have also become a part of the star system. Brownie had to be ruled out for the film *Parivar* as the producers could not afford too many stars. "I haven't taken Brownie because it was also a problem getting his dates," says Nair. But Brownie, as his trainer Nazeer points out, is an accomplished performer also, jumping through fire, smashing his way through glass windows, saving the heroine from a bunch of villains. He even carries a permanent mark of his daredevilry; both his ears were cut some years ago while jumping through glass.

But clearly Brownie's phenomenal success is the high point of the latest animal trend. "I bought him in Kodaikanal for Rs 3,000," says James. "I trained him even as he performed in the original Malayalam version of the film *Teri Meherbaniyan* three years ago. He featured in all the language remakes of the film, and became a national star with the Hindi version. Now he is so good in front of the camera that he rarely has to give a second take."

Such high praise for Brownie is not just an owner's pride in his dog. Those who have worked with Brownie remain dumbfounded by his uncanny talent. "The way he performed in my film I felt convinced he was a great artiste in his last birth," says K.C. Bokadia, producer of *Teri Meherbaniyan*. "The dog acted as if there is an *atma* in him."

EVEN a seasoned director like Manmohan Desai was bowled over by Brownie's exceptional abilities in front of the camera. Desai cast him in *Mard*, giving him a pivotal role along with a horse as the constant companions of the hero Amitabh Bachchan. The film was a bigger hit than *Teri Meherbaniyan*. "He is the most fantastic dog I have ever seen," says Desai. "It is unbelievable the way he does exactly what you want without any retakes. The dog has an uncanny sense of what to do before a camera."

Brownie has brought success and wealth to his owner James, 38, a self-made man who ran away from home in Kanyakumari as a kid to make his fortune in Madras. James now insists on a air-conditioned room for Brownie whenever he travels ever since the dog developed a rash while shooting in the Calcutta heat two years ago and had to be hospitalised. "Dogs like to stay cool, and after he rests in an AC room Brownie is in better shape for another day's shooting," he says.

Traditionally, the other animals much in demand with producers are horses, elephants and tigers and maybe snakes as well after the runaway success of *Nagin*, the Sridevi-starrer. "Most films featuring animals in a major way are shot in the south, as that's where most of the animals are," says Jagdish Sahdevan, owner of Apollo Circus whose animals feature in Bombay's most recent remake of *Tarzan*. Sahdevan, who made the serial *Appu Aur Pappu* for TV featuring elephants, and now plans to make it into a feature film, adds: "In India the elephant is the most popular animal on the screen because of the link with Lord Ganesh."

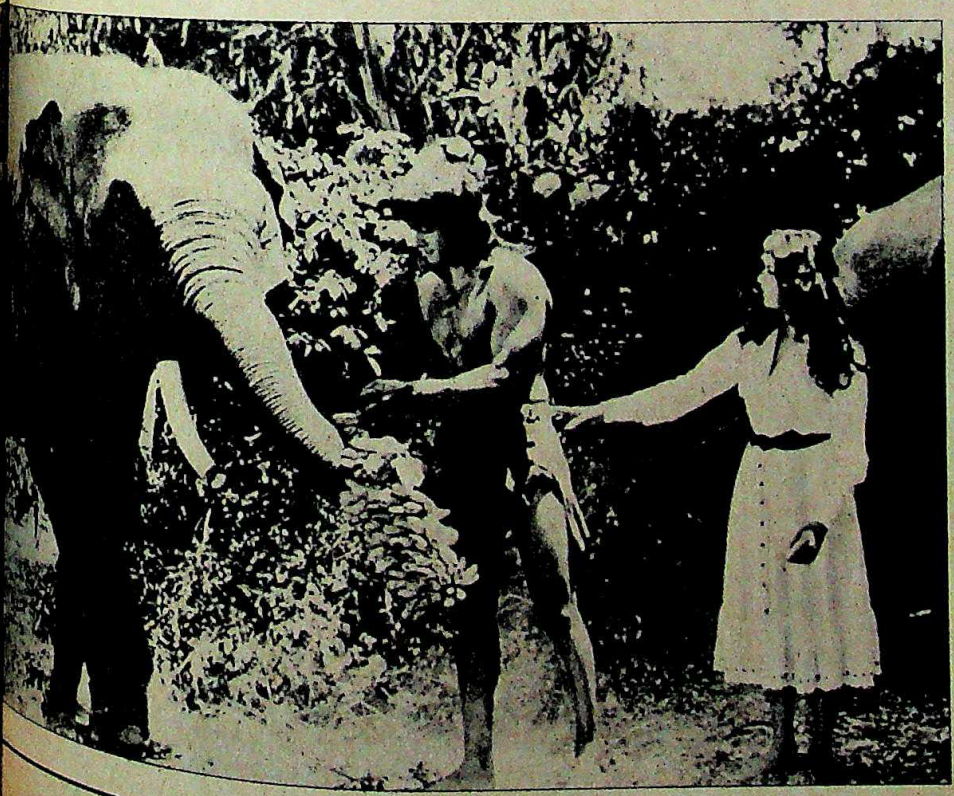
The advantage with most animals is that more than one animal can be used to portray the same creature in a film. It is for this reason that a well-trained dog is in greater demand, as it is far more difficult to find a double. And other animals can be difficult to direct for extended periods. "Monkeys are the trickiest as they love to play pranks and you have to constantly manipulate them," says James.

Jackie Shroff, who has starred both with Brownie in *Teri Meherbaniyan* and with Savitri in Bokadia's *Jawab Hum Denge* finds the experience of working with animals similar to working with infants. "You need a lot of patience or you begin to tear your hair off," he says. "But, of course, Brownie was amazing even down to the glycerine tears he sheds on his master's grave."

But whatever the animal, they are a big hit in Indian cinema. As *Screen* Editor B.K. Karanjia says: "In fact, animals have turned out to be the stars in these films, really catching the public's imagination." And till the audiences tire of their antics, Brownie and company can be expected to keep the circus going on the screen.

—M.RAHMAN

Scene from *Tarzan*: animal fun



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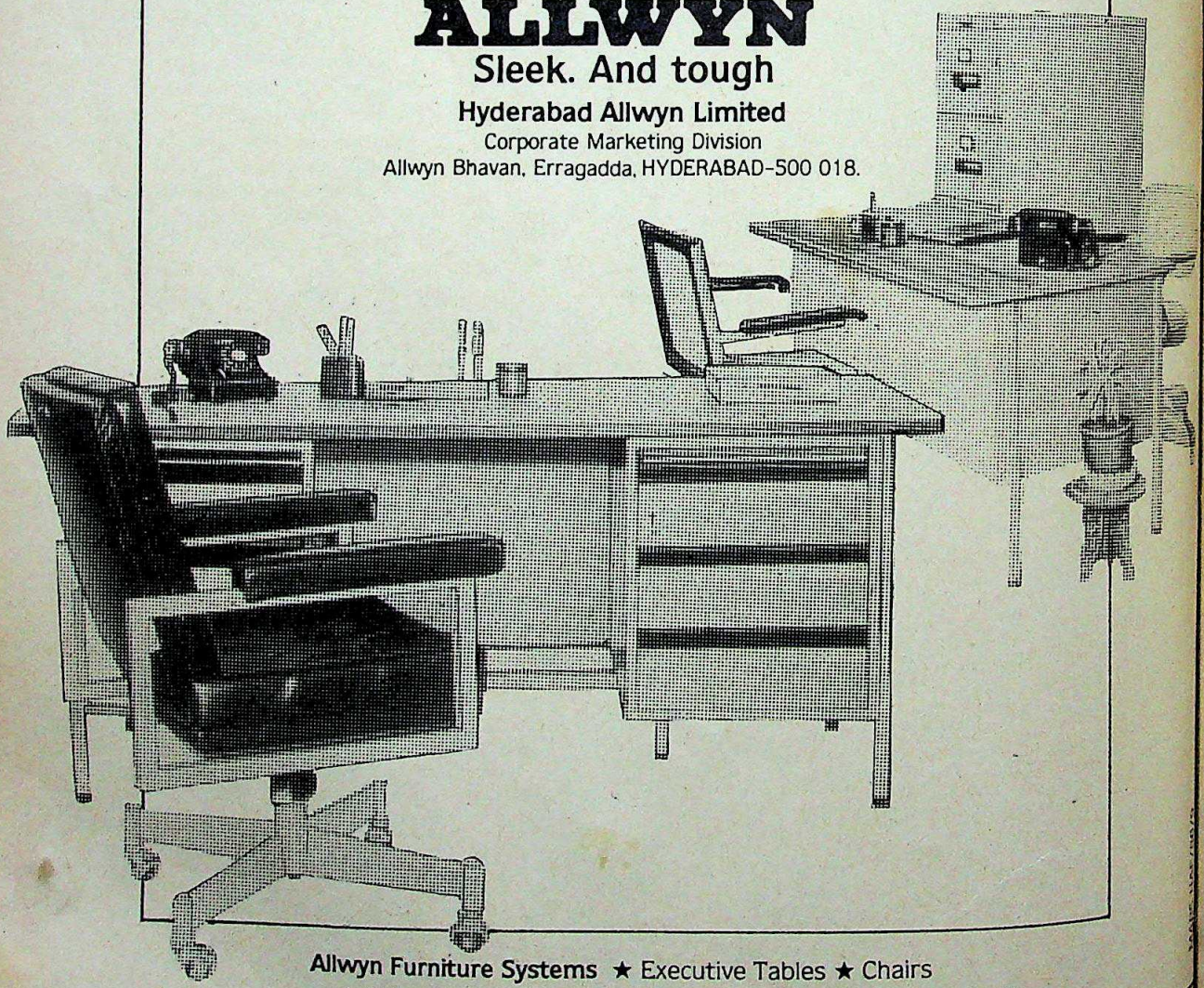

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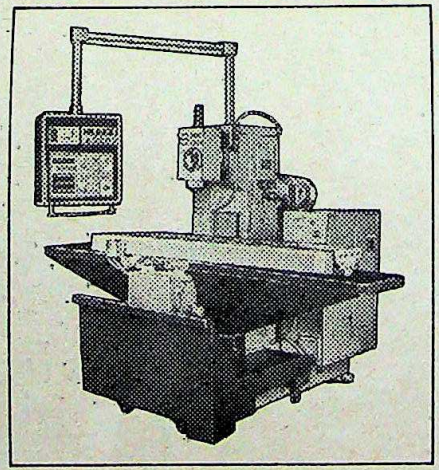

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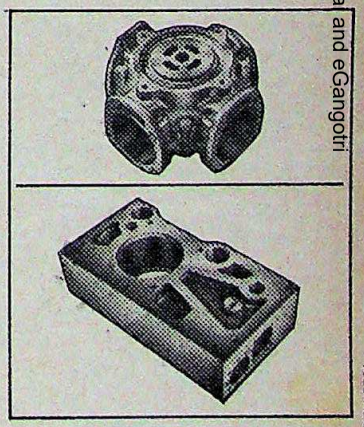

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LEUCODERMA

Cuban Cure

FOR those 20 million Indians who suffer from vitiligo (leucoderma)—those nasty white patches which denude the skin's natural pigmentation—there is hope at last. Cuban scientists and doctors now have a cure which has a recovery rate of 85 per cent, with even higher estimates among people with darker skins.

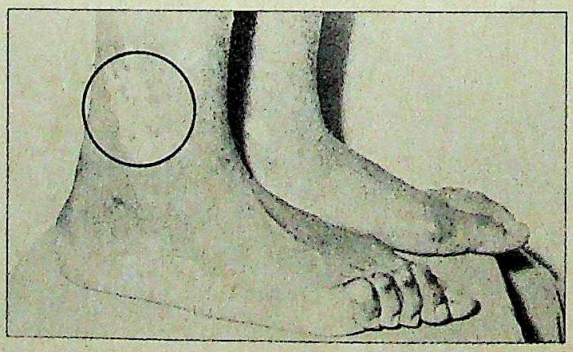
The antidote is an extract of placenta, which when applied to the defiguring patches and then exposed to ultra-violet rays, results in the visible darkening of the skin within seven days. So successful is the treatment that the Cuban Government is converting a major hotel into a clinic to house the hundreds of worldwide sufferers who are lining up to visit the country.

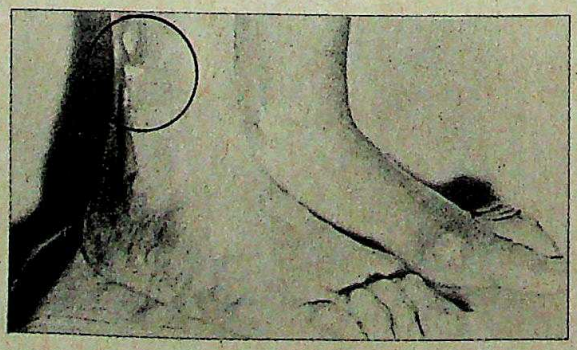
The cure for vitiligo was discovered by accident more than a decade ago. Dr Carlos Miyares Cao, a gynaecologist specialising in premature deliveries at the Havana School of Medicine, was in the process of a laboratory analysis of frozen placenta in an attempt to understand the effects of stress on the metabolism of the placenta. Miyares believed that stress wrought negative and toxicological changes in the placenta, which in turn resulted in premature and high-risk deliveries. One fall-out of the study: Miyares noted that when the liquid in which the placenta was maintained was injected into the nipples of guinea pigs, there was a rapid increase in melanin production in the area, and this in turn stimulated pigmentation. The pigmentation process almost tripled when the injected area was exposed to sunlight.

In conjunction with dermatologists at the University of Havana, Miyares continued his probes into lipo-protein substance which encouraged melanin; a toxicological survey concluded that the lipo-protein was neither harmful to humans nor cancerous. Soon a lotion, under the brand name Melagenina, was ready for use among sufferers of vitiligo. Tests conducted on 732 Cuban patients between the ages of two and 64 resulted in complete cures for 640 of them during a period which varied from a few months to a few years. More important, once cured, the disease never returned to plague them. These findings will be presented at medical conferences in Spain and in Berlin in May 1987. The progress has already been reported in several medical journals and conferences. Though many doctors elsewhere claim they have been using placental extracts with rays for years, not one of them has been able to register a success rate as high as 85 per cent over a large number of patients.

Operating out of the Cira Garcia clinic in Havana, the soft-spoken bespectacled Miyares, who is a zealous devotee of yoga, admits that the cause of the disease is unknown. He believes it is psychosomatic, linked to a neurosystem under stress. That stress could be triggered by a variety of traumatic events: a death in the family, an accident, illness or divorce. And because it is aesthetically unpleasant, it leads to social withdrawal, depression and isolation in sufferers.

The wonder drug (above) and (below) a leucoderma patient's legs before and after treatment: new hope





The treatment devised by Miyares is simple. The lotion is applied to all patches thrice daily with a 15-minute exposure to ultra-violet rays once a day. The lotion is sold in 240 ml-sized bottles for $3 (Rs 39) apiece. Depending on the extent of the patches, a patient could use a bottle a week or one per day. The objective must be to attack all patches at the same time since tests have shown that only concerted action produces a high rate of success. Patents on the lotion have been applied for in Canada, the UK, USA, USSR and France.

The cost, when compared with medical treatment in the West, is nominal: the first consultation is $35 (Rs 455), the following are $25 (Rs 325) each. A patient who cannot afford a long stay in Cuba can be taught how to treat himself at home. And after he returns to his own country, Cuban doctors keep in touch with him directly or through doctors serving local chapters of Vitiligo Societies—as is the case with patients from Brazil, Venezuela, Canada and the United Kingdom.

As regards its applicability to Indian skins, the best-known case is that of a Sri Lankan woman living in London who arrived severely scarred all over, especially on her face. Within three months of treatment, her face has been fully restored. Miyares says that the tone and elasticity of dark-skinned people encourage and have shown an even faster and higher cure rate.

A little more than a year ago, Indian doctors requested and received through Indian embassy officials in Havana, the product and information of Melagenina. There the matter rests—though they will soon be applying for an Indian patent. The Cubans are eagerly awaiting progress on the matter since they realise that the problem is serious in India. Cuba has at last offered hope to sufferers of a cruel and disfiguring ailment. —PATRICIA J. SEYBOLD

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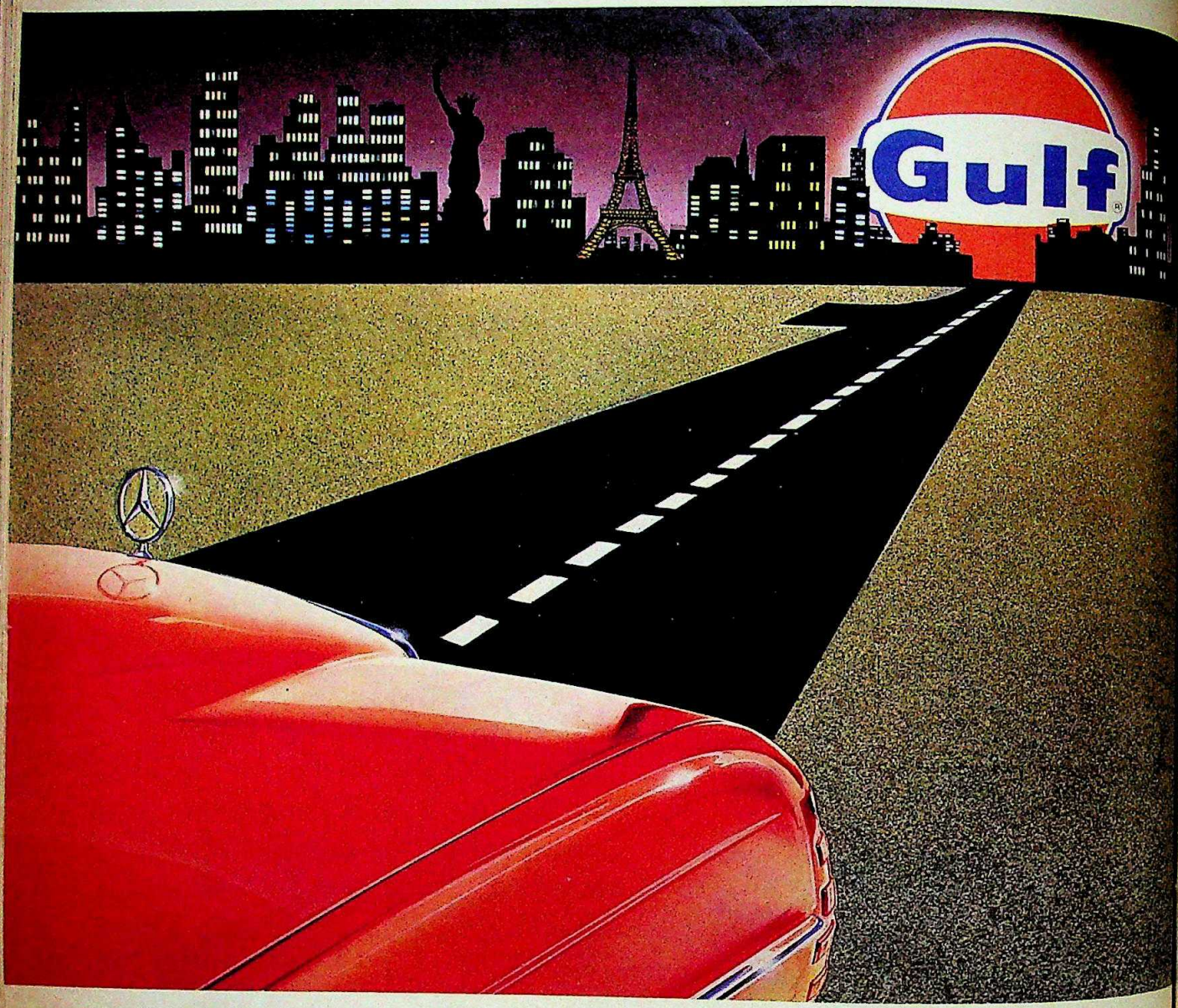

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The Language of Dance

CREATIONS
by MRINALINI SARABHAI
Mapin, Ahmedabad
Pages: 98; Price: Rs 225

TODAY, the dance scene in India is teeming with hundreds of educated aspirants and established artistes, and there is a general awareness of the fact that the Indian classical arts have had an unbroken tradition of over 3,000 years. But rare indeed are those accomplished dancers who are involved deeply enough to delve into the religiosity and philosophy underlying the magnificent dance traditions of India. Fewer still are those who are gifted with the ability to explain these to lay audiences through lecture-demonstrations or writings.

Abundantly accomplished and world-renowned dancer, choreographer, guru, scholar, poetess and writer, Mrinalini Sarabhai has been hailed as the current high priestess of Indian classical dancing. Although she is firmly rooted in the rich traditions imbibed from her celebrated gurus in the dance-forms of Bharatnatyam and Kathakali, the creative urge in her prompted her to choreograph fresh items reflecting the contemporary values and conflicts of our age. As Mrinalini says: "Our civilisation has a basic philosophy. Yet, none of us artistes can escape our century and its implications." A true dancer is not one who unquestioningly copies her guru's style, but one who evaluates each movement, finds its essence ('*sat*'), and integrates each movement with an intellectual, physical and emotional response. What the intellect contemplates, the body expresses through dance. Through *Creations*, Mrinalini makes her own statement on life as an artiste committed to making the world a better place.

Beginning with *Vasanta Vijayam* in 1949, Mrinalini has choreographed nearly 50 dance-dramas covering a wide variety of themes, mythological, eternal, contemporary and abstract. Ecology and environment, pollution of the Ganges waters, the threat of nuclear warfare, the alienation of man in an increasingly modern and urban society, the tyrannical excesses perpetrated on the minorities by the affluent and powerful ruling class, are some of the problems that she has highlighted through her creations. All these she sees through the sensitive eyes of a dancer gifted with a highly intellectual and aesthetic temperament, and therefore, very few have understood what it is all about.

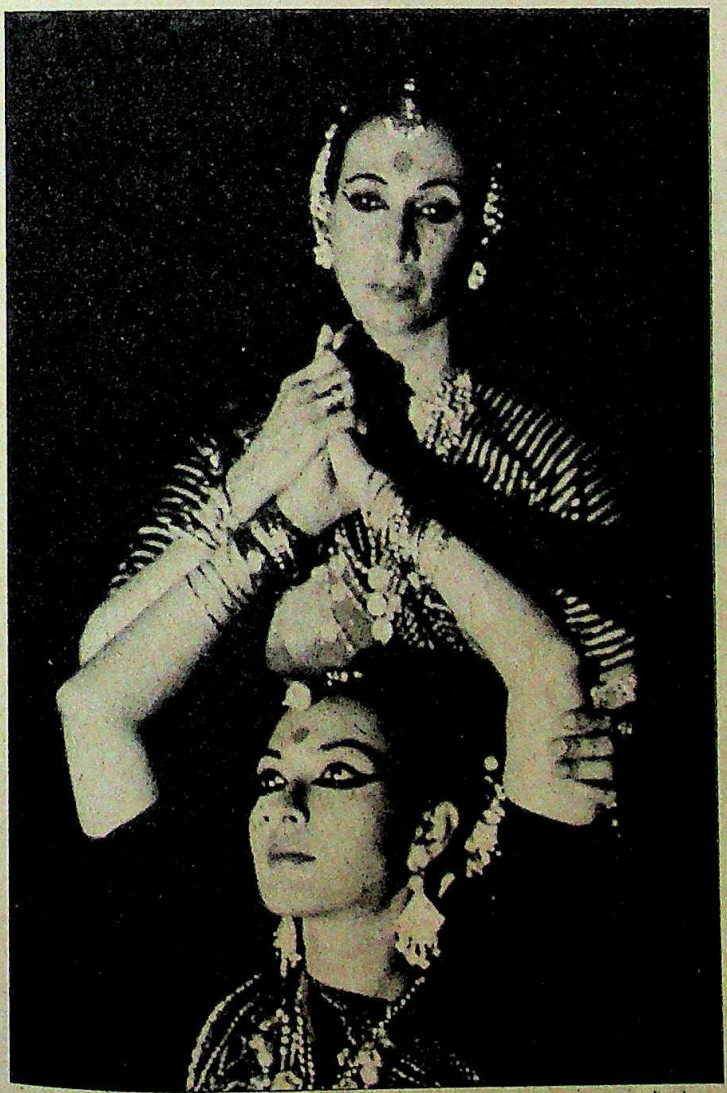
Through *Creations*, she describes in lucid language and eloquent photographs, what she has created through the alphabet of dance. In her words: "Creative activity is a presentation in understandable terms of what we are, a picture of man's inner aspirations, joys, and sorrows." Her dance-drama *Manushya*, for instance, was inspired by a great event in her life—the birth of her first child, Kartikeya. "Maya and the Disciple is the affirmation of life in Tantra. The disciple is the '*atma*' searching for the source, and '*maya*' the goddess ... unveiling the mysteries of existence through the positive recognition of love in all its aspects."

In her impassioned creation *Ganga*, the dancer-writer sings a dirge for the sullied mother river, and sends up a cry of pain and anguish: "Oh radiant Ganga! White as the scared *hamsa* flowing through the heavens... your forgiveness we seek, for spreading our pollution in the clarity of thy streams...that evil can be cleansed by none but our own selves...in the purification of our hearts."

Besides the 13 chapters written by Mrinalini, there is a foreword and introduction by internationally renowned modern dancer Merce Cunningham and Buckminster Fuller. The book is richly illustrated with 80 exquisite photographs of Mrinalini, her equally beautiful and famous daughter Mallika Sarabhai and the other dancers of the Darpan group. The impressive cover and well-planned layout, the colourful photographs, and the superb printing (done in Singapore) are all of the highest quality. Mrinalini's *Creations* will be a coveted addition for every good library of art-books.

—SUSHEELA MISRA

Mrinalini and Mallika: creative work



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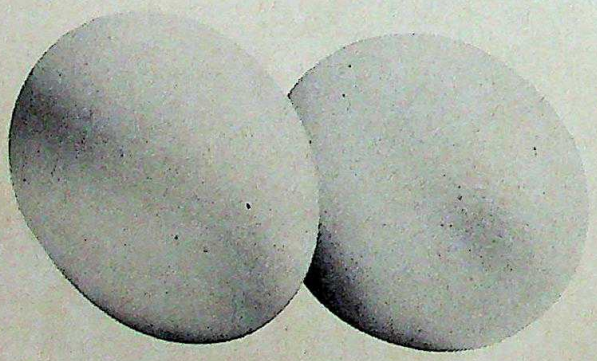

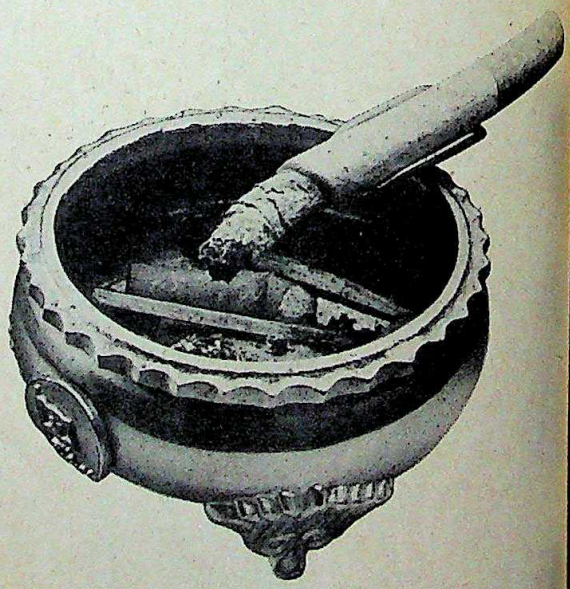

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ASTROLOGY

Computer Kundlis

PANDIT Bhairavi Tantrik of Meerut is a man of strange contradictions. At one end of his poky first floor flat is a cavernous, red-painted room where he keeps a human skull and other instruments of his dark art. At the other end, a comparatively dust free room houses a computer terminal and printer which churns out *kundlis* (horoscopes). A businessman pure and simple, Bhairavi Tantrik has acquired the wherewithal to satisfy all kinds of clients. Those who come looking for witch-doctor potions or to get curses lifted are led into the first room. Educated clients seeking horoscopes and fortune predictions are treated to the sight of a precisely calculated horoscope chart emerging from the computer's printer.

Bhairavi Tantrik is not an unusual astrologer, nor is Meerut the only place where computer horoscopes are becoming popular. The computer *kundli* is revolutionising the astrological business all over the country. Delhi alone has half a dozen "astro shops" now and the number is increasing in major cities around the country.

Horoscopes have always been big business in India. Astrology has been sanctified in the Hindu scriptures and even today, three out of four Hindu families get horoscopes prepared for their children. The planetary positions charted by the pandit are supposed to act as an astral time-clock to guide all major events in life. Calculating the position of the planets at the time of birth was always the most tiresome part of preparing a *kundli*. That task has now been simplified by the computer.

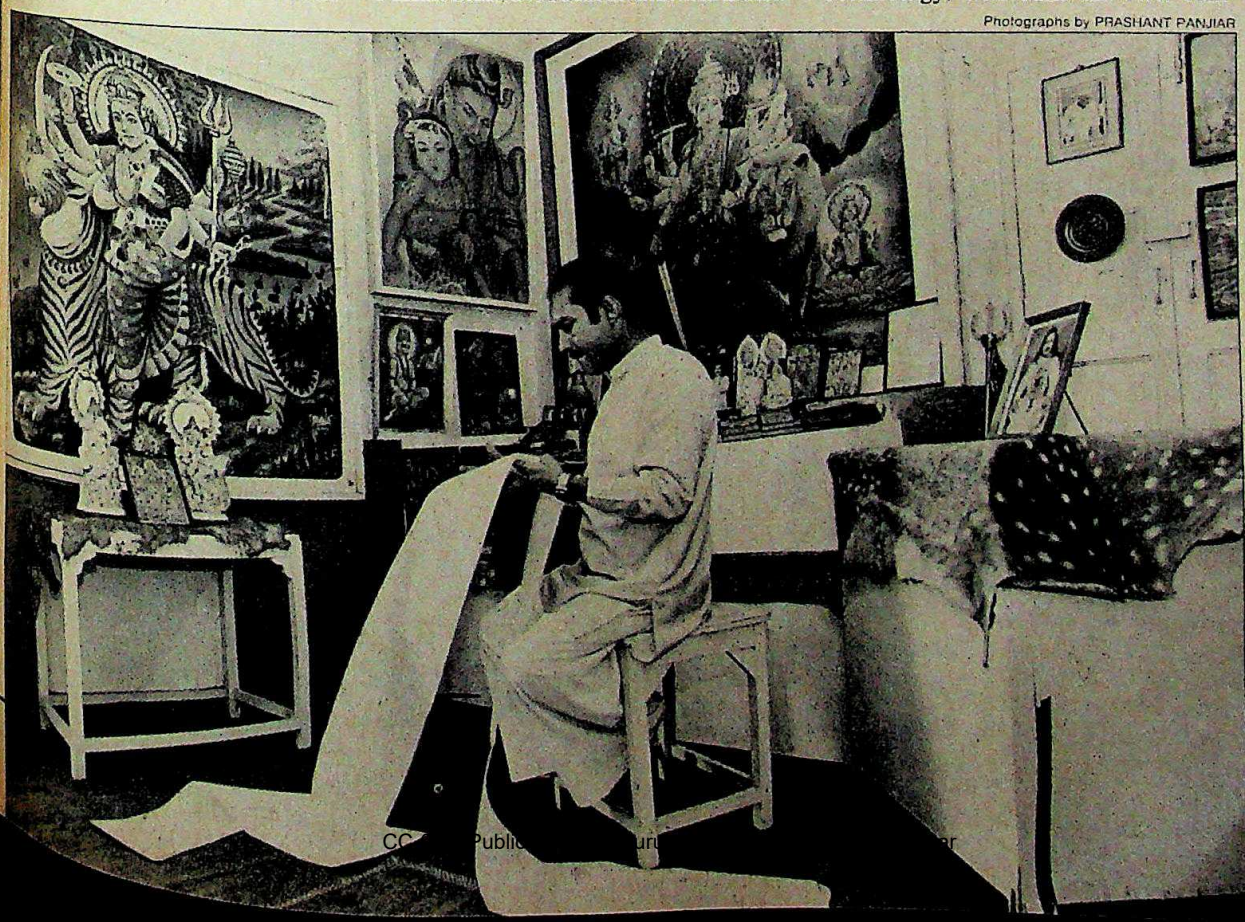
The economics of the operation is responsible for making computer horoscopes a big hit. The basic horoscope produced by a computer costs only Rs 40 whereas a pandit could charge several hundred rupees for the same job. But the pandits are not protesting. The arrival of computer *kundlis* has more than doubled the business of five-star astrologer Pandit R.N. Sharma who sits in Delhi's Hyatt Regency hotel. "First we used to spend most of our time preparing *kundlis*. Now people bring us computer printed horoscopes and we can take our time interpreting them and making predictions." Sharma and other astrologers agree that the calculations of the computer *kundlis* are very precise. But the computer's predictions about the future are very general and most people still turn to traditional astrologers to interpret their horoscopes and forecast their future.

More than anything else, computer-astro shops are proliferating because the horoscope machines can be operated with childish ease. One does not have to be an astrologer or even a good typist to key in the four basic items of information needed. Once the name, date and place of birth and the longitude and latitude of the place of birth have been keyed in, the printer starts churning out the horoscope. "Only five out of the 32 people who have bought our Bhrigu II (computer horoscope) system are astrologers. For the rest it's just a good business," says Rahul Gupta, 26, of the All India Computer Astrology Foundation (AICAF) which markets the astrological software under the brand name Bhrigu II. "We have calculated that even if a Bhrigu unit makes five horoscopes of Rs 100 every day, the unit will recover its cost in seven or eight months," adds Sarvesh Goorha, managing director of Cal Systems, which supplies the hardware with the Bhrigu system. Bhairavi Tantrik claims he is already earning up to Rs 10,000 a month. Kundan Lal, a garments dealer in New Delhi's Defence Colony, installed a Bhrigu system "as a sideline" a month ago, and has already had 250 customers. He now plans to start a match-making service.

The software programme for the Bhrigu II, Gupta claims, was written by his elder brother Pradeep, an electronics engineer from the Indian Institute of Technology, who runs his own com-

Pandit Bhairavi Tantrik: mix and match

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR



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puter company. They pooled the astrological knowledge of half a dozen leading pandits. The same software is now used by Foresight Ltd, the other major company in the horoscope and future forecasting business. AICAF sells the basic software (just horoscope making) for Rs 8,000. The larger package, including the capability to make yearly predictions, ranges from Rs 26,000 to the biggest which has the capability to match horoscopes of prospective marriage partners at Rs 55,000.

The rates charged by Foresight in Delhi offer an indication of the money-spinner the computer horoscope machine is proving to be. Suman Tagra, Foresight manager in Delhi's Connaught Place and the company's oldest employee, says her firm charges Rs 100 for a detailed horoscope, Rs 200 for an "exhaustive" one and an additional Rs 100 for predicting one year's major events. A complete horoscope with 20 years predictions costs Rs 500.

Foresight's Connaught Place outlet alone earns Rs 8,000 on an average day. But that is nothing compared to the business the company did when it opened its Bombay office in September 1984: it prepared 600 horoscopes a day for the first three months, pulling in Rs 29,000 a day, says Tagra. Between November 1986 and January 1987, the company prepared horoscopes for about 9,000 followers of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi who were staying at the Yogi's Noida camp. Foresight now gets dozens of requests every month from the US for the largest predictive horoscopes.

Some horoscope requests that come in are strange. One person wrote in for the horoscope of America:

Date of birth: 4th July 1776

Time of birth: 2.13 a.m.

Place: Philadelphia.

Another wanted the horoscope along with 20 years predictions for the future of Dollaro, born at midnight, on April 2, 1792 at New York. Yet another wanted predictions about the behaviour of the New York Stock Exchange—which would determine the fortunes of millions—born at 8.38 a.m. on 17th May, 1792 in New York City.

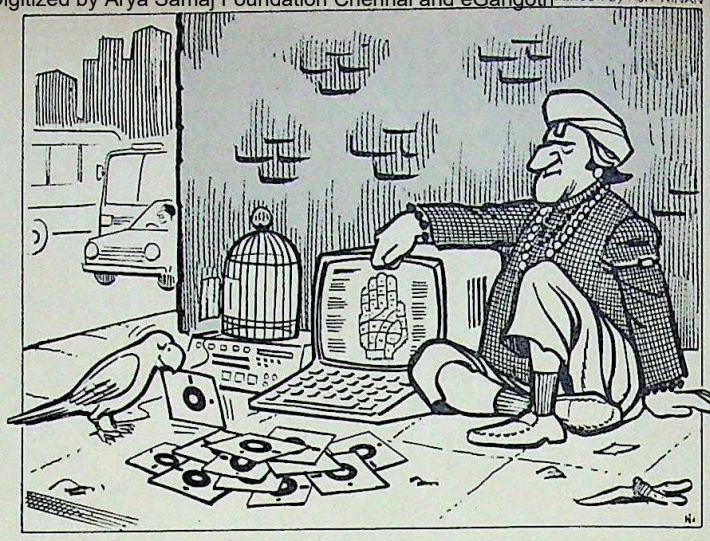
There are similar requests for major currencies and the world's busiest bourses. Not surprisingly, in recent months there have been as many as 150 requests for a computer print out on the future of Rajiv Gandhi. The request comes not only from the Opposition but, more surprisingly, from ambitious and worried members of the Congress(I). And all the predictions point to one thing: that the going will become increasingly tough for the prime minister between April 1987 and August 1988.

Goorha says Foresight is "minting money". Tagra reveals that the company is opening 16 new centres around the country by the end of this year followed by offices in New York, Los Angeles and probably in London and Singapore. Not surprisingly, one of the biggest markets these days is Punjab. Foresight took a horoscope computer down to Ludhiana for a trial run and was besieged by "mad crowds". Businessmen came in hordes from Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Jalandhar to inquire from the electronic star-gazer "business *challayga ki nahin*", "*rahen ke na rahen*". And everyone wanted a horoscope of Punjab to see what it predicted for the troubled state.

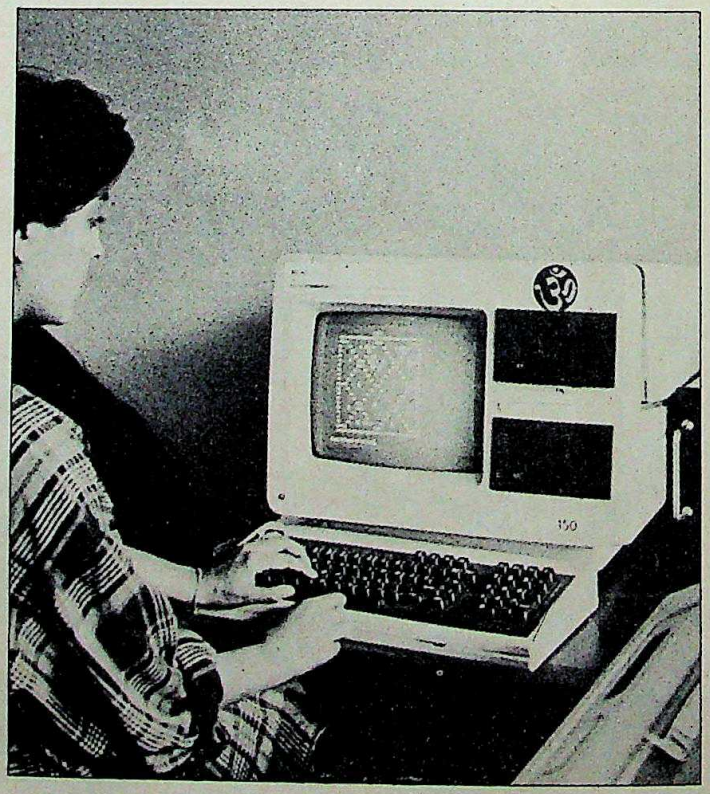
People in trouble, or under stress or mental tension are the ones who most often look for guidance to astrologers and horoscopes. Others come to fix auspicious times to start a new business or to make a major investment decision. People planning to get married make it a point to get their horoscopes matched and now they flock to astro-computers to match the characteristics of the partners. "There are 36 *gunas* (personal attributes) in Hindu astrology and at least 18 of these have to match for a match to be considered workable," says Gupta. Whether that happens or not, it is sure that computers and horoscopes have come together in India to make a perfect, profitable match.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



Match-making at Foresight: popular



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STYLE CHANGES FOR THE BETTER

The colonial look.
That's the shape of things to come in '87. Pleats, baggies T-shirts and a relaxed confident air are all part of the new style scene.

Here, jacket is single breasted with notched lapels. No back vent. Trousers have double outward pleats on either side of fork. Single pleats at the back add to comfort.

Silk-printed tie is worn with a T-shirt in keeping with the break-away from convention.

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MENSATIONS

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Govil and Dipika: familiar ic

RAMAYAN

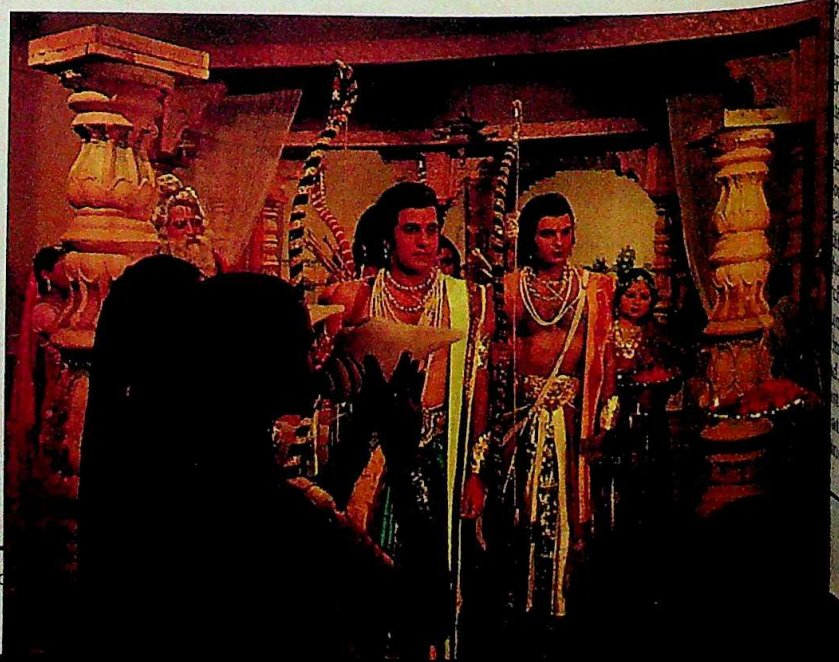
Divine Sensation

AT first glance everything seems to be wrong with *Ramayan*, Ramanand Sagar's TV serial that started late January. Deities float around the sets flashing laser beams, Ram and Sita fall in love around a bush, Ram is always having his feet pressed by Lakshman, the Sita *swayamvar* goes on forever, Raja Janak's palace looks like it's been painted with cheap lurex paint and the clothes look like they've been dug out of some musty trunk in Chandni Chowk's costume rental shops. Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayan* has all the finesse of a high school function.

And yet seldom has a television serial aroused such a phenomenal response. In Meerut, where load-shedding was timed for Sunday mornings during *Ramayan*'s transmission time, residents complained to the authorities and got their power back. In Umbergaon, where the serial is being shot, villagers drop down on their knees when they see hero Arun Govil because they feel Ram has come back. And *paanwallas* everywhere have started pulling down pictures of young starlets and pinning up those of Arun Govil—who plays Ram—with his beatific half smile.

In Bombay, the Sagars have been deluged with fan mail. One man sent Sagar a cheque for Rs 5,000 for the videotapes of the serial to give to his daughter as dowry. A woman w say that she makes her blind son t television set every time *Rama* because she thinks he will get his back. And another man said th seeing the serial his son had begun his legs just as Ram does his Whatever its merits, Sagar's morning epic is being awarded th tity of the original.

As television rating points h climbing steadily upward—acco the Indian Market Research Bure has been a sharp upward tre



A scene from the serial: tacky sets

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ership has doubled since the serial ed, even in metros like Madras— ne has got more fame than he ever has his hit films before. He is also going to e a lot of money. Although he refuses talk about it, he is reported to charge und Rs 3 to 4 lakh per episode, which es by the time Ram comes back to dhya after 52 episodes. Sagar should e billed over Rs 1.5 crore. But as he says: "The commercial aspect is not portant to me. This is my mission." He s sold rights of *Ramayan* to Mauritius d is negotiating with both the US and Soviet Union. He will also put video- es of *Ramayan* on the market, at a ping Rs 5,000 a set, and as he says dsay: "Then we will make money."

Ramayan has always been special to ner. For 25 years he has met with a up of friends for weekly readings of the but he never dreamt he could actually it. "It's like cupping your palms and g to drink up the ocean," he said. Till ision opened up exciting new pos- ities. He had seen on balmy autumn ings the crowds that the Ramlilas w and he knew he had a hit on his ds. On TV he got the power to use Ram he had never been used before. Al- seen before from a distance, Sagar gs us close up: we see the half-smile on n's face, his clothes, his living quar- Shivanandan Foundation's Swami devanand told *Ravivar*: "*Ramayan* es my soul, my heart cries with it d I feel as if I am participating in it." *ayan* is not a religious serial at all. It is ality play, a love story, a soap opera wrapped in godliness. Whichever y, Ram is a best seller.

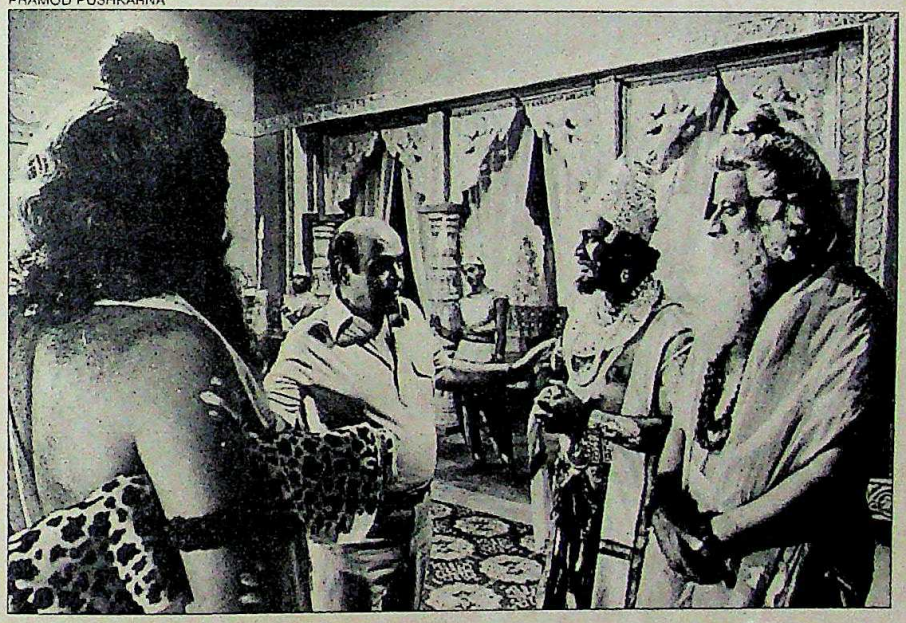
The story has perennial appeal. Sanjiv a, a viewer from Agra whose family s off its shoes and folds its hands when serial comes on, says: "You know the y, you know that Ram is going to pick the *dhanush* but still you wait. The pense is retained." And Sagar has ally read his *Ramayan*, 14 different sions of it. He brings to the serial resting and little known details about work: that Lakshman is really quite a ky little thing, that Kekayi was a good man who was initially overjoyed to t of Ram's marriage, that Sita falls into dilemma when she first spots Ram about ther to go along with her father's tic idea of the *swayamvar*. Ashok mar as the *sutradhaar* ties the whole g in a pink bow when he steps in at the dark glasses and all, and relates the with the present. It is to Sagar's credit many good values—obedience, disci- e, loyalty—do come through. He also uses his poetic licence to champion social evils like dowry. So Dashrath tells Janak: "You are greater than I am. I am only a beggar standing at your door asking for your daughter." Says Sangeeta Mathur, 28, from Delhi: "This moralising could get on people's nerves, but it doesn't. You wait and see, it will change our whole generation."

Another thing that has appealed to viewers everywhere is the music. "The *chaupaiyans* are so beautiful, so melodious, the stanzas are perfectly balanced," says Vijay Kaushish, who like many good Brahmin boys grew up singing the same tunes in his *aangan*. "Ram is a Hindu concept simply because we've claimed him. For Ram himself there was no religion." The serial should sell the world over because it is a milestone of Indian culture. These are also sensitive times when the country is perturbed about Ramjanmabhoomi and is especially responsive to Ram. So remarkable, indeed, has been the reaction to mythology—there are over 500 Ramayan clubs in the US and Canada—that, according to Kaushish, it won't be surprising if even conservative European TV companies buy the serial. As Sagar says: "I may die but your children will be watching my cassette."

Now that he's sitting pretty, Sagar can smile. But he's had his problems. Like most religious serials, *Ramayan* has had its share of controversy too. There have been complaints about its poor production qualities—the papier mache pillars, the cheap sets, the miracle-a-minute, low grade stars and Dipika, who plays Sita—the most sacred woman in Hindu mythology—had been seen before in a bath-tub. It is said that Sita's skimpy attire was even discussed in Parliament. The serial was dismissed as filmi, sacrilegious, and fostering blind faith. But as one viewer said: "Being a film man Sagar can hardly help his filminess. But he is certainly entertaining." For Doordarshan itself, the argument is simple. "We've got a good programme and we are getting good revenues," says B.L. Khurana, director audience research. And Madhumalati, controller of sales admits: "Advertisers are vying with each other to get a spot on the *Ramayan* time."

Life has changed for Ramanand Sagar. He will not touch meat or liquor for the entire duration of the serial. He has transported 10 cooks to Umbergaon to prepare vegetarian food for the 150 crew members who are stationed in this tiny hamlet for the first 15 days of every month and who must also abstain. Life has also changed for the villagers since Ram came to Umbergaon. Said Govil: "I never thought I'd become a cult figure in rural areas. I feel embarrassed when old folks fall at my feet." They keep pictures of Govil and Dipika—who incidentally wears high heels under her Sita's robes—in their houses and religiously garland them.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Sagar directing: sanctified mission

Encouraged by this response to mythology, the Sagars are now preparing to do a quickie on Hanuman called *Jai Hanuman* also to be shot in Umbergaon, Ram-rejanmabhoomi, and released later this year. Meanwhile, there is another film messiah waiting in the wings to move in as soon as Sagar exits from Doordarshan—B.R.Chopra with *Mahabharata*.

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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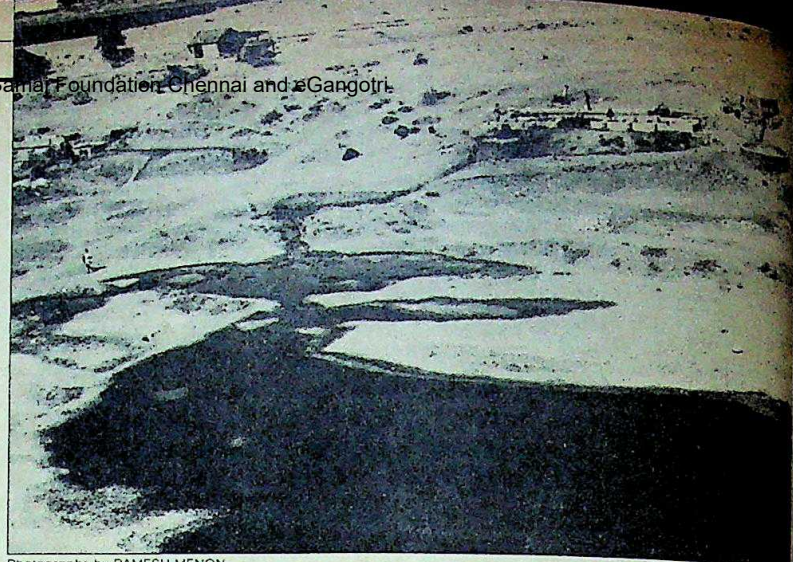
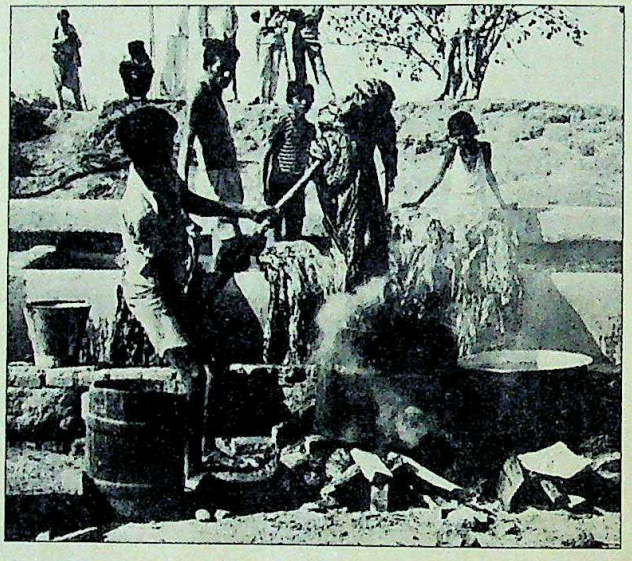
GUJARAT

Red Curse

THE town of Jetpur in Rajkot district is seeing red—literally. Tube wells dug in the area spew out red coloured water which contains harmful chemicals. The nearby puddles and ponds look like they have been fed from a river of blood. Jetpur is paying the price many other cities may have to pay someday. Nature is finally taking revenge on the town for having dumped effluents in all the available open spaces, oblivious to the possible consequences.



Photographs by RAMESH MENON



Polluted Bhadar river (top) and freshly printed sarees

The effluents are the dark coloured dyes used to print designs on sarees, a principal industry of the town. Laments Dharamsi Megabhai, a saree printer: "We treated Jetpur as a garbage can pouring coloured effluent into the open. Today, we are paying the price of playing with nature." The blood red effluents have been absorbed into the area's water table over the last 25-30 years.

Jetpur has more than 1,100 units which print around four lakh sarees a day. The units use about 80 lakh gallons of water daily in the dyeing and printing process. At the end of the day, the water is allowed to flow out of the unit to accumulate in low lying areas or flow into the Bhadar river. In summer, when most of the river is dry, the water is streaked with a stark red colour. Residents say that it is a reminder that the town is bleeding.

It was only in the late '70s that the people of Jetpur realised the seriousness of the problem when even the well water turned red. In the last few years, it has played havoc with the health of people living in the area. Skin diseases are rampant in the villages around Jetpur. Skin specialists in the area point out that most patients suffer from allergic contact dermatitis, leucoderma, loss of hair and fungus infections. More than 60 per cent of the patients who visit the government hospital at Jetpur suffer from ailments caused by water pollution: gastro-enteritis, diarrhoea, vomiting, and liver disease.

A study carried out by the Environmental Engineering Department of L.D. Engineering College found that the water in Bhadar river had become so toxic that 400 cubic metres of clean water would have to be poured into the river every second to dilute the pollutants to a permissible level for fish to survive. But Mohan Jethabhai, chairman of the health committee of the Jetpur Municipality asserts that the dye is harmless and insists that the effluents have done no harm to Jetpur. The owner of three printing units, he dismisses the dangers as "figments of imagination".

What is worrying the district administration is that the dyes now use silicate which is very harmful for agriculture. When silicate effluent is let out in the fields, a white powdery film forms on the surface which destroys all vegetation. Now, with the water shortage in Jetpur, printers travel around within a 30 km radius to get the sarees washed in fields rented from farmers. Warns Rajkot Collector Rajiv Takru: "The destruction of land is not a one day affair. If farmers do not become pollution conscious today, they will pay heavily tomorrow."

An attempt was made in 1982, when industry representatives and the Government decided to build an effluent treatment plant to service all the printing units. The units were asked to contribute Rs 45 lakh and the Government pooled in a similar amount. The Gujarat Water Supply and Sewerage Board was asked to put up an effluent treatment and disposal system. But the board delayed doing so, resulting in an escalation of costs. By the time it had spent Rs 90 lakh, it had only built a gutter and a cement well to collect the effluent and a pumping system to discharge it about 1 km from Jetpur. It was a ludicrous scheme since it attempted to stop pollution in one area and start it in another.

Early this year, the Government asked the industry to cough up another Rs 25 lakh in view of the increased costs of the project. The industry has agreed to pay if the Government ensures that a treatment plant is put up.

Meanwhile, the Jetpur tragedy is being repeated in other nearby areas like Ranchhodnagar where a parallel saree printing industry has started. Predictably, the sub soil water there has also gone red. Warns Municipal Commissioner S. Jagdishan: "Unless effective pollution control measures are adopted, parts of Rajkot will soon start getting polluted coloured water. There is no easy way out. These units have to be strictly dealt with." And unless they are, and soon, the dyeing industry could well have a deadly connotation.

—RAMESH MENON in Jetpur

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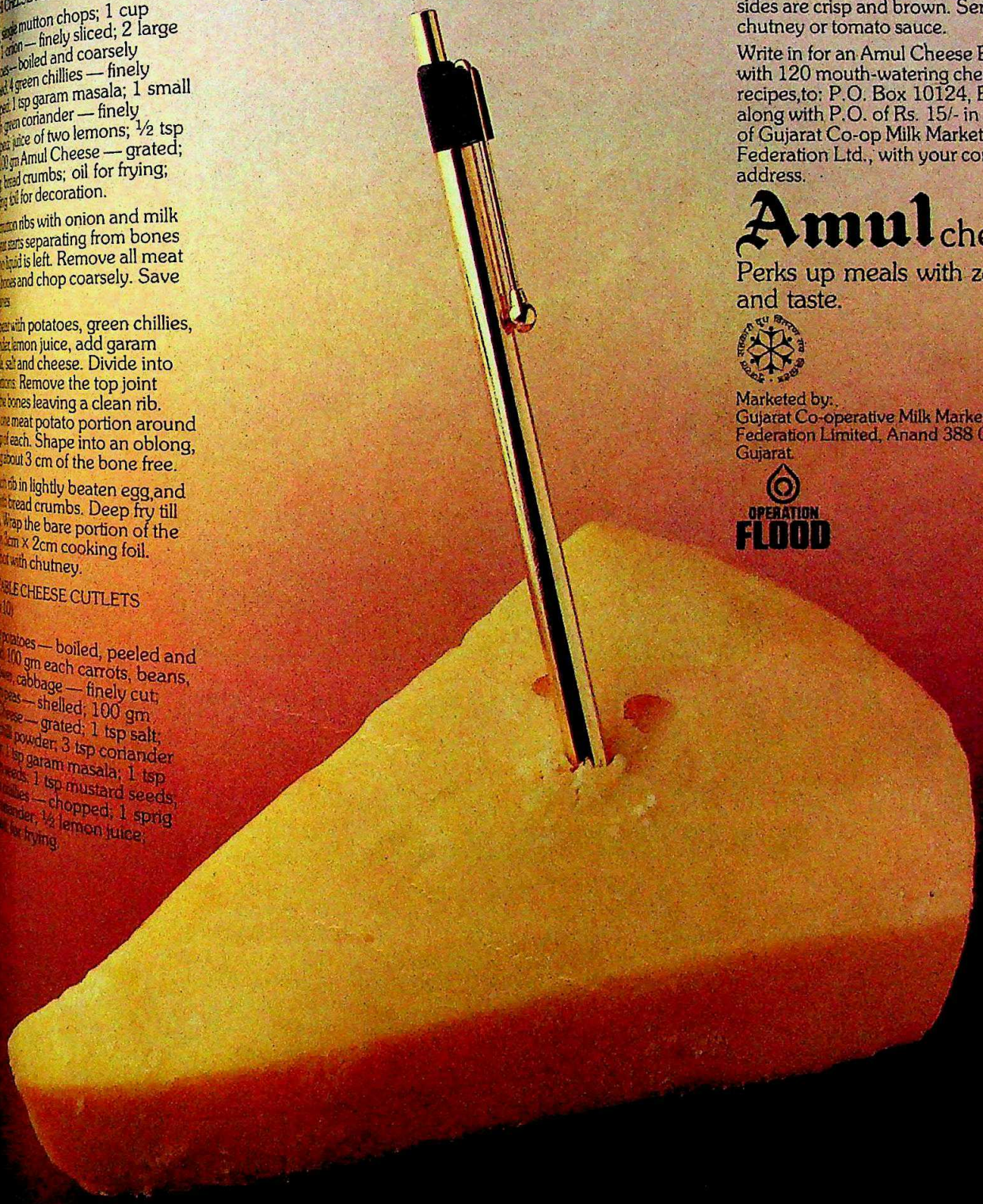
However busy he is in the office, my husband keeps his appointment with Amul Cheese.



Heat 2 tbsp vanaspati in heavy pan. Put in cummin and mustard seeds, add all other spices and salt. Fry for a few seconds and add chopped vegetables and peas. Add enough water to cook the mixture well. Remove from fire and add grated cheese. Keep this filling aside. Mix salt, lemon, coriander and green chillies to mashed potatoes. Divide potato mixture into lemon-sized balls. Flatten each ball on palm of hand like a puri and place vegetable cheese mixture, cover with another flattened potato puri and close edges by pressing. Pat cutlets in bread crumb mixture to flatten and shape. Shallow fry on tava using ghee. Turn until both sides are crisp and brown. Serve with chutney or tomato sauce.

Write in for an Amul Cheese Book with 120 mouth-watering cheese recipes,to: P.O. Box 10124, Bombay, along with P.O. of Rs. 15/- in favour of Gujarat Co-op Milk Marketing Federation Ltd., with your complete address.

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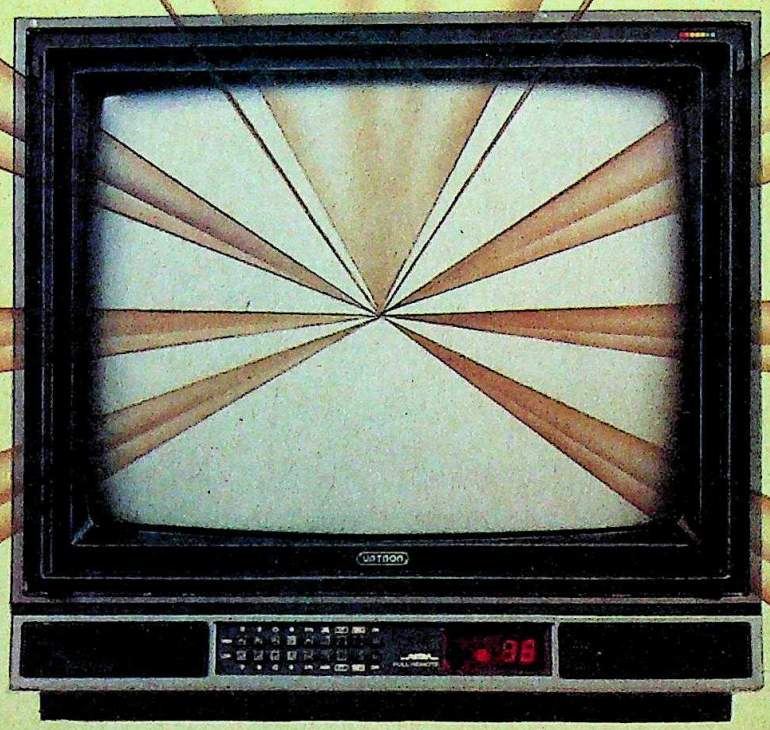

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All you have to do is tick one numbered box in each list. That's your favourite. The lists have been prepared after viewer research in eight cities all over India. Only performances telecast in 1986, on National Network, are eligible.

Remember, your votes will be counted as soon as you have selected your eight favourites.

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• Only programmes telecast on National Network in 1986 are eligible • No entry fee • Only one entry per person • Incomplete forms will be rejected • Last date for entries: April 30th 1987 • The decision of the judges is final • Employees of Uptron India Limited, its sister companies and its Advertising Agencies cannot participate • No correspondence will be entertained • Entry forms available with Uptron TV dealers also.

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MY FAVOURITE TV SERIAL

- Buniyaad 1
- Dada Dadi Ki Kahaniyan 2
- Karamchand 3
- Khandan 4
- Nukkad 5
- Rajni 6
- Srikant 7
- Vikram aur Betal 8
- Yatra 9
- Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi 10

MY FAVOURITE ACTOR

- Dadaji *Dada Dadi Ki Kahaniyan* 1
- Guru *Nukkad* 2
- Karamchand *Karamchand* 3
- Khopri *Nukkad* 4
- Masterji *Buniyaad* 5
- Mr. Mehra *Ghar Jamai* 6
- Raja *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* 7
- Ranjit *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* 8
- Srikant *Srikant* 9
- Vikram *Vikram aur Betal* 10

MY FAVOURITE ACTRESS

- Dadi *Dada Dadi Ki Kahaniyan* 1
- Ketaki *Khandan* 2
- Lajoji *Buniyaad* 3
- Mrs. Mehra *Ghar Jamai* 4
- Radha *Nukkad* 5
- Rajlakshmi *Srikant* 6
- Rajni *Rajni* 7
- Renu *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* 8
- Ritu *Air Hostess* 9
- Veerawali *Buniyaad* 10

MY FAVOURITE COMEDIAN

- Havaldar *Nukkad* 1
- Khopri *Nukkad* 2
- Kitty *Karamchand* 3
- Mamaji *Choti Badi Baten* 4
- Mr. Mehra *Ghar Jamai* 5
- Raja *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* 6
- Raja's father-in-law *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* 7
- Roshan Lal *Buniyaad* 8
- Satish Shah *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* 9
- Subbu *Ghar Jamai* 10

MY FAVOURITE HISTORICAL SERIAL

- Asman Kaise Kaise 1
- Jaane-Alam 2
- Kahan Gaye Woh Log 3
- Raj Se Swaraj 4
- Terah Panne 5

MY FAVOURITE CHILDREN'S SERIAL

- Appu aur Pappu 1
- Dada Dadi Ki Kahaniyan 2
- Ek Do Teen Char 3
- Kachchi Dhoop 4
- Khel Khel Mein 5
- Vikram aur Betal 6

MY FAVOURITE EDUCATIONAL SERIAL

- Apne Aap 1
- Cosmos 2
- Economics Made Easy 3
- Krishi Darshan 4
- News Line 5
- Quiz Time 6
- Science Quiz 7
- Wonders of the Sea 8

MY FAVOURITE TITLE SONG

- Buniyaad 1
- Dada Dadi Ki Kahaniyan 2
- Ek Do Teen Char 3
- Ghar Jamai 4
- Karamchand 5
- Khandan 6
- Nukkad 7
- Rajni 8
- Vikram aur Betal 9
- Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi 10

Prizes If you want to be eligible for a prize, here's something exciting. Give us a name for a new Uptron Television that's way ahead of competition in styling and technology. The name should not have more than 10 alphabets. Print it in block letters below.

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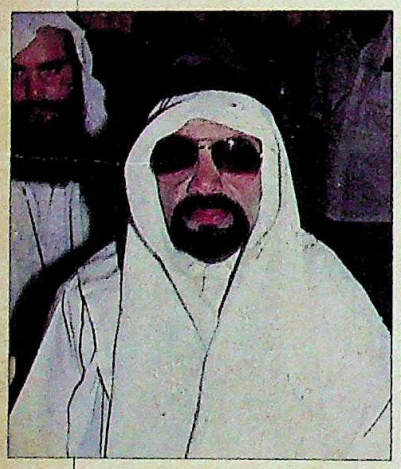
◆ Sheikh Rasool, he rode out of the West. Through all the wide state, his dress was the best. And when the show was over, they found he had won. And then and only then did they know that the inscrutable Sheikh of Araby—"His Royal Highness Sheikh Rasool Ahmed Al Riaz of Sirsi", as Karnataka Governor A.N. Banerjee introduced him at the annual Karnataka Legislators' Day function—was no other than that man of many guises, Chief Minister **Ramakrishna Hegde**. So complete was the charade that even his wife, Shakuntala Hegde who collected the first prize for him

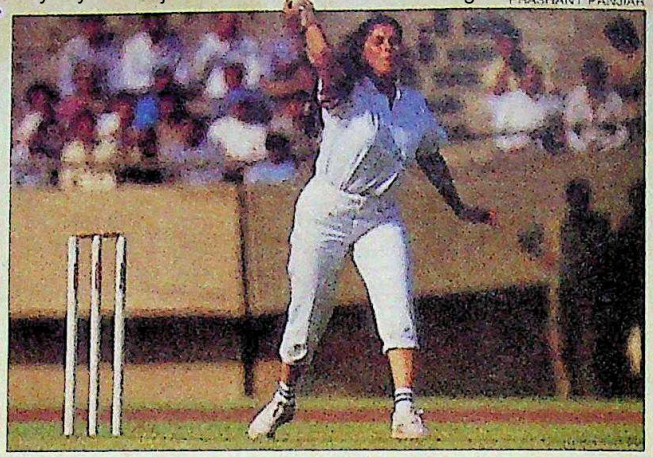


Hegde: surprise guise

was fooled. Gloated a beaming Hegde: "Even my wife doesn't know what I am going to come as each time."

◆ All the field was a stage, and the players actors. The multi-starrer had skippers Madhavrao Scindia and Kapil Dev in the lead, with Amitabh Bachchan and Margaret Alva as guest stars for the Carnival Cricket match organised by the Railway Women's Central organisation in New Delhi. The biggest hit was commentator Asrani making sidecracks like: "*Chali chali meri ball*" when Deepti Naval ran slow motion behind it. It was a good busman's holiday for Azharuddin, Madan Lal, Bedi, Roger Binny, Vishwanath and new roles for Raj Babbar,

PRASHANT PANJIAR

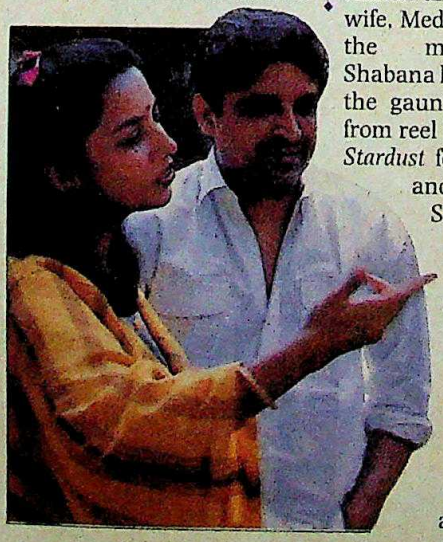


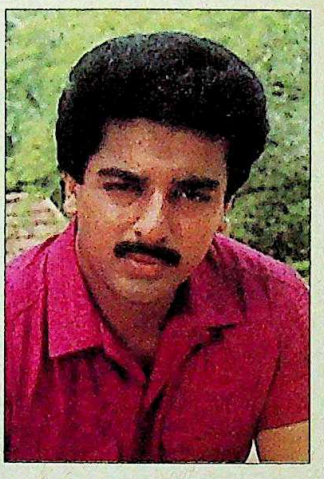
Dimple at the pitch: field day

Mazhar Khan, Karan Kapoor and Zeenat Aman. But the crowning glory was Dimple Kapadia. All she had to do was bat an eyelid—never mind the ball—and the fielders were bowled over.

◆ The *kamal* is in for a second blossoming—back where it all began 14 years ago. **Kamalahasan** has come full circle to Kerala and *Her Nights*' I.V. Sasi. Sasi zoomed him into the male sex symbol of the south and will now resurrect him with *Vritam*. Turning his back on the north, after his floppy honeymoon, Kamal says: "I will only act in south Indian movies. For me everything is a brief flirtation." He will now make "India's first silent movie" *Pushpa Vimanam*, with southern stars including Khopdi, Nukkad's lovable drunkard.

Azmi and Akhtar: torrid suit





Kamalahasan: second coming

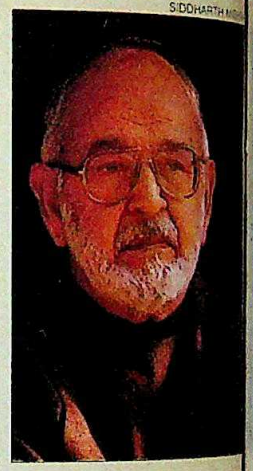
◆ *Stardust* called them The Queer Quartet. But now three quarters of the quartet: **Shabana Azmi**, husband **Javed Akhtar** and Shekhar Kapoor's wife, Medha are out to queer the magazine's pitch. Shabana has finally picked up the gauntlet, crossing over, from reel to real life and sued *Stardust* for writing that she and former fiance Shekhar were having a "torrid" affair. It promises to be a fight to the finish. Spewed the angry actress: "I am not going to withdraw the case because I want to teach the erring yellow press a lesson."

SIGNPOST

■ **Died: Sachchidanand H[illegible] ranand Vatsyayan Agye[illegible]** 76, of cardiac arrest in [illegible] Delhi. The grand old ma[illegible] Hindi literature, Agyeya l[illegible] up to his name—meaning 'i[illegible] inscrutable'. His poetry a[illegible] fiction were only the log[illegible] culmination of a multi-face[illegible] career whose first seeds ger[illegible] nated with his birth at [illegible] excavation site in Kasia, [illegible] Deoria district of Uttar Pr[illegible] desh, where his archaeolog[illegible] father was posted.

The major milestones [illegible] route included jail terms a[illegible] revolutionary, a stint in [illegible]

SIDDHARTH [illegible]



Agyeya: rich life

army as Captain Agye[illegible] path-breaking tenures as e[illegible] tor of *Navbharat Times* a[illegible] *Dinman*, besides the Jnanp[illegible] the Sahitya Akademi a[illegible] other awards conferred [illegible] him for such epical works [illegible] prose and poetry as *Shekha[illegible] Ek Jeevni, Kitni Navon M[illegible] Kitni Baar, Nadi Ke Dweep* [illegible] *Apne Apne Ajnabi*. Agyeya w[illegible] passionate about his pastim[illegible] as well, from photography [illegible] gardening to pottery and c[illegible] pentry. The day he died, [illegible] was to inaugurate a 'mach[illegible] study—a labour of love—[illegible] a neem tree at his New De[illegible] bungalow. But, as he him[illegible] wrote once: "It is immate[illegible] whether my house has [illegible] inside it or not. I am looking [illegible] a house which is surrou[illegible] by light from all sides."

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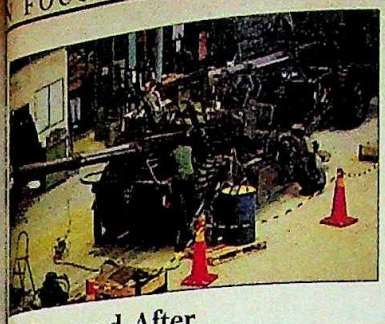


Bofors and After

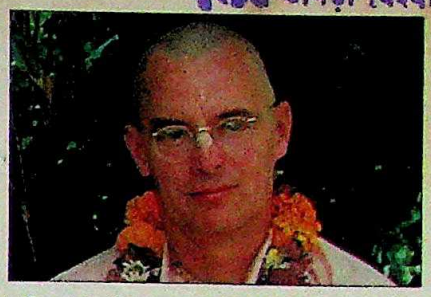
The Bofors howitzer fired away in unexpected directions last fortnight as allegations of illegal pay-offs on a Rs 1,500-crore deal rocked the Government and Parliament, and spotlighted the role of slush funds and shadowy middlemen in arms deals.

COVER STORY 30

Paranoia in the Party

In the grip of a siege mentality as crisis followed crisis, the Congress(I) was in a state of paranoia as fears spread of the President dismissing the Government. Partymen rallied around Rajiv, but there was subterranean dissidence too.

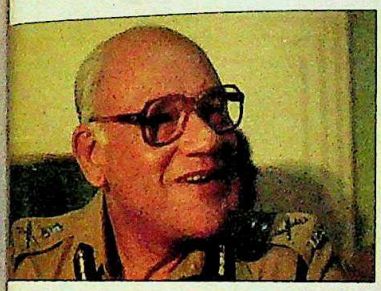
COVER STORY 46



The Palace of Intrigue

The Krishna Consciousness cult's New Vrindavan commune in West Virginia is at the centre of a raging controversy, following charges of murder, child molestation, kidnapping, copyright violations and tax evasion. A report.

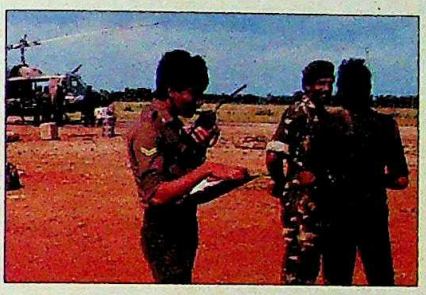
GLOBE-TROTTING 96



"No Chance of Success"

After a long and laudable innings as India's most celebrated policeman, Julio Francis Ribeiro will leave a controversial trail when he lays down office next month. Alongside appeals to stay on, he also faces charges of 'police terrorism'.

INTERVIEW OF THE FORTNIGHT 126



The New Offensive

A massive bomb blast in Colombo and five days of insensate violence that followed, sparked off a major political crisis in Sri Lanka, with anti-government and anti-Indian feelings running high, pushing back hopes of a peace initiative.

SPECIAL REPORT 134

Death on the Roads

Sudden and gruesome death has become a chilling phenomenon on overcrowded Indian roads. With over 40,000 people killed last year in road accidents, and another 1.75 lakh injured, Indians on the road now run more risks than before.

SPECIAL FEATURE 142

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Ahmedabad riots unabated

Hindustan Times Correspondent

GANDHINAGAR, Jan. 31 — Following five stabbing incidents which took place in the not-affected Bapunagar area today with one proving fatal, the police reimposed curfew from 7.00 p.m. today till 7.00 a.m. tomorrow.

Police sources said that the curfew imposed on the adjoining Haridas Nagar and Chorasia police stations apart from the areas coming within Bapunagar as a precautionary measure.

At all the sensitive points in the Bapunagar colony, which had been the scene of riots last year too, armed police contingents were posted. Armed policemen were also seen on road kept.

The general opinion in the area was that the attack on the victory procession of the Bharatiya Janata Party-supported independent candidate and his supporters was pre-planned.

As the candidate and his supporters were passing by they came under heavy stoning and within minutes all hell broke loose.

In all, a dozen people got stab wounds yesterday four of which proved fatal. While one person died in police firing one was killed by private firing, according to these eyewitnesses.

With the death of one more person today the death toll has now risen to seven. The number of those injured since yesterday has crossed the 20 mark.

PTI adds: Mr Pradip Sharma, a BJP-supported independent winner in recent elections has been detained by the police for allegedly inciting people in his ward, Bapunagar.

Burglary gang busted

presented a memorandum requesting for an early settlement of their outstanding demands.

Religious intolerance: Former Vice-President M. Hidayatullah said that different religious bodies of the world were becoming less tolerant of other faiths and a strong antagonism of one the world evil

Ameri... testifies

...ing has improved: Marwah

Murder mystery solved, 2 held

By A Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI, March 8

This crime branch of Delhi police has arrested two persons in connection with the murder of Mr Tata

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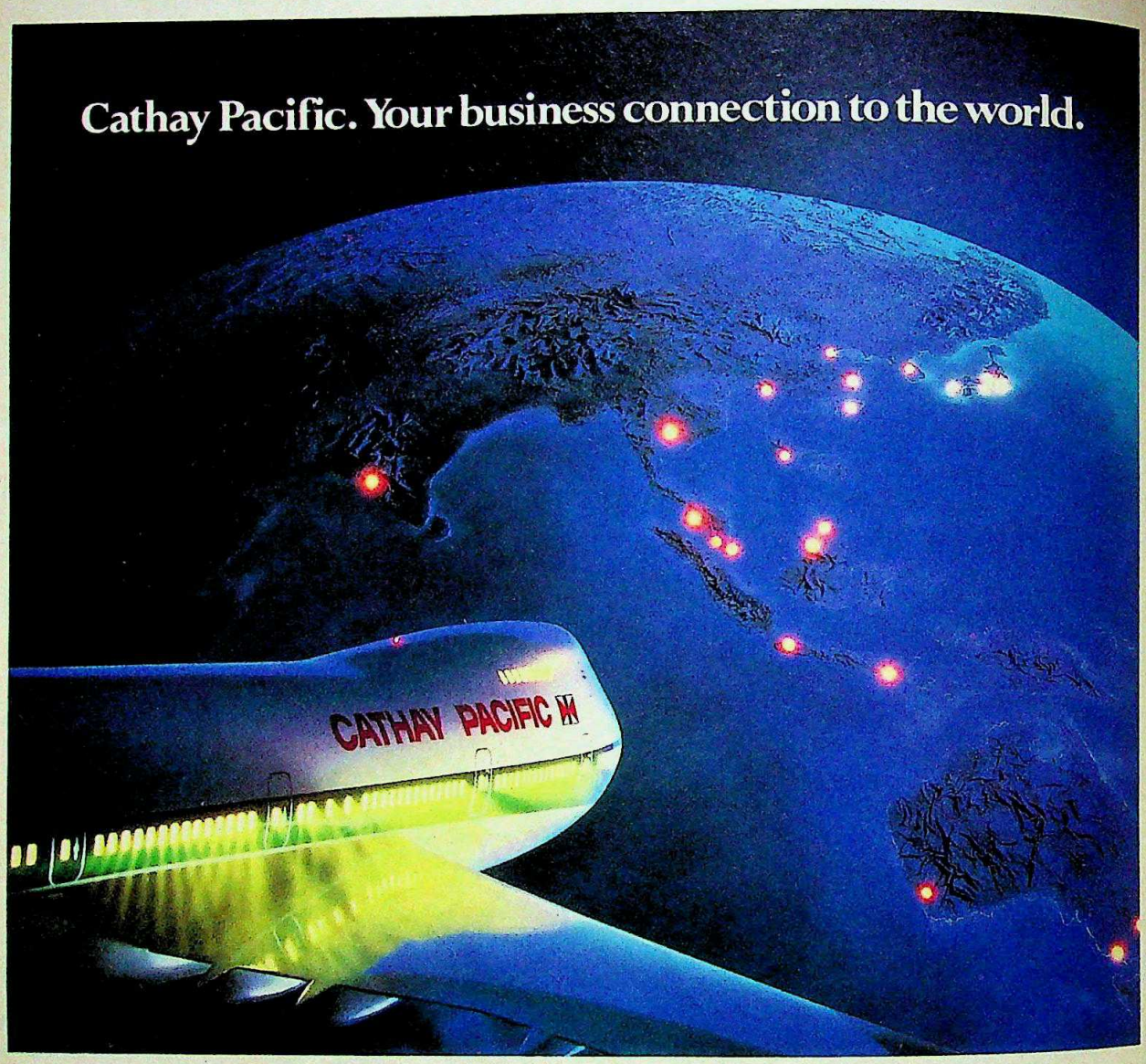

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

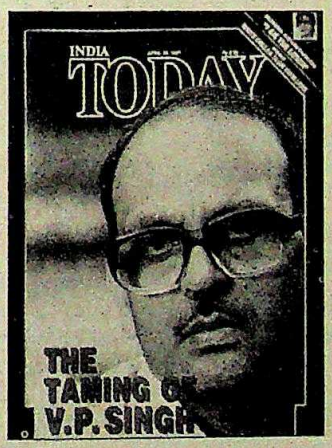
WOMEN used to be a rarity in journalism till as recently as the late 1960s. Even now, they tend to congregate nearer the bottom of the ladder than the top, and more often than not tend to focus on the 'women's issues'—like rape—while the men go after the 'real' journalism.

But there is little doubt that things are changing—for the better. Increasingly, women reporters are sent to trouble spots, asked to cover the Government and Parliament, or assigned fancied political beats. And women have begun to move up the hierarchy too, though women editors are still rare outside of women's magazines.

Several women have won journalism awards too, and one of them last fortnight was INDIA TODAY *Principal Correspondent* MADHU JAIN, *who bagged the* Eve's Weekly *award for her path-breaking story on divorce (December 31, 1986) and how this was becoming an increasingly common phenomenon up and down the social scale. In the year that she has been with* INDIA TODAY *(after successful stints in* The Statesman *and* Sunday*), she has also written extensively on films, television and culture. Said Madhu while accepting the award in Bombay from Ram Meghe, Maharashtra's education minister: "Such awards help focus attention on women's issues. But the time should come when awards are given to men too for writing on these issues, because this is as important as political reporting."*

Madhu Jain receiving the award

LETTERS



UNFORTUNATE EXIT

Your cover story ("The Taming of V.P. Singh", April 30) signifies the eclipse of values and efficiency in the Indian polity. There is no place for a crusade against corruption. When in an indefensible spot, the Government appoints dubious commissions or conjures up the spectre of the 'foreign hand'. Our prime minister (Mr Clean) has earned yet another colourful epithet for himself with his continuous bungling: Mr Incredible. Our democracy is better described as a democrazy now.

Bangalore **VINOD KUMAR B.**

■ V.P. Singh has not been tamed. He has stormed out of office with the image of those left behind in disarray. Ask any man on the road and he will confirm this view without hesitation.

New Delhi **ANOOP SETH**

■ With reference to your cover story, it is perhaps to the credit of V.P. Singh that he failed to drum up support for his crusade against corruption. It shows beyond doubt that he has no vested interests—except the ultimate public good.

Bangalore **DR G.I. D'SOUZA**

■ The hounding of V.P. Singh is a classic example which throws light on the values of our political system. Sycophancy, demagoguery, self-preservation and corruption are the hallmarks of the present system. Virtues like honesty, integrity and dignity are rarely to be found, and if present, meet the same fate as illustrated in this episode.

New Delhi **SAURABH KUMAR**

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■ A leader who cannot retain honest and efficient persons is bound to face political turbulence. By accepting the permanent exit of a person of such high political calibre from public office, the prime minister has lowered his own image as Mr Clean.

Ambala — R.M. MITTAL

REVEALING VERDICT

Your cover story ("Congress-I: Crumbling Citadel", April 15) elaborately elucidated the nosedive of the Congress(I) in the recently-held Assembly elections. Its electoral setback underscores the fact that personal charisma and claptrap slogans will no longer cut ice with the electorate. This was especially demonstrated in West Bengal where Rajiv Gandhi's ambiguous utterances could not dent Jyoti Basu's fortress.

Ahmedabad — M. V. RAVINDRAN

■ Your cover story was a brilliant study of the dying stars of the Congress(I). Kerala has turned left again. And this was not surprising, considering the controversies surrounding the Congress(I)-led ministry. The subversion of educational institutions, the economic reservation policy, the mass rape of women by policemen in Thankamany village, and the notorious pipe scandal, all contributed to its downfall.

Trivandrum — P. MOHANDAS

SHOCKING FARCE

Your article of the Jammu & Kashmir elections ("A Tarnished Triumph", April 15) reveals only half the truth of the large-scale rigging indulged in by the Congress-National Conference alliance. Still, the impartial report has acted as a balm on the injured sentiments of Kashmiris and has helped towards strengthening their confidence in Indian democracy.

Handwara — MAJID BANDAY

■ Your article comes as a shock to all those who want democracy to flourish in India. Farooq Abdullah threw democratic proprieties to the winds for his personal gains. Now he is pointing accusing fingers at fundamentalism in an effort to hide his own skeletons. Inconsistency is the hallmark of his political career. After the elections, one thing is clear: Farooq's credibility has received a jolt.

Srinagar — B.K. BHAN, M.S. ISMAIL

VITAL LIBERTY

Your editorial comment ("Squeezing the Press", April 15) is commendable. The actions of the Tamil Nadu Assembly towards the editor of the *Ananda Vikatan* definitely go against the tenets of the democratic freedom of expression promised to us in our Constitution. And the villains in the piece are the self-serving politicians who want to protect their reputations at all possible costs.

Kamakashipuram — R. SRINIVASAN

BEST SELLING PLOT

Your special report ("Pandora's Box", April 15) gave an accurate analysis of facts of the Fairfax case. The scandal certainly has all the ingredients of a best seller.

Nagpur — MANISHA PATANKAR

CALCULATING MOVES

In your report ("PM-President Meeting: Unresolved Controversy", April 15) I was shocked to read from your opinion poll results that 72 per cent of the respondents did not want the prime minister to resign even if he had lied to Parliament. Profumo had to resign from the British Government not because of his involvement with Christine Keeler but because of his wrongful denial of such an involvement. In Britain, the gravest error an MP could make is to lie to Parliament. In India, no questions are ever asked.

London — K. NATHAN

POOR PERFORMANCE

Your article ("Hard Lessons", April 15) effectively brought out the sorry state of Indian cricket today. Kapil's poor captaincy was one of the major reasons for India's poor showing. Kapil lacked imagination, often judged wrongly and at times, cracked under pressure. With the World Cup just round the corner, it is time something positive was done, so that we don't get to repeat the debacle of "Imrangate".

Jamshedpur — CHERYL CRUZE

■ Your evaluation of Kapil's captaincy was forthright and brilliant. However, there is a minor factual inaccuracy—after Gavaskar, G.R. Vishwanath is still the second highest run-getter (6080), and not Vengsarkar.

New Delhi — ANSHUMAN TIWARI

AD LINE

Your latest issue (April 30) carried a full page colour advertisement of Vichitra Sarees whose creative work was done by The Creative Cell. However, the ad inadvertently carried the key number of FSA. The error is regretted.

New Delhi — *Frank Simoes Advertising Pvt Ltd*

ILLEGAL SIGNALS

With reference to your report ("Cable Television: The New Frontier", December 15, 1986) no private sector company is marketing hardware for receiving microwave signals from satellites other than INSAT 1B. Since some companies have attempted to do this, the Government has declared reception of such signals illegal. And the law can take its course.

New Delhi — S.S. PURI, *director, Shyam Antenna Electronic Pvt Ltd*

INEFFICIENT ENGINE

Your cover story ("Wasteful Government Expenditure: The Dirty Dozen", March 31) used a clear technique in referring to specific government projects while pointing out the misdemeanour of officials. The underlying theme that emerged was that the Government cannot be an efficient actor in carrying out economic activities for society. The size of the administration creates 'noise' in transmitting information and prevents a sense of involvement.

Instead, the Government should give directions and let the price mechanism work out the micro-economic details. This will end the present nefarious nexus between the established private sector and the Government. This neo-classical view might sound heretical in a country where the rhetoric is 'socialism' and the actions are pseudo-capitalistic. But if we are to progress forward, it is time we stopped looking up to the Government as an engine for growth. It is only the efforts of millions of Indians that can take us forward.

Princeton — RAMESH RAMANKUTTY

TRUE SPONSOR

Your news item ("Eye-catchers", March 31) featuring television personality Rama Vij wrongly referred to the car rally for the blind as being sponsored by Goodyear. This unique rally was sponsored by Ceat Tyres of India Ltd.

Bombay — RUPA RANGANATHAN

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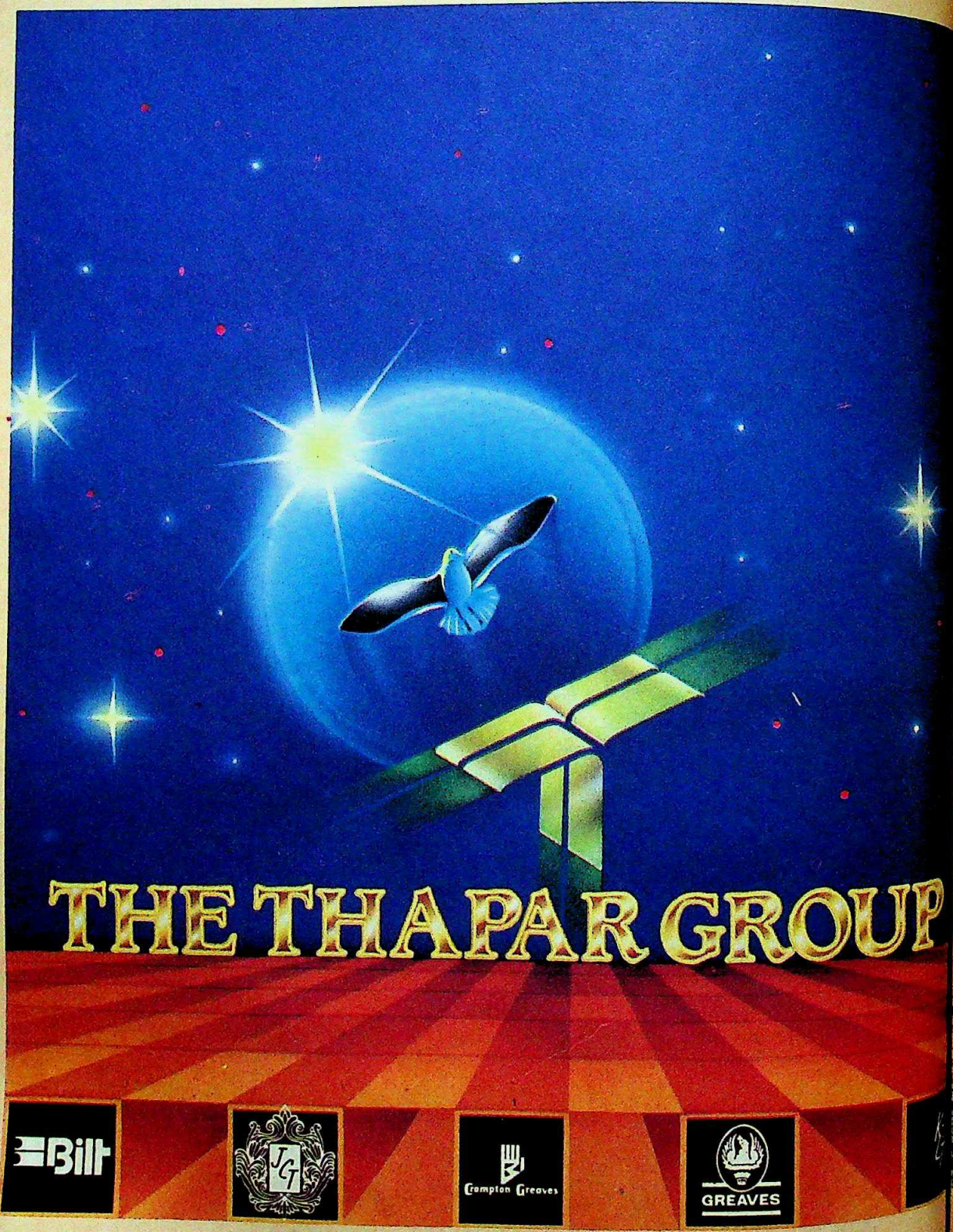
India's third largest Industrial Group wants to tell you four things you never knew.



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India's third largest conglomerate be shy? Surprisingly, and as a result we are often asked four questions.

companies constitute The Thapar Group?

five dynamic companies manufacturing and marketing a range of products. The business activities of Jagatjit Cotton Mills, Ballarpur Industries, Crompton Greaves, Greaves Cotton and Karam Chand Thapar & Bros. need no introduction. To the others.

a look at the list on which this advertisement stands. *The factor is Leadership.*

products does The Thapar Group make?

Thapar Group has often been pioneers with ideas, services and

India's largest and most diverse range of paper to semi-ductors. From fashionable textiles to a wide range of synthetic

India's largest and most diverse range of sophisticated engineering products in the private sector to India's first picture tubes. From basic chemicals to specialities.

diesel engines to hydel power sets. From engineering and consultancy to R&D. From specialised construction to ment.

list is long. *The common factor is Quality.*

What technology does The Thapar Group use?

The Thapar Group has created a resource pool of the world's finest technology relevant to India's needs.

This is the result of inhouse development and collaborations with international giants like Du Pont, Hitachi, Mitsubishi, Zimmer AG., Corning, Westinghouse, Owens-Illinois, Westfalia, Oki Electric, Hawker Siddeley and many many more. *The common factor is the best Technology.*

What are The Thapar Group's plans for the future?

Strategic growth into diverse and familiar industrial areas.

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Other emerging areas of the economy where new projects are envisaged are chemicals, biotechnology, renewable energy, the oil sector and housing.

A promising future awaits these vast projects. Because, at The Thapar Group, *the common factor with new ventures is... Success.*

The Thapar Group

Growth From A Position Of Strength

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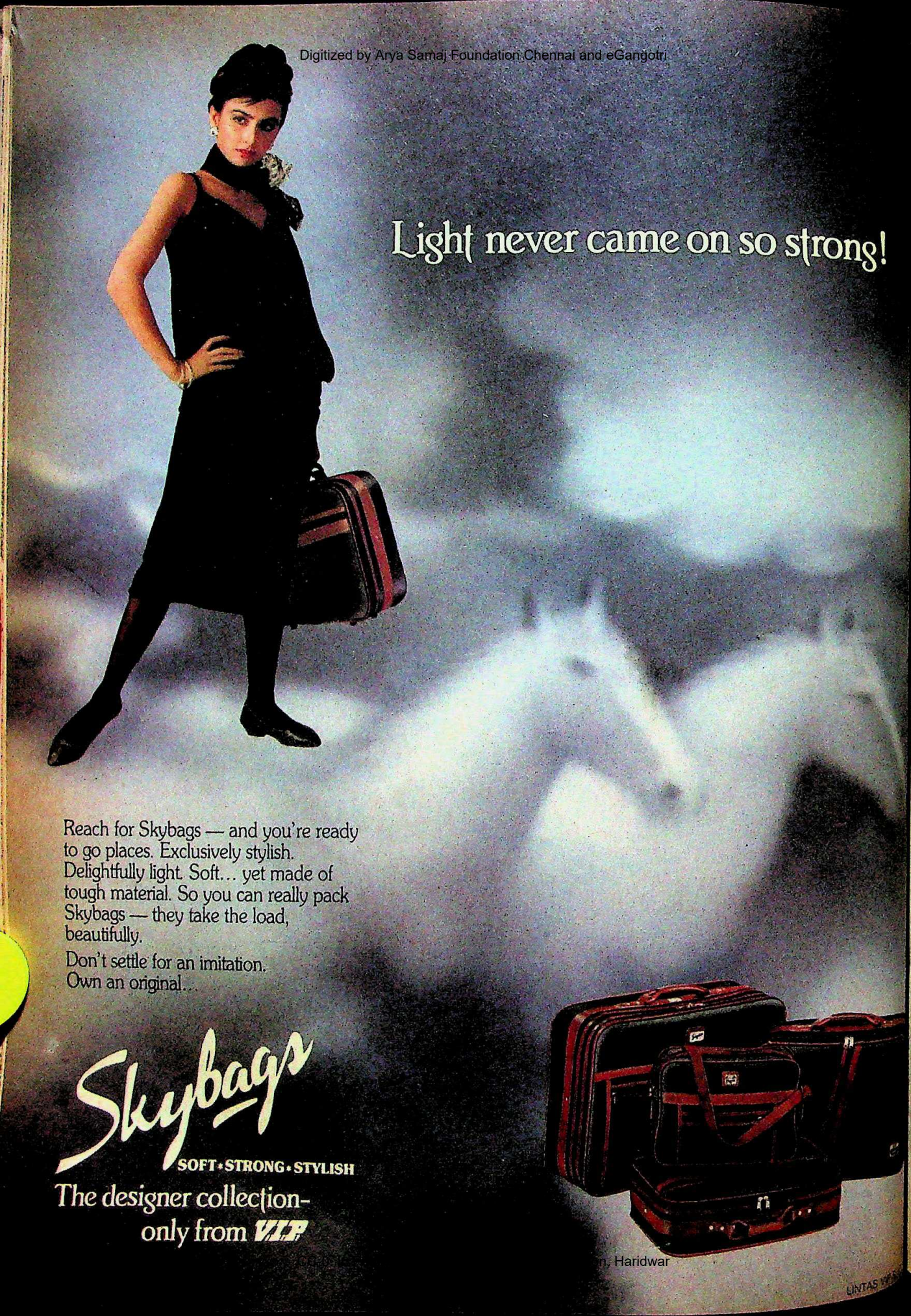

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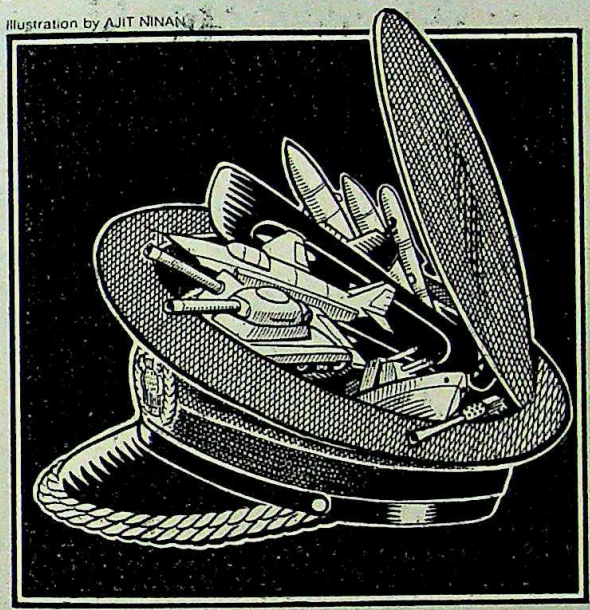
Secrecy in Defence

If war is too serious a matter to be left to the generals—as Clemenceau once said—defence spending is much too expensive a business to be left to the Ministry of Defence, or the Government at large. Or, for that matter, law-breaking commission agents. Whether it is the unfolding scandals relating to the acquisition of German submarines and Swedish guns (and who knows how many other skeletons will soon fall out of forgotten cupboards), or the rapidly escalating scale of defence expenditure (over Rs 12,000 crore this year), there is quite evidently a crying need for a more informed debate on defence matters. There is no need to, nor indeed can the country afford to, continue treating defence as a holy cow.

The Government's self-serving attitude—best illustrated by the prime minister's puerile statement in Parliament recently that anyone who questions the need for the present scale of defence spending is anti-national—must be questioned and changed, for obvious reasons. The sums of money involved are enormous, defence all over the world is an area where slush funds tend to operate, and there is little doubt that India's own defence sector is flabby, reeks of corruption, and is often unmindful of cost, to a point of irrationality.

Illustration by AJIT NINAN



Despite all this, there is next to no informed debate on how effectively the country's money is spent on defence, and whether national security can be ensured with smaller amounts of cash. Parliamentary debates on the subject are cursory—often there are only a handful of members present—and the Defence Ministry's annual report has facts but no real information that helps form conclusions. As for the audit scrutiny by the Comptroller and Auditor General as well as by the Public Accounts Committee, this is hopelessly inadequate and quite obviously ineffective. Even such audit as exists, turns up such staggering evidence of financial waste that it begs for a more comprehensive audit function. But this has so far failed to materialise.

To make matters worse, any and everything concerned with defence is treated as secret. Maps of the country's border areas are classified, though anyone can get far better maps from the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration, on payment of a nominal fee. The Defence Ministry's annual reports say less about arms acquisitions than what is routinely reported in the world's armament journals. And the press gets even partially complete information on major issues only when differences within the Government spill over into the newspapers and magazines because of calculated leaks—with their own distortions.

This is not to dispute the obvious, that there is a great deal about defence that should remain a closely guarded secret. Armament strength, troop positions, equipment orders and several other details should certainly remain confidential. But when the Government is habitually as leaky as a sieve, and when satellites circling in space can keep foreign powers informed of even the minutest military positions, the question rightly needs to be asked as to what some of the secrecy is all about. Defence agents working for foreign suppliers, routinely have with them the kind of technical details and specifications that would not be presented to Parliament in a month of Sundays. Those with a long memory will recall how the official review of the 1962 debacle on the Chinese border was made available to a critical British author, while it has still to be presented to the Parliament in India—though more than two decades have elapsed. The point is obvious: the Government must be able to guard its secrets more effectively, and what need not be kept secret should be presented to the Indian public to make possible a more informed debate on a subject that is evidently of vital national interest.

The German submarine and Swedish gun scandals reinforce the conclusion that matters relating to defence acquisitions cannot be left to faceless bureaucrats and governments that may have an eye on the chance to make some money on the side. All the painstaking explanations about how the Government had expressly forbidden payment of commissions on these deals, only serve to underline two things: one, that such payments were routine in other cases, and two that the Government's conditions were flouted with impunity. That only begs the question of how seriously the conditions were meant to be taken in the first place.

If matters are to improve, without defence secrets becoming subjects of street-corner debate, some kind of mechanism must be worked out for ensuring an independent, autonomous check conducted in a confidential manner. Perhaps, the only way out is to establish a standing commission that will report to the Cabinet, and perhaps to leaders of opposition parties, about wrongful or wasteful spending. Jaswant Singh, the BJP member of the Rajya Sabha, has recently pointed to the Packard Commission in the United States, which reported in three months on how it came about that ashtrays and coffee percolators designed for that country's armed forces cost astronomical sums. A similar commission in India would almost certainly unearth even bigger scandals, and should be a worthwhile exercise to undertake. For the simple point is that, far from such scrutiny being an anti-national step, it is the absence of detailed checking and counter-checking when colossal sums are being spent, that goes against the country's interests.

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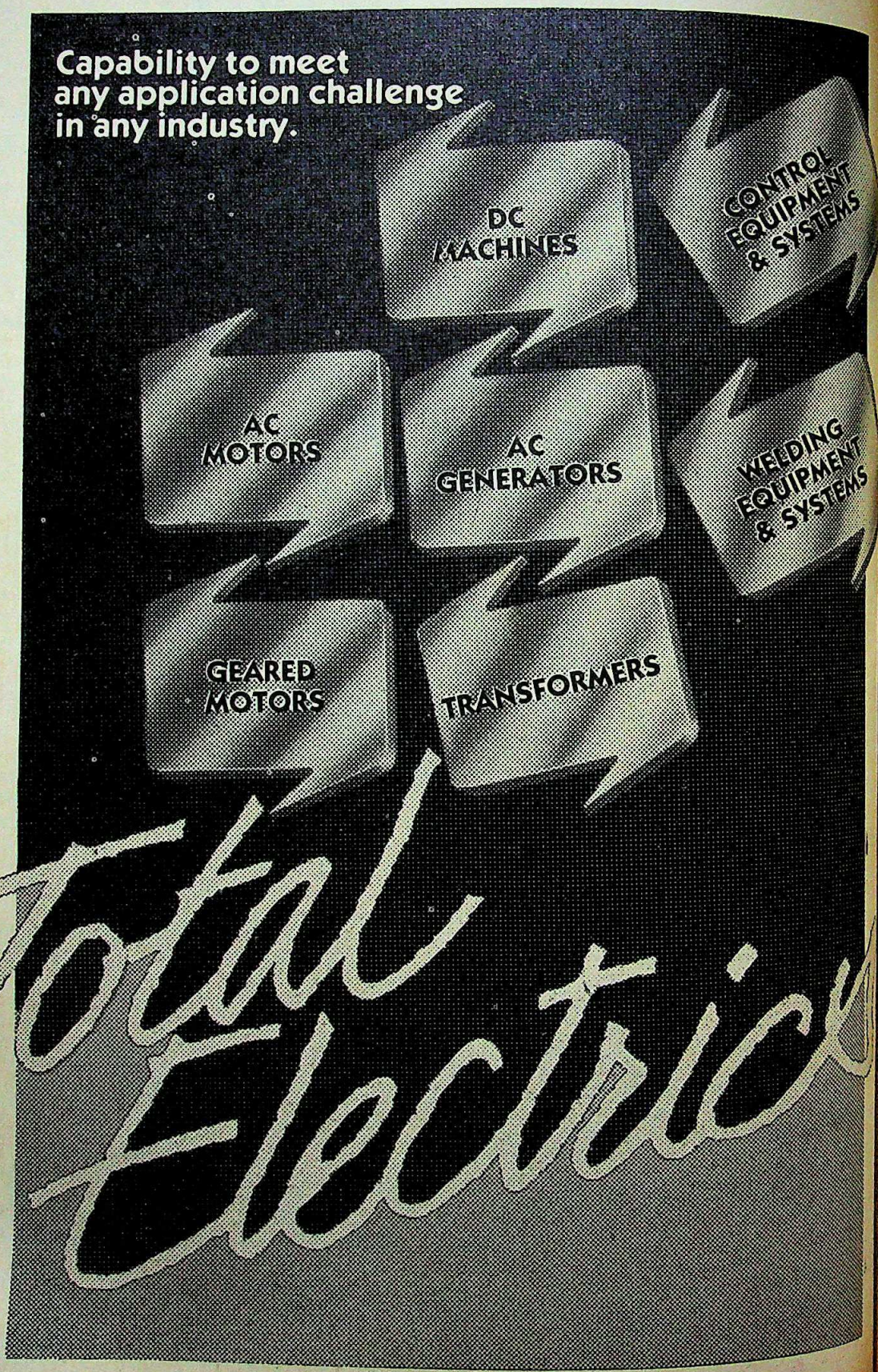
Kirloskar Electric Calibre



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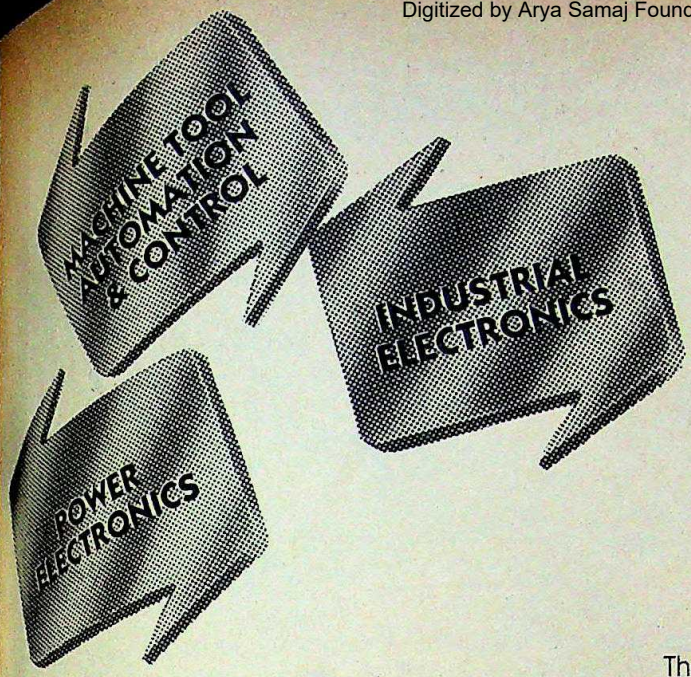

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The Times of India

• *One individual does not matter in the management of a country; my being there or not is not going to make a change.* ■ V.P. SINGH in *The Telegraph*

• *Mr Singh has seen himself in the role of a Savonarola who would burn down Rome rather than allow "sin" to prosper. The vengeance with which he went after the tallest men in Indian industry as finance minister spoke for itself.*
■ GIRILAL JAIN in *The Times of India*

• *Where Mr Gandhi tripped was in his choice of advisers and his belief that through fiats and an ostentatious display of impatience by transferring officials and demoting them, he could change the face of the country overnight.*
■ S. NIHAL SINGH in *The Indian Post*

• *We have been taking a very liberal view in order to promote joint ventures abroad.*
■ BRAHM DUTT, minister of state for finance, replying to queries in the Lok Sabha on why no action was taken against Madhavrao Scindia for violating FERA

• *If anyone was found guilty of violating any* RBI *regulations, they would not be allowed to go scot free.*
■ RAJIV GANDHI intervening in the Rajya Sabha debate the next day, on the issue of loans raised by Reliance.

• *I am not keen on the post (of West Bengal Pradesh Congress(I) chief), but I am not resigning.* ■ PRIYA RANJAN DAS MUNSHI in *The Telegraph*

• *The Government seems to think there is instant diplomacy....There is instant coffee but no instant diplomacy. One day you cannot say everything is right with Pakistan and contradict yourself the next day by saying nothing is right with Pakistan.* ■ A.P. VENKATESWARAN in *Sunday*

• *There is no demand for Khalistan in Punjab. The militants are the victimised party. I felt the same warmth when they hugged me which I feel when my son does it.* ■ SUNIL DUTT in *The Sunday Observer*

• *Amitabh Bachchan went to Allahabad after 30 years to fight an election. I come here (Bihar) 30 times a year.* ■ SHATRUGHAN SINHA in *The Week*

• *As for the character of Sham Lal, personally I hate the man. I never watch myself on* TV. ■ VINOD NAGPAL, actor, on his villainous *Buniyaad* role in *Imprint*

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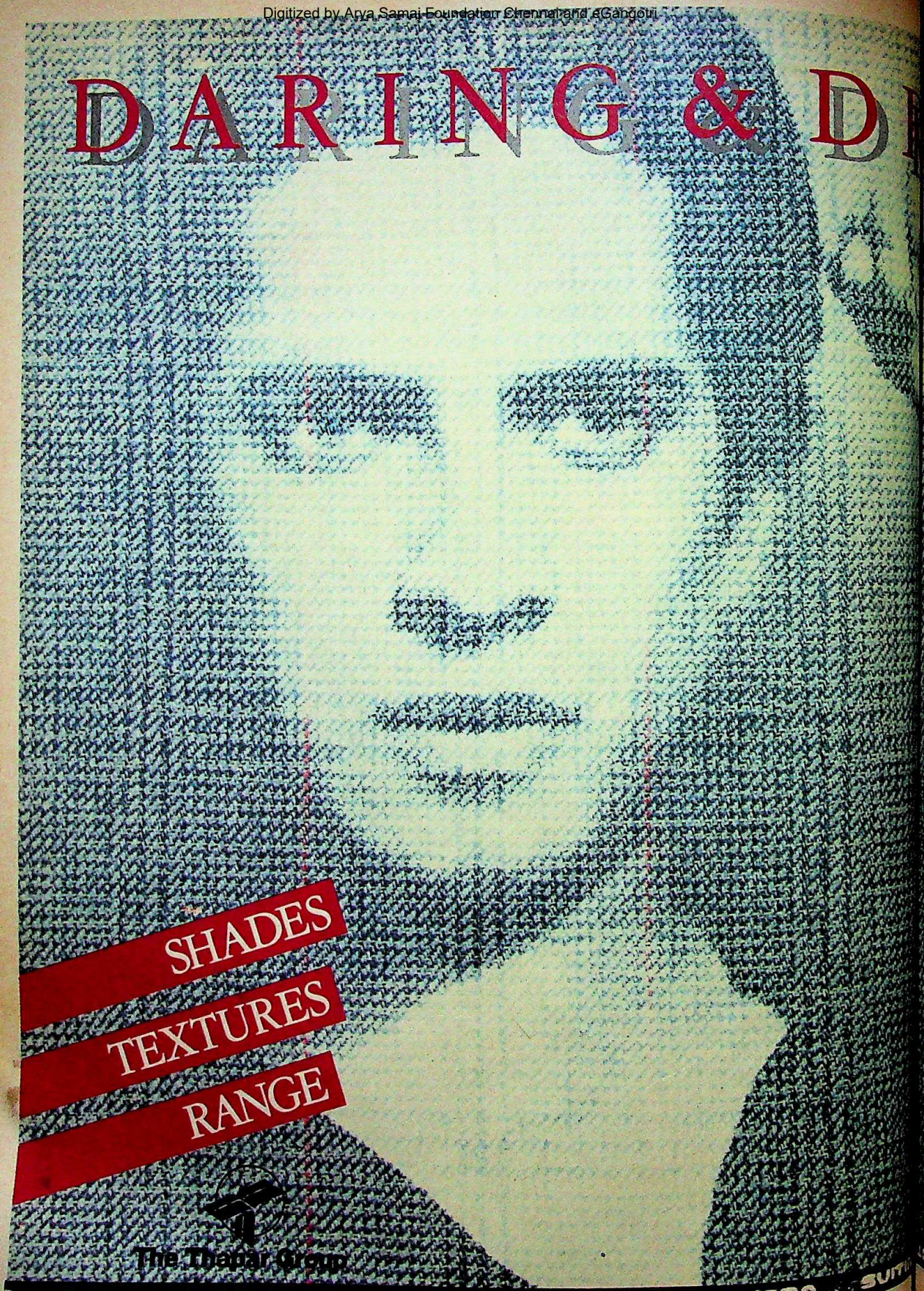

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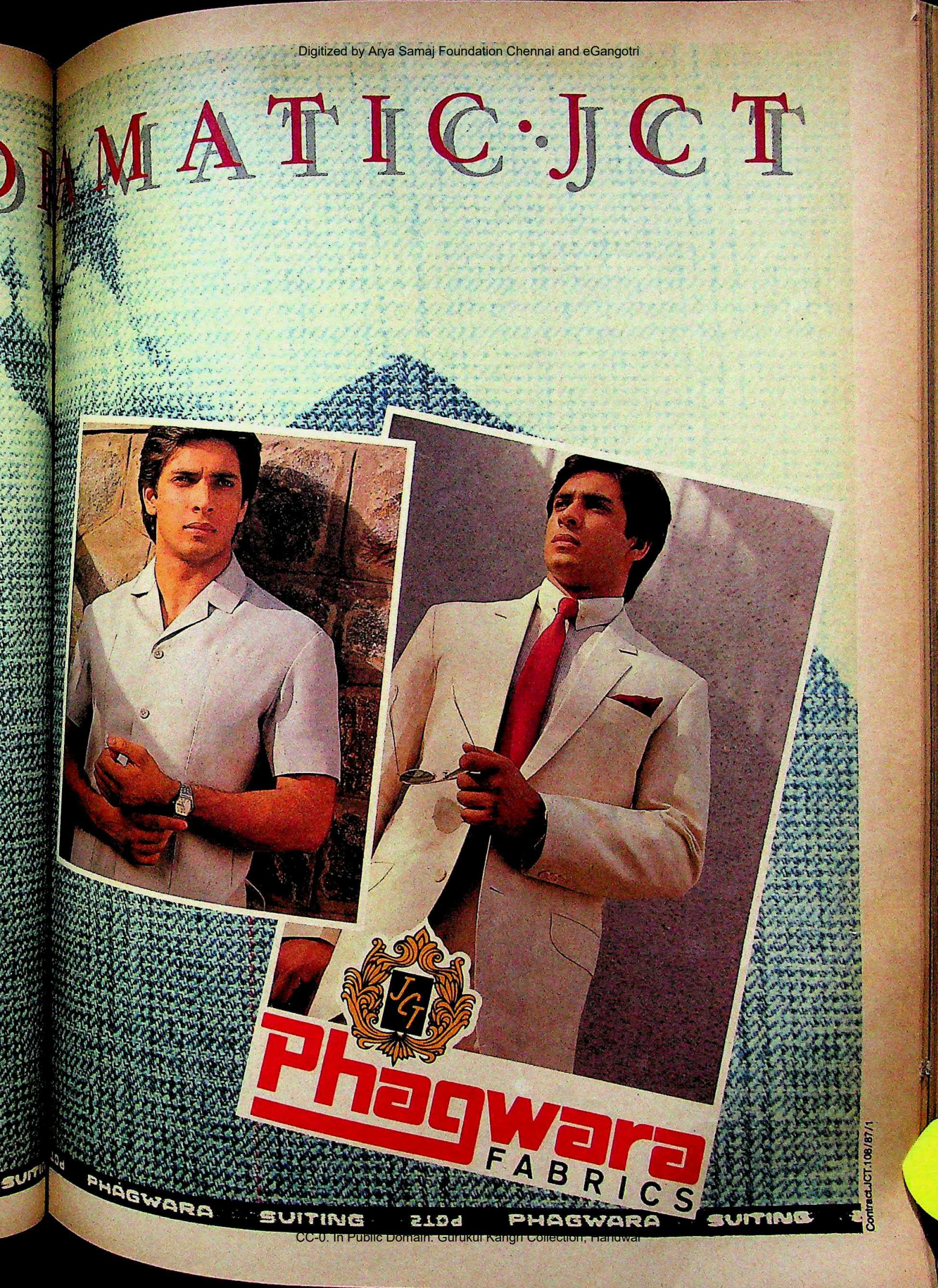

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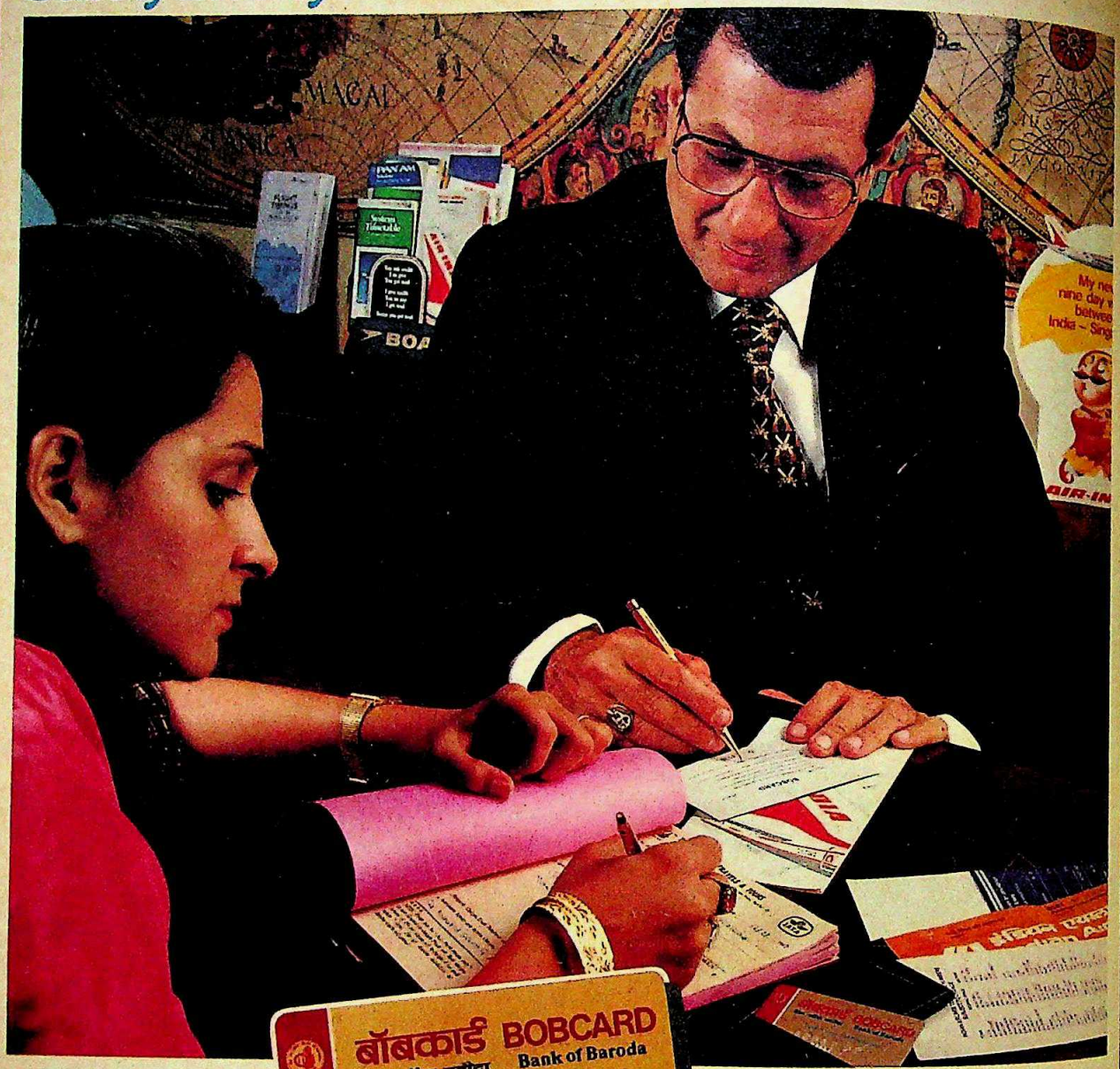
Safetymoney



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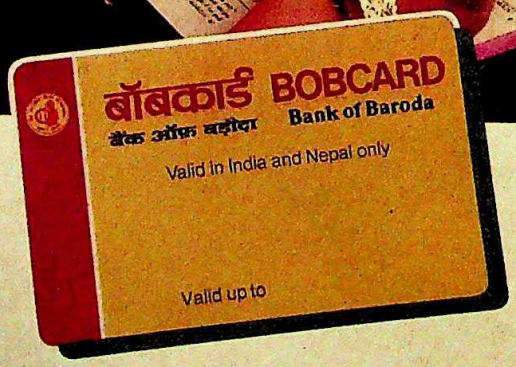

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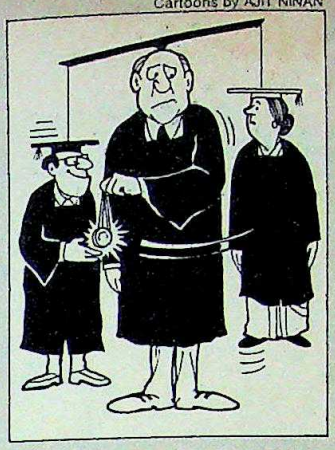
DELAYED GOLD



■ Old is usually considered to be gold. But a former anthropology student would obviously beg to differ. Saini, who had topped in his M.Sc Anthropology exams in 1977 from Delhi University—an achievement that qualified him for a gold medal—found it would have been easier to have obtained the medal by prospecting for the gold.

Though he had topped the results, for a whole year he received no intimation about receiving the medal. In 1978, he staked his claim in an official letter to the university authorities only to be told that another student had been awarded the medal of honour as she had secured the highest marks.

In 1983, following media reports that the Academic Council had revised the results of that particular year, Saini, now a bank officer in Chandigarh, again tried tapping the university, but failed to strike a lucky vein. Disgusted, he finally sent his alma mater a legal notice in February 1986. The threat worked. Within two months, the much-fobbed off man received word that the medal would be withdrawn from the earlier awardee and given to him. At this year's convocation, Saini finally got his record-breaking gold, 10 years after it was due.

DEATH WISH

■ Tradition says one must respect the wishes of the departed. One gentleman, who probably had a trace of Irish ancestry in his family tree, decreed that after his death, those who gathered to mourn him should treat the ceremony as an Irish wake. He wanted a cheerful get-together where toasts would be drunk to his departure from this world. Also, he strictly forbade any rituals beyond a quiet cremation and consigning of the ashes to the Ganga. Failure to comply with his wishes, he pledged, would bring forth divine wrath.

Unfortunately, however, his instructions were ignored and all the usual rituals were strictly followed. On the fourth day after his death, a large number of family and friends gathered at his house for the

Chautha ceremony. Now, whether or not the wrath was divine as the dead man had promised is unprovable. But when the *havan* fire was lit, the rising flames brought down a swarm of angry bees—smoked out of their hive by the fumes—upon the hapless congregation. They were all stung into immediate evasive action and pandemonium reigned supreme. Death, does have its sting.

GUN GAFFE

■ The best-laid plans of mice and men, they say, can go astray, and for the unlikeliest reasons. When a gang of five desperados in Bombay toyed with the idea of pulling off a daring robbery, little did they know what trifle would mar their perfect project.

The gang marched into a commission agent's office brandishing knives and revolvers and demanded all

available money and valuables. They got more than they had bargained for: to their delight, the loot on the premises came to quite a packet. A heap of diamonds worth around Rs 3.5 lakh.

Four of them pushed off with the sparklers, and one stayed behind with a gun to stand guard over the petrified agent to prevent his raising an alarm. The solitary conspirator was obviously daydreaming of the spoils when an alert neighbour decided to spoil things. Hearing the commotion, he barged in and seeing the armed robber, grabbed him in a bearhug. In the process, however, the robber's pistol fell on the floor—and broke into two, as indeed it would, since it was only a harmless but very realistic-looking toy. The police picked up the rest of the gang with the booty intact. Some diamonds are evidently not forever.

ELECTION SPECIAL

■ Nuptial occasions these days are made all the more extravagant by sending lavishly gilded wedding cards—each designed to outdo the other in marking the solemnity of this rite of passage. But there was one eager bride-groom-to-be who decided to announce the happy day in a rather lighter vein.

Inspired by the ongoing state elections in Kerala, Prasad hit upon an innovative idea. On an elegantly printed card with a logo of the zodiac signs of the bridal pair and a newspaper masthead—'The Ramapuram Express News'—blazed the headline: 'Election results out: Prasad elects Sreeja'. The exclusive was by the groom's sister's agency—the Jayashree News Service.

The story described the details of the new merger. In

the Kilimangalthu Madom constituency, Sreeja had been voted to power with a huge majority by the Prasad United Front. She was also nominated the new home minister in the Prasad cabinet. The swearing-in ceremony was scheduled to be held on April 12, 1987, in Ernakulam.

The press snippet added an irreverent detail: any cabinet expansion will be carried out only after 10 months.

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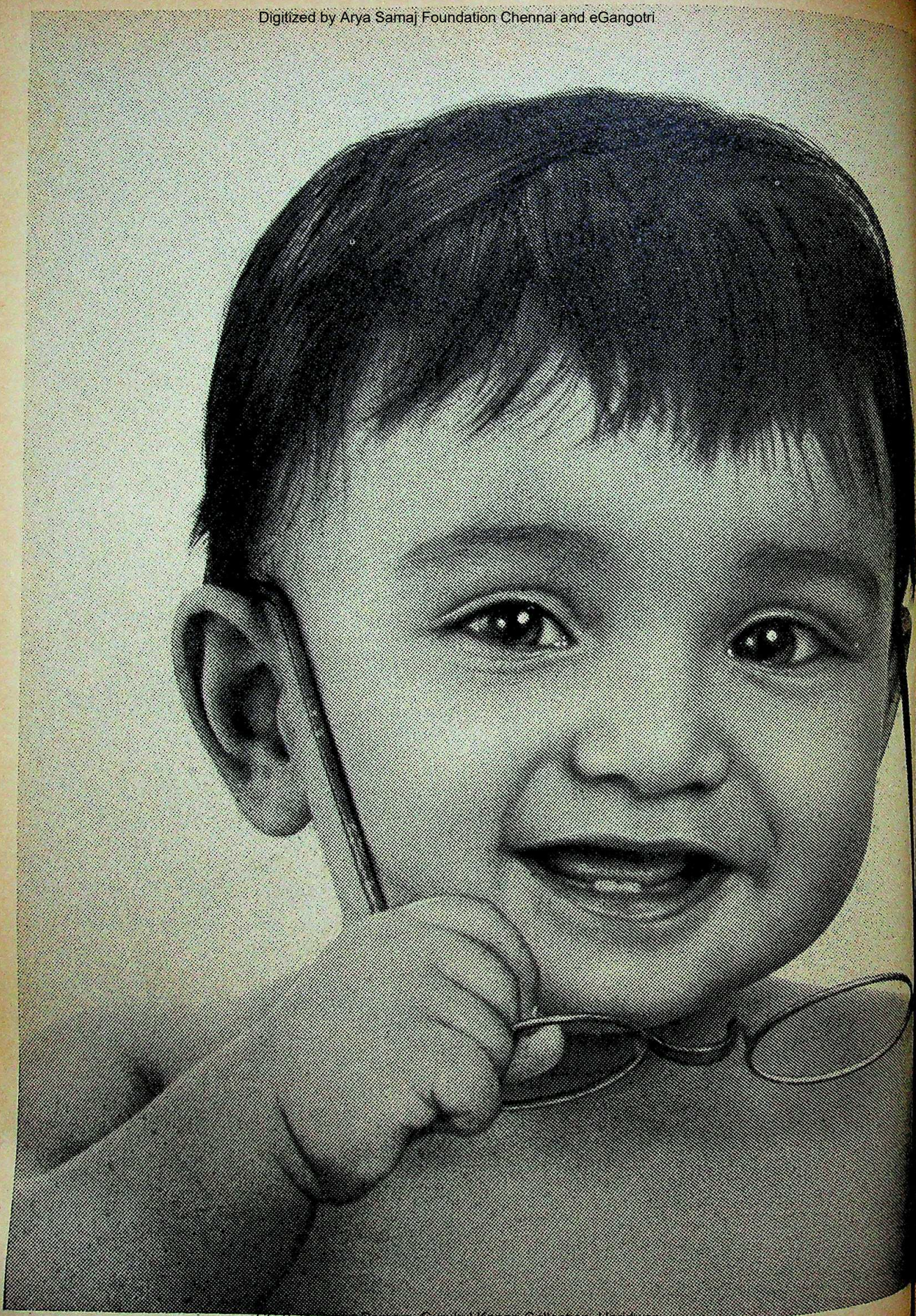

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Crime Fiction

● T.R. Nagrani, known in some circles as the evergreen security buff has bounced back from retirement. And how. The former chief of the National Security Guards—the recently-created black cat commando outfit responsible for the security of VVIPs—retired last year dashing all

speculation that he would be continued in that post for an extended period. Now he's surfaced again in the Prime Minister's Secretariat as the head of a new crisis management group whose function is to prepare police and paramilitary forces for the management of security disasters. In one of his first moves Nagrani has assigned several director-generals of police to prepare for him imaginary scenarios involving terrorist attacks, plane and train hijackings, and firebombings, and asked them how they would handle such disasters. The upshot is that the police officers have now turned into fiction writers. Each is vying with the other to produce thriller-scenarios. Some are relying on their own imagination while others have assigned their children to watch the latest adventure movies on video and gobble up mystery novels, in order to come up with exciting plots for Nagrani's bedtime reading.

Advise and Consent

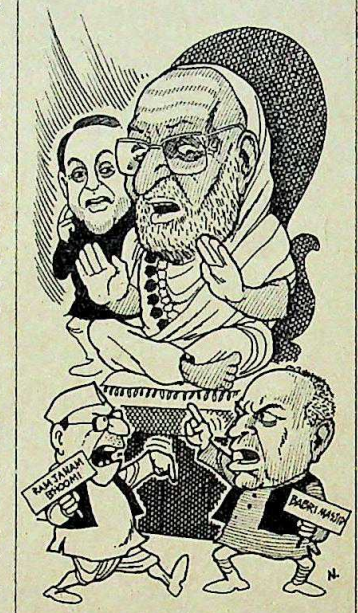
● In the Prime Minister's Secretariat there were parliamentary secretaries. Then there were high-powered politicos—dons who acted as political and administrative shock absorbers. Then there were advisory committees. These set-ups represented several experiments conducted by Rajiv Gandhi on how to make the Government work faster, and effectively implement his decisions. But each fell by the wayside. Then was born the idea of appointing super-secretaries—a brains trust of IAS bureaucrats who could cut through red tape and enforce inter-departmental decisions, answering directly to Rajiv. But the idea never got off the ground because of tremendous resistance from the entrenched bureaucracy. Enter now, advisors. According to plans now under way every ministry and gov-

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

ernment department will sport an "advisor to the prime minister". The advisors will be chosen from among senior bureaucrats about to retire, and they will be given the rank of ministers of state.

Ascetic Arbiter

● Syed Shahabuddin, the fiery Muslim leader who is associated with the Babri Masjid Action Committee took his case before a most unlikely forum last fortnight—Jagadguru Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram. He went there at the suggestion of Subramanyam Swamy, the Lok Dal MP,



who also accompanied Shahabuddin to the Madras ashram of the venerated Hindu leader. As luck would have it, the Shankaracharya was not in one of the periods of his prolonged silences. In any case, it was Shahabuddin who did most of the talking—reverentially and with great emotion, often breaking into tears as he pleaded his version of the Ramjanmabhoomi - Babri Masjid controversy which has once again become a surcharged communal issue. The Shankaracharya and his disciples heard the Muslim leader out patiently as they did another representative who argued on the opposing end of the Ramjanmabhoomi argument and then asked for a detailed report on the controversy, agreeing that communal tensions should not be exacerbated. While the Centre seems lost for an answer to this vexing religious problem, the Shankaracharya might soon emerge as a final arbiter.

Italian Connection

● According to senior army sources, under an agreement that was recently signed with the Italian Government, approximately 100 Indian army officers are being sent to Italy to undergo training in anti-terrorist operations. These officers will then form the nucleus of a SAS-type battalion that will in turn train other army personnel. Italy has been chosen because of its long experience with terrorist groups like the Red Brigades, and because of its success in countering terrorism in the country. At one time, the Indian Government was considering an informal proposal from the Israelis to train army personnel in that country for similar purposes. Israel maintains the most effective anti-terrorism operation in the world. But even though the Government has, in the past, used Israeli advice for anti-

hijacking and airport security measures, the concept of a full-fledged Indian force training there would be international political dynamite, capable of blowing Indo-Arab relations through the roof.

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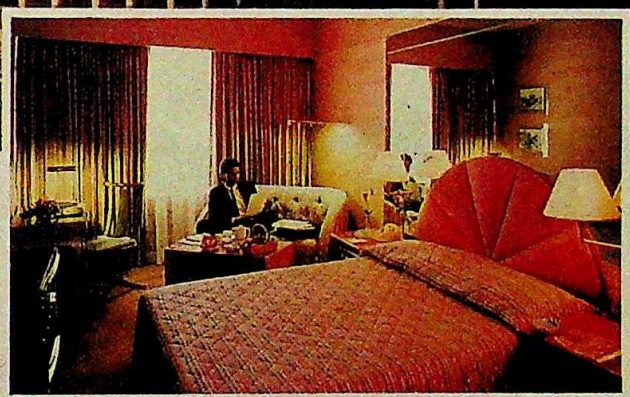

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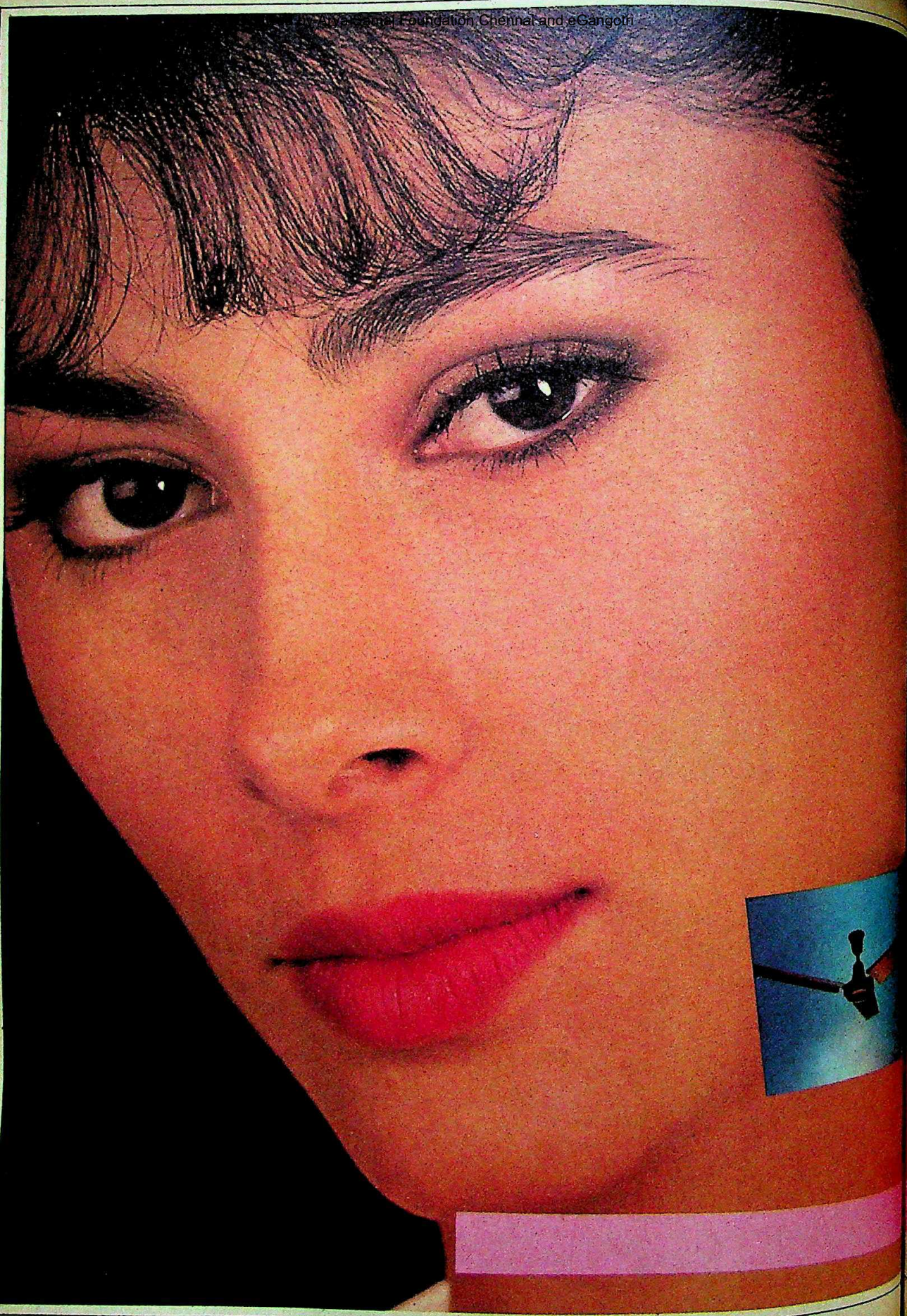

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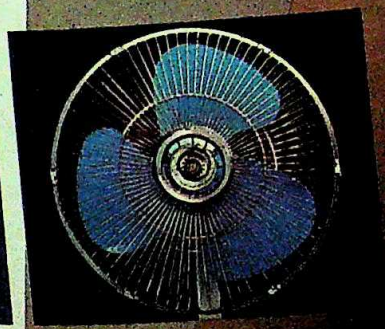

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CHICKEN WITH SOUFFLE TOPPING
(Serves about 5)

1 small chicken — boiled, boned and diced; 2 large capsicums — sliced; 1 medium onion — chopped; 150 gm cabbage — shredded; 6 cloves garlic — crushed; ½ tbsp oil; ½ tsp salt; 150 gm Amul Cheese — grated; 4 large eggs; 1 tbsp green coriander — chopped; 3 green chillies — chopped.

In a large pan saute garlic in oil. Add onions and cook till light brown, add other ingredients except cheese and eggs. Fry till vegetables are cooked but still crisp. Remove to a deep ovenproof dish. Separate the eggs. Lightly beat the yolks. Beat egg whites into stiff peaks with a little salt. Mix yolks with whites. Pour over the chicken vegetable mixture. Sprinkle grated cheese. Bake in a hot oven (200°C, Gas 6) for about half an hour till eggs set. Serve with garlic bread.

AMUL CHEESE MALAI KOFTAS
(Makes 20)

KOFTAS: 4 potatoes — boiled, peeled and mashed; 3 tbsp flour; 100 gm Amul Cheese — grated; 1 onion — chopped and mixed together with 3 green chillies and small bunch coriander; 4 tbsp bread crumbs; fat for deep frying.

GRAVY: 2 onions — grated; 2 red chillies — ground to a paste; 50 gm cashewnuts; 4-6 tbsp malai or cream; 50 gm Amul Butter; 30 gm Amul Cheese — grated.

To make koftas, blend mashed potatoes, cheese and flour till smooth. Take portions of this mixture, the size of a lemon and flatten it on your palm. Place a little of the chopped onion, chilli, coriander mixture and shape into a ball. Repeat with the rest. Roll in bread crumbs and deep-fry till golden brown.

For gravy, melt butter. Fry onion till brown. Add cashewnuts and chilli paste and fry again. Add sufficient water and boil to make a thick gravy. Add cream and koftas at the time of serving. Top with grated Amul Cheese and green coriander. Serve hot with parathas.

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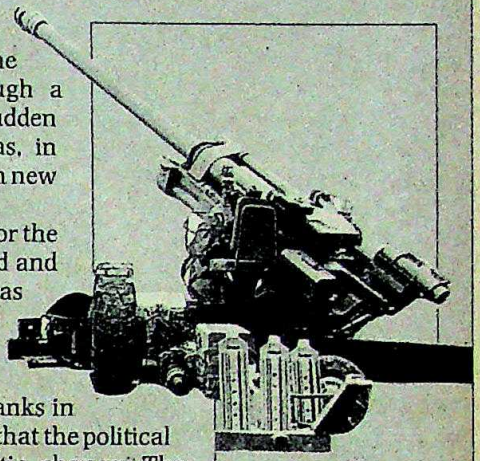
The Bofors Blast

THE smoking gun wreathed the fortnight that was in swirling clouds of suspicion. For the Government, the conspiracy of charges was like sleep-walking through a minefield. For the country, the fortnight's happenings raised sudden and serious questions about stability. The Bofors blast was, in essence, a rude realisation that the country had become high on new wine fermented in old bottles, that a mandate was in peril.

The Congress(I) Working Committee (CWC), congregating for the first time in two years, unearthed the ubiquitous foreign hand and termed it a conspiracy. But almost overnight, credibility was commanding a greater price.

In that context, last fortnight resembled nothing more than a loaded gun. The sudden tightening of political reflexes—and the equally sudden closing of ranks in the ruling party—was an indication that the political scenario had undergone a dramatic change. The future seemed to be draped in a nervous question mark.

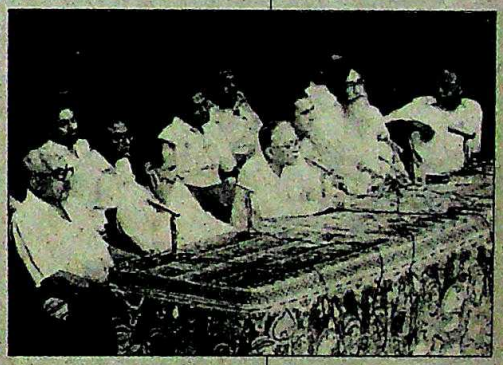


The Bofors blast wreathed the fortnight in swirling clouds of suspicion.

The CWC meeting termed it a conspiracy.

In direct consequence, other forces were stockpiling their ammunition. For the first time since 1979, questions were raised about the President's constitutional ability to dismiss a government. That the question was being most vociferously asked by ruling party members signified that the threat was not imaginary. Ironically enough, it was during the fortnight that the ruling party and the Opposition started short-listing the names of the next presidential candidate—an issue that President Zail Singh has elevated to a new importance.

On another front, the chief ministers of six Opposition-ruled states met in New Delhi to evolve a joint strategy against the Congress(I) and cobble together an alternative to the Rajiv Gandhi Government. West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, fresh from his electoral triumph, lent the conclave an unusually aggressive mien. It was yet another indication that the political winds were starting to blow in an uncertain direction.



The non-Congress(I) chief ministers met to cobble a national alternative.

There were added pressures that appeared on more distant horizons. A bomb blast in Colombo and subsequent reprisals by the Sri Lankan Government seriously impaired India's efforts to broker a negotiated settlement on the ethnic crisis and injected a new hostility into the relationship. Of much greater concern was the sabre-rattling by yet another neighbour as Beijing accused India of aggressive design and both sides moved forces closer to the border. For the second time in three months, the drums of war added an ominous beat to the existing cacophony.

It was pressure of a more localised kind that led Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde to finally succumb to representational demands and expand his Cabinet to gargantuan proportions, leading the Opposition to quickly label it an "airbus cabinet". Just how many of the ministers would in fact be mere passengers was a wide-bodied question.

The end of Ribeiro's tenure leaves a dangerous vacuum.

In Punjab, the tenure of no-nonsense police chief Julio Ribeiro was coming to an end, leaving a dangerous vacuum that will be almost impossible to fill. The Punjab crisis has also focused national attention on perhaps the most vital state election in recent memory—in Haryana—which will be the key test for the continued survival of the Rajiv Gandhi Government. The sudden switch by master survivor Hardwari Lal from the Congress(I) to one of the Lok Dal factions, ostensibly due to the party's new image, seemed to indicate that the problems of the ruling party may be just beginning.

—DILIP BOBB

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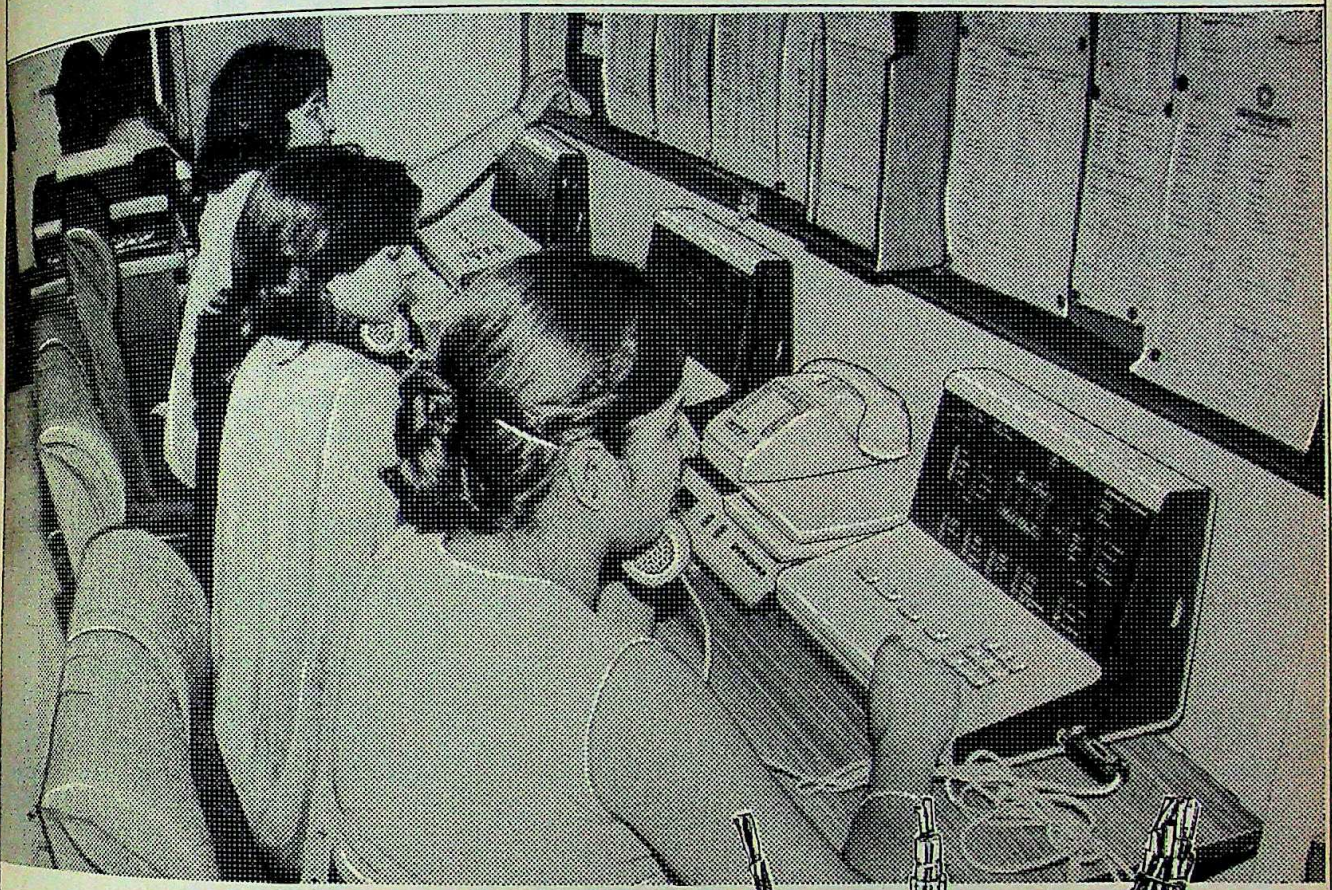

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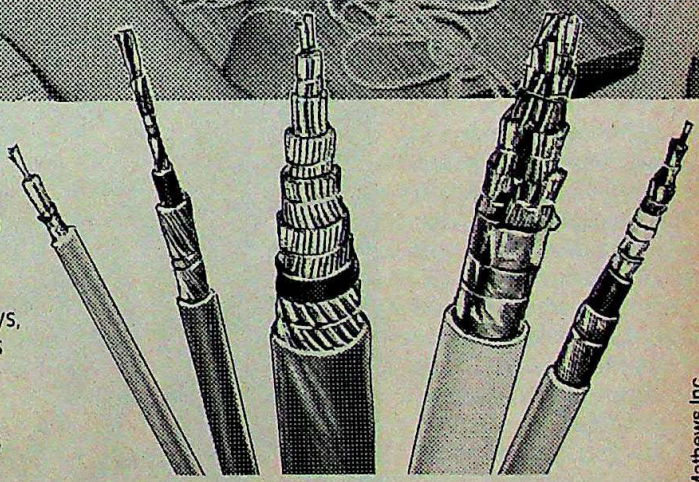

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DEFENCE DEALS

BOFORS AND AFTER

THE Bofors blast is destined to echo resoundingly down the darker avenues of contemporary Indian history. Almost as damaging as the allegations themselves, was the inept manner in which the Government bungled its handling of the affair in Parliament. Coming, as it did, on the heels of the Fairfax affair, the submarine scandal and the subsequent resignation of defence minister V.P. Singh, the Bofors issue is a potential time-bomb. Apart from putting in grave jeopardy the credibility of the Government, it has created a palpable feeling of paranoia within the ruling party regarding the intentions of President Zail Singh. That, in turn, threatens to strain the tautly-stretched political fabric of the country. Bofors and after, could prove to be the already crisis-ridden Rajiv Gandhi Government's severest test yet.

The guns spell money's ultimate reason.
—Stephen Spender

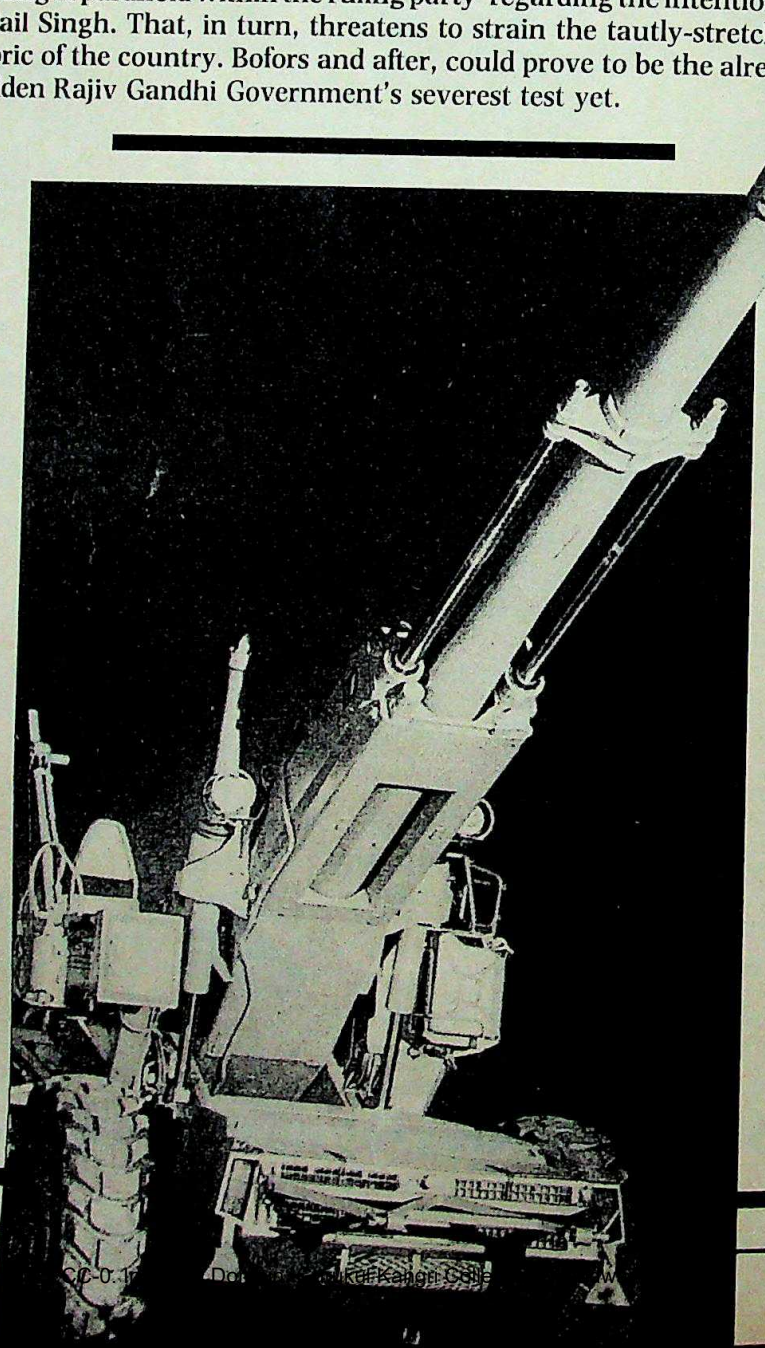
If one offers money to a government to influence it, that is corruption. But if someone receives money for services rendered afterwards, that is a commission.
—Adnan Khashoggi (1976)

The catchy advertisement for the Bofors 155mm howitzer calls it "the eternal weapon". For South Block, nothing could have been more ironic. Exactly a year after India signed the Rs 1,705-crore deal for the Swedish Bofors 155 mm FH-77B howitzer, it has literally become a loaded gun, pointed at the heart of the Rajiv Gandhi Government.

Last fortnight's sensational disclosures regarding alleged kickbacks to key people involved in the Bofors deal could not have come at a worse moment for the ruling party. Since the beginning of the year, it has plunged itself into one crisis after another. The forced resignation of a popular foreign secretary, the unnecessary tension on the Pakistan border and the sordid treatment of the President, were all issues that called into serious question the credibility and image of a government that had promised much and seemed to be delivering the opposite.

Then came, in swift succession, the Fairfax issue, followed by V.P. Singh's probe into the submarine deal which ultimately led to the resignation of the star performer in the Rajiv Gandhi Government. And now, just when the fallout from the V.P. Singh affair was showing signs of abating, a besieged government has been hit with the Bofors scandal.

The Bofors disclosures were made by the National Swedish Radio,



The Bofors howitzer: sharp recoil

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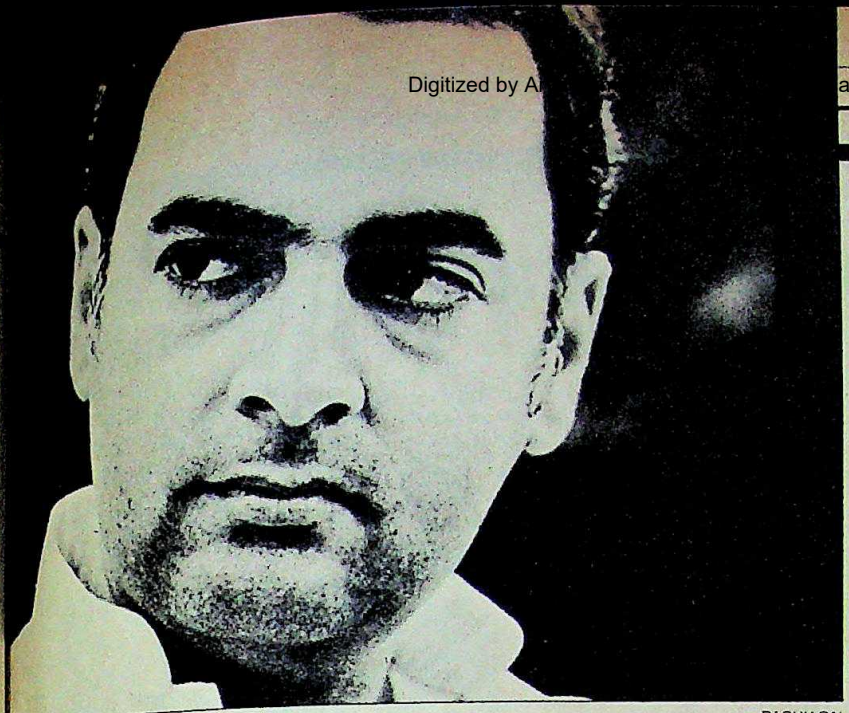

RAGHU RAI

which charged that payments worth 33 million Swedish kroner (approximately Rs 6.6 crore) had been made to an Indian source (*see box*). According to the radio station's current affairs programme *Dagens Eko* (Daily Echo)—29.5 million kroner was paid in three payments made in November 1986 and a fourth payment of 2.5 million kroner was made in December 1986, into four Swiss bank accounts. The code name for the transfers was "Lotus".

But more damaging than the allegations themselves, was the timing and the inept manner in which the Government handled the entire affair—a repeat of its clumsy and contradictory management of the probe V.P. Singh ordered into the submarine deal which led, ultimately, to his resignation (*see box, page 44*). After a hastily-summoned, unscheduled meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, the Government issued a statement terming the Bofors allegation as "one more link in the chain of denigration and destabilisation of our political system". The Congress Working Committee dredged up a lengthy and even more convoluted thesis on the "sinister move by the forces of imperialism... through a calculated campaign of calumny", and blamed the ubiquitous "foreign hand" for what it termed a conspiracy against the present government and its leader.

The externalising of the issue found few buyers, mainly because the Government found itself suddenly short of one vital ingredient—credibility. The snowballing effect of the last few weeks has taken a far heavier toll than the leadership's face-saving statements attempt to indicate. Rajiv's most potent public weapon—his reputation of Mr Clean—

Despite the Government's face-saving statements, Rajiv's reputation as Mr Clean is in serious jeopardy.

was in serious jeopardy, if not lost forever. And, the partymen's attempts to rally around their leader only served to emphasise their new-found insecurity—and their paranoia.

WHAT was perhaps most damaging was the ruling party's performance in Parliament. There were prolonged populist statements by the leadership. Rajiv himself went out of his way to insist that "nobody would be spared", that the Government would leave no stone unturned in its efforts to unearth any wrongdoing in the Bofors affair. Minister of State for Defence Arun Singh, in a performance worthy of a Mark Antony, declared: "Hang us if we are found guilty, but allow us to work." It was emphasised that Rajiv had extracted a pledge from the late Swedish premier, Olof Palme, that no middlemen would be involved, and that he had tried to place a midnight call to his Swedish counterpart to clear up the charges.

But that call was described by Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson as a "courtesy call". Carlsson also clarified that Palme had simply conveyed to Rajiv assurances received from Bofors about no middlemen being involved, and that there were no documents on this. The formal request last fortnight, for a confirmation of the absence of middlemen, went through Bhupatray Oza, the Indian ambassador in Stockholm. Oza told INDIA TODAY at his residence in one of Stockholm's exclusive quarters, Villagatan: "We have had a report from Bofors which I have forwarded to Delhi. That is strictly unofficial. We now await the official response from the Swedish Government which has been requested by the Indian Government. I do not think any names or details are going to be revealed in Delhi, based on the initial Bofors report."

But shortly after this, Rajiv Gandhi told an army commanders' conference that everything was in the clear. According to the official press note, he said: "Sweden has confirmed that there were no middlemen and no money was paid in Swiss banks." When the matter figured in Parliament, Rajiv tied himself further in knots by reiterating that Sweden had recently confirmed the absence of middlemen, but then saying contradictorily: "So far, we have got no specific information from the Swedish Government....We must give them a chance to give us an answer and a response."

Even as Rajiv said this to Parliament, the Swedish Government confirmed that no inquiry had been ordered till then. The inquiry was finally announced a day later, on April 29. Before that, Bofors had declared: "No such bribes or commissions have been paid." Said Director of Information Per Mossberg: "Bofors is fully prepared to offer all clarifications if requested by the Swedish Government, which could then be relayed to the Indian authorities."

Added Lars-Olof Lindgreen, political adviser in the Swedish Trade Department: "It is difficult for us to know all the nuances of the deal and what transpired in the negotiations between Bofors and Indian officials. These are done strictly between Bofors and the Indian Government. We do not come into the picture. But now that the Indian Government has requested clarifications, we have asked Bofors for details." The "clarifications" asked for were presumably the ones requested by Ambassador Oza.

In the heated Parliament debates that followed the revelations, the Government stuck to its guns in insisting that no middlemen had been used. But by not

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SVERIGE RADIO

"We have all the evidence"

IT was a spectacular scoop for a national radio station which, barely a year ago, completely missed Sweden's most sensational story in decades. The gunning down of Olof Palme took place just before midnight. Sverige Radio had closed business for the night at 11 p.m. Today, the station never sleeps. It now broadcasts 24 hours with hourly bulletins and news analyses. A majority of its 90-member editorial team, which includes 13 foreign correspondents, is preoccupied with the Palme murder probe and the ongoing Bofors investigations.

Since the scoop about Bofors' bribes to Indian sources in the billion-dollar artillery deal, life has changed for the reporters at the Dagens Eko programme newsroom. Besieged with calls from the international media and quoted around the world, they now seem to have adapted to their minor celebrity status.

The reporter who broke the story is a regular freelancer. Magnus Nilsson, 32, is an unassuming reporter who specialises in environmental issues. But it was his contacts who provided evidence of transfers from the Bofors' bank—The Skandinvinska Enskilada Banken—to the Suisse Bank Corporation. Much of the initial credit for breaking the story, undeservedly in hindsight, went to the radio's Hong Kong-based correspondent Rolf Proseryd, who had arrived in New Delhi. What Proseryd did was to provide background information on the Fairfax investigations, the HDW submarine contract and defence minister V.P. Singh's resignation. The damaging allegations were broadcast in Stockholm. Besides Nilsson, others who worked on the story included Jan Mosander and Borje Remdahl, specialist on foreign news.

Most people in Stockholm tended to believe the radio station's story, not only because it is respected for its editorial integrity but as Bofors itself is caught in a maze of allegations and is less believable.

The Swedish Broadcasting Group is owned by several trade unions, Swedish press organisations and the Federation of Swedish Employers. It has four wings—one of which is the National Swedish Radio. The others are Swedish Television, Swedish Local Radio and Swedish Educational Radio. The National Radio thus holds a monopoly throughout the land. Its investigative team on Bofors is determined to go ahead with more disclosures, including those relating to the Indian deal. In their bustling editorial office, located in a sprawling building in an eastern suburb of Stockholm, Borje Remdahl and Magnus Nilsson, who triggered off the current controversy, spoke to INDIA TODAY*'s London Correspondent* RAMESH CHANDRAN. *Excerpts:*

Q. *Are you still positive that payments have been made to Indian contacts in Swiss accounts relating to the Bofors 155 mm gun deal?*

A. We are absolutely positive—one hundred per cent.

Q. *In what form is this evidence?*

A. We can assure you it is documentary evidence.

Q. *Do you have account numbers, dates and precise amounts involved in these transfers to the Suisse Bank Corporation?*

A. Yes. We have all of this.

Q. *And they are directly connected to the Indian deal?*

A. Absolutely. And we know it was paid to Indian contacts.

Q. *But you do not know to whom. Your tracks stop at this Swiss bank.*

A. We do not have any names yet. Yes—it is accurate to say for the moment the trail stops in Switzerland.

Q. *Why don't you ask this mysterious source to reveal these names to you?*

A. We cannot do anything at this stage without seriously compromising our sources. Our main task in these hard times is to protect our sources. They will be most useful in the future.

Q. *You have repeatedly mentioned "bribes". These could be commissions to an agent for his support....*

A. Our sources insist they are nothing but bribes. In any case, even if they were simple commissions, why pay them into secret Swiss bank accounts? There is a lot of semantics around this—bribes, commissions, provisions.

Q. *Bofors denies your allegations. While you insist you have evidence of bribes having been paid to Indians, officials in India say they had been assured by Sweden that no middlemen would be involved in the gun deal.*

A. OBJORNSTROM

Borje Remdahl

Magnus Nilsson

"We can't understand why our government is not exerting enough pressure on Bofors about these payments.... Something is very rotten here and in the Indian gun deal. The Government can easily find out."

A. That is precisely what we would like to know. For you in India, the big story is who received the bribes—politicians or agents. For us in Sweden, the crux of the issue is that Olof Palme assured Rajiv Gandhi in the autumn of 1985 that no intermediaries would be involved in this deal. Yet, payments were made to contacts abroad.

Q. *Are you implying that someone in your government misled Olof Palme?*

A. It is now for all of us to find out if Bofors lied to Mr Palme. Or did Mr Palme give assurances to Rajiv Gandhi which were not true? We believe that Olof Palme carried a certain weight when it

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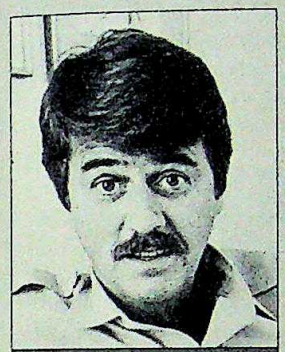
came to clinching this deal. He wanted this deal to go through.

Q. Are you suggesting that Palme knew something more than what he submitted?

A. Carl Johan Aberg, the under-secretary of state for foreign trade, has said that he had documented assurances Palme received from Bofors regarding these middlemen, and we want him to produce those documents. Aberg has been consistently refusing to talk to us.

Q. What assurances did Rajiv Gandhi get from Palme?

A. We can't say for sure—they could be verbal, maybe written. The Indian ambassador here has asked for clarifications from the Swedish Government. Why can't these documents which Aberg possesses be produced?


Rolf Proseryd

Q. Swedish officials say they have little knowledge about the precise nature of the deal since much of the negotiations were between Bofors and the Indian Government.

A. Well, that's very convenient. They now don't want to get involved at all. But Mr Palme himself was deeply involved in the Indian deal. He was under pressure to do something regarding unemployment in a very depressed area in Sweden. In the late '70s, Bofors had deep problems. And the huge Indian deal certainly saved the company. "Mr Clean" entered office determined to wipe out corruption. And his good friend Palme decided to help him. But now, perhaps, it seems to have been a disservice.

Q. This code-name "Lotus" referred to one payment. Whose name was it?

A. The code referred to one payment. We believe that "Lotus" was the name given by Bofors. We did not invent it.

Q. What names from the Indian side have figured in the investigations so far?

A. There was Rao, Chadha. Our London correspondent spoke to G.P. Hinduja. He denied all involvement.

Q. The Indian Ambassador B. Oza visited your offices. What transpired?

A. He wanted clarifications if we had mentioned names of Indians or implicated Indian politicians. We denied that we had done so at any stage. We cleared up that misunderstanding.

Q. The editors gave him some sort of protest note regarding your correspondent in New Delhi.

A. Yes. It was the treatment meted out to Rolf Proseryd. He was followed by four policemen all the time. He was summoned several times by the foreign office. Proseryd was asked to provide all documents concerning the Bofors story that he had in his possession. They did not seem to realise that he had nothing to do with our original story.

Q. What puzzles many people is the timing of your story. It seemed to break out precisely when the pressure was maximum on the Rajiv Gandhi Government.

A. We can only assure you that the timing was a pure coincidence. Since the investigations on Bofors began in the Swedish media, we had been planning to take a closer look at the Indian deal. This evidence popped up unexpectedly. It certainly was not part of some overall strategy.

Q. Would you say your radio station is free from outside influence and pressure?

A. We consider ourselves one hundred per cent independent and we enjoy complete editorial freedom. We experience no such outside pressures.

Q. Does Bofors not have the option to sue the National Swedish Radio for defamation and force you to provide your evidence in court?

A. We don't believe they can. First, it is an offence under Swedish law to force a journalist to reveal his source. In any case, we know we are right when we say that middlemen were paid in the Indian deal. What we cannot understand is why the Swedish Government is not exerting enough pressure on Bofors about these payments. The Government can easily find out if these have been paid. For instance, they can order the head of our Central Bank to check with the bank which made these transfers to secret Swiss accounts. Indeed, something is very rotten here and in the Indian gun deal.

ordering a probe immediately—as V.P. Singh had done in the case of the submarine deal—the Government clearly lost the initiative. Nor did it make the obvious and specific request that the Swedish Government inquire from the Central Bank in Stockholm, whether the alleged payments were made to Swiss accounts. Under Swedish law, the Central Bank would have the authority and obligation to confirm or deny the radio station's allegations. Although the Government was keen to give the impression that it was as eager as anyone else to get to the truth of the matter, the effort didn't seem fully convincing. Perhaps the Government did not want to be surprised by embarrassing disclosures from agencies outside its control.

One ostensible reason why the Government has mismanaged the affair, was the initial misunderstanding over the actual words used in the Swedish radio's allegation. The first reports on the radio broadcast were interpreted as the payments having been made to "Indian politicians". The radio emphatically denied having made this allegation. In interviews to INDIA TODAY last week, the journalists involved in the investigation insisted that they had documentary evidence to stand by their story that the money was paid to Indian "contacts", including bank account numbers, dates and the amounts transferred from the Bofors' bank to the Suisse Bank Corporation. They claimed that they were "100 per cent positive that this money was paid as part of the Bofors deal with India". They also insisted that the only reason they were not releasing additional information was because it would endanger their main source for the story. Last week, the station stated that they would be prepared to give the information to a third party acceptable to them as well as the Indian Government, so as to ensure that their sources were protected.

So far, the Indian Government has been given two names by the Swedish journalists who are involved in the story. One is Win Chadha, a Delhi-based arms dealer who represents a number of companies abroad, including Bofors. Chadha has denied that he received any payments (*see page 34*), and claims he stopped representing Bofors in 1985 after the agreement between Rajiv and the then Swedish premier Olof Palme, that no middlemen would be involved. A photo-

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WIN CHADHA

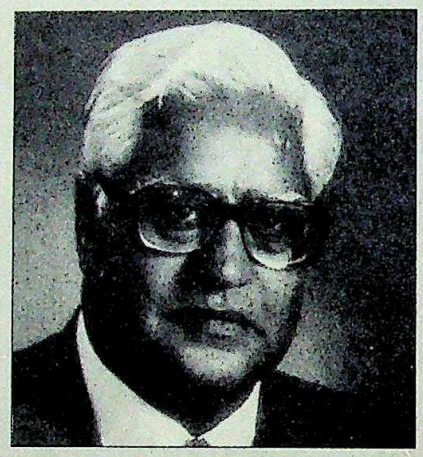
"I had no say"

PROBABLY the most harassed man in India after Rajiv Gandhi is Win Chadha, 61, the Bofors consultant named by Swedish Radio as the conduit for commission payments to Indian officials in the billion-dollar gun deal. Chadha denies handling any commission money on behalf of Bofors but that hasn't prevented him from being plagued by phone calls and visits from press reporters. He was even pursued into the sauna room of a five-star hotel health club in New Delhi by a Swedish Radio reporter. The reporter was quietly removed from the hotel where Chadha is a valued customer, the kind to whom hotel general managers send birthday gifts of wine and cakes.

The big, burly Chadha does not suffer from undue modesty. He describes himself as a highly-educated, well-informed, successful businessman who controls six companies and owns two, including Anatronic General Corporation which represented Bofors in India. He lives well, owns a plush, high-walled farm-house on the outskirts of Delhi and at least two gleaming Mercedes cars are always parked in his driveway. He lets it be known that he is a former Fullbright fellow who did his Ph.D. work at Columbia University. But he is cagey about small things. He won't reveal his real age: "You can say I am over 60." An arms dealer who lectures the press about morality, Chadha flinches from any contact with the press. But he agreed to clarify his role in the controversial Bofors deal in a conversation with Special Correspondent RAMINDAR SINGH. *Excerpts:*

"The gun business started earlier than 1982, but Bofors was not in the running because the gun was considered too sophisticated. Effective negotiations started sometime in 1985 after Bofors agreed to meet three pre-conditions—to reduce the price, remove middlemen and ensure that the gun's capability was adequate. The gun was thoroughly evaluated. The Bofors and French guns met all the parameters. But the Swedish gun is better. This is the report of all committees. It was the only gun which had been in service for seven or eight years. The French gun was then only on the drawing-boards. Then they (Bofors) slashed the price like hell. I don't know the price as I was not involved in the negotiations or discussions. I have not attended any meeting concerning the negotiations. I was not allowed.

"Commander M.R.A. Rao left Bofors in 1979. I was already representing a subsidiary company, Bofors Aerotronics and in 1979, I took over as a representative of Bofors, not as an agent. An agent is a much bigger thing. An agent is



"I have not acted as a middleman either in passing money or bribes. It is against my conscience and principles."

financially involved and has the authority to sign on behalf of the company. I have never been an agent for any foreign company, leave alone Bofors. A representative is only a confidential post box. When the Government wants information or spare parts, they phone the representative to come and discuss matters with them. Like, when the gun had to be proved or demonstrated, the representative had to make arrangements. Consultants are appointed to help (Bofors) personnel here.

"We, as consultants, have nothing to do with sales activity. The Government of India will not deal with us, they don't entertain us because we have no *locus standi*.

"We act as consultants and not as representatives. Agents get a commission, a percentage of the total sales, but a representative's remuneration is a fixed amount. The Government of India does not differentiate between agents and representatives: all are treated as middlemen."

Had he acted as a middleman in this deal? "Absolutely not. A categorical no. I have not handled any money on Bofors' part. I have not acted as a middleman either in passing money or bribes. It is against my conscience and principles. I have never been and will never be party to such dirty things."

What was the extent of his involvement till 1985, when he was a representative for Bofors? "I was never involved in financial transactions. They made the offers, they fixed and negotiated the price, they signed the contract. I had no say in the bloody thing. What profit they make, how much they sell it at, when they deliver, it's their decision. We had nothing to do with it. I had nothing to do with passing any money.

"I don't expect anything to come out of this Bofors deal. Because nothing exists. To the best of my knowledge no money was passed nor commission paid. I don't know of it."

What about the $5 million (Rs 6.4 crore) mentioned? "That is all bullshit. Ask Swedish Radio, which peddles such lies. They had not given any facts, only vague statements, and till today they have refused to substantiate it. The most painful part is that the whole country is talking about half-facts, uncorroborated statements and that too of a foreigner who is hiding from day to day. To my knowledge, no Bofors representative has said that commissions were paid.

"No raid has ever taken place on me in my whole life: either on my business premises or any establishment or facility owned or connected with me. I have been questioned about details of the Bofors deal by a government agency which I refuse to identify. But I can say that the CBI or IB have never visited or interrogated me. I am proud of the moral status that I have and the clean life that I have led. I never gave any party last year

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to celebrate the Bofors deal. On April 25, 1986, my wife and son gave a dinner party to celebrate my 60th birthday. It had nothing to do with the Bofors deal, which was signed in end-March, 1986.

"I represented Kockums (the Swedish submarine manufacturer) for a few years, but a few months before the final discussions between them and the Government, I parted company with Kockums in 1979. The submarine decision was taken in 1980. I never represented HDW (the German submarine manufacturer involved in the controversial defence deal)."

Why did he leave Kockums at a time when agents were still allowed? "Kockums decided that they wanted to deal directly with the Government. Only they know what their reasons were."

What would he describe himself as? "An administrative consultant. The Swedes here (three families of Bofors managers in Delhi and two representatives at Jabalpur and Deolali) have needs and problems. We make bookings for them, look after transport, housing and schools for these families. For this we get a monthly remuneration which comes through the RBI.

"I have worked abroad in very senior jobs—my last appointment was director, Far East, for an American billion-dollar multinational company not involved in defence. I set up Johnson and Johnson in India. I came back in 1970 after spending over 10 years abroad, and established Anatronic General Corporation in 1970. (The name Anatronic is derived by combining the first letters of army, navy, air force and the latter half of electronics.) Its business in the beginning was representation and now consultancy. Since I am a very well-informed, highly-educated man, I also dabble in financial matters, leasing. We lease equipment to leading companies in the country like DCM and McDowells. In terms of money it is the larger part of my work. Anatronic and Win Chadha Investments do leasing also. I have six limited companies and two proprietory concerns."

Is he worth Rs 100 crore as rumoured? "There is a famous saying that one's own wisdom and others' wealth always appears bigger. I am not being auctioned that I should put a price (tag) on my head. If I was worth Rs 100 crore, I would not be living in a rented house."

graph published in several Swedish dailies, which elicited amused comment in Stockholm, was that of a jubilant Chadha celebrating with champagne, with Bofors officials, after the contract was clinched. Chadha's "swanky life-style", and his "four Mercedes cars", have provoked intense speculation in Sweden about his role in the deal. The other name given is that of Commander M.R.A. Rao, who used to represent Bofors in the late '70s, but retired from the arms business after Chadha's appointment.

But in New Delhi, it was obvious that the revelations had caused considerable disquiet in the corridors of power and an unusual undercover operation was covertly launched. A series of unpublicised visits were carried out by intelligence sleuths on the premises of 41 key defence agents—including the vacant bungalow owned by the London-based Hinduja family. A highly-respected Swedish newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, in a separate investigation into the deal, has named the Hindujas as being involved in the payments. But, according to Gopichand Hinduja: "Most of these allegations are a figment of somebody's imagination. At no stage were we involved in any of the Indian defence deals."

The curious aspect of last fortnight's "visits", however, was that though intelligence sources admitted that raids had been carried out, the intelligence agencies refused to confirm the fact officially. And newspapers which reported on the 'raids', had to carry denials from arms agents. Equally curious was the case concerning a prominent defence agent, M.K. Jajodia of Roger Enterprises, who had been raided last November by Enforcement Directorate sleuths—during V.P. Singh's tenure as finance minister—and had admitted maintaining an account of Rs 3.5 crore abroad. Jajodia, the biggest FERA offender nabbed by the Enforcement Directorate in recent times, was surprisingly released on parole last fortnight, on the express orders of Minister of State for Finance Brahm Dutt, despite disapproval from the COFEPOSA wing of the Finance Ministry. Officials of the ministry claim that Dutt had ordered the parole to enable Jajodia to make arrangements for repatriating the money to India.

Last fortnight, the CBI also searched the premises of two other Jajodias, K.K. Jajodia and A.K. Jajodia. Both were said to be abroad, but on the basis of papers recovered during the search, the CBI arrested A.K. Jajodia's Personal Secretary K. Venugopalan under the Official Secrets Act. Earlier, the premises of another defence agent, Vinod Khanna—who represents Saab Scania, the Swedish company that has supplied the tow vehicles for the Bofors howitzer—were also visited by sleuths.

Most of the questioning of defence agents and representatives is being done by the counter-intelligence wing of the IB, the special investigation cell of the CBI and RAW. Officials of all agencies, however, deny they are involved. Sources say that the aim of the searches and questioning is damage-control. In other words, to seize any documents and papers that could prove embarrassing or incriminating for the ruling party.

MEANWHILE, as a measure of the current paranoia caused by the Bofors scandal, the telephones of senior Defence Ministry and armed forces officials, defence agents and even journalists investigating the story are believed to have been tapped. Senior army officials approached by INDIA TODAY refused to talk on the phone and would only meet journalists from the magazine elsewhere, for fear that even their offices might be bugged. Delhi's English daily, *The Statesman*, charged that its team of Insight reporters was shadowed by a carload of IB men.

The panic within the Congress(I) (*see following story*) is reflected in the fact that senior party functionaries are actually openly expressing the fear that President Zail Singh is collecting evidence on the Bofors deal, in preparation to dismiss the present government. However far-fetched the possibility, it is an indication that the Government is seriously concerned about the deal and its possible fall-out.

In fact, it has been learnt that during one of the searches on defence agents, CBI sleuths seized documents on the Bofors deal highly damaging to the present government. Acting on the information, a team of senior CBI officials further investigated the matter and questioned a large number of people. Their inquiries confirmed what the documents had earlier indicated. The file containing the material was submitted to CBI chief Mohan Katre last week. Rashtrapati Bhawan sources say they are aware of the existence of the file and its contents, and are contemplat-

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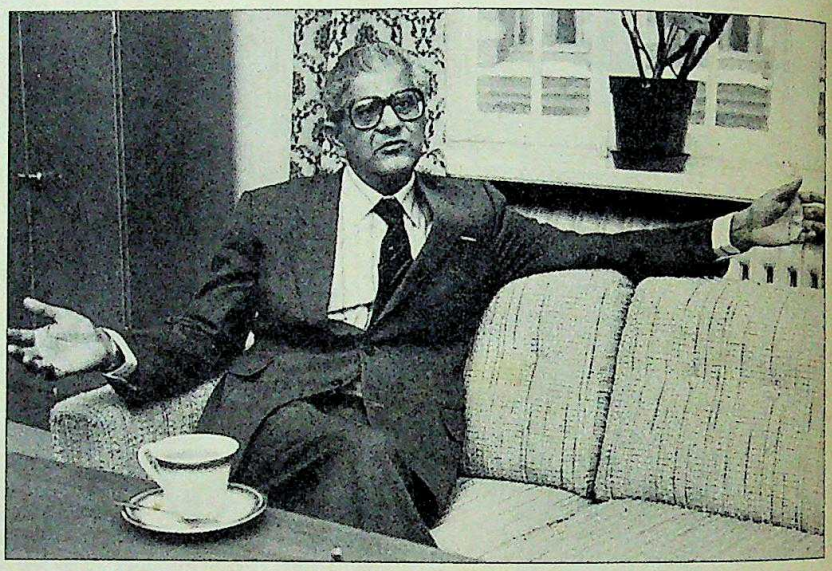
ing asking the Government for more information on the subject.

Meanwhile, the Government is trying hard to contain the possible fall-out of the Bofors affair. If it is proved that the Bofors deal did indeed involve kickbacks, it will tear apart the shroud of secrecy that drapes the holy cow of defence matters. It is, for instance, a well-known fact in political circles that the Congress strategy since Sanjay Gandhi's time has been to eliminate the need for going hat-in-hand to Indian businessmen for donations to the party purse. Businessmen have, in fact, been heard complaining for the last few years that the Congress(I) had stopped coming to them for money at election time. Much of the money now supposedly comes from foreign companies bidding for large contracts in India.

THE security implications of a kickback-influenced deal are that the defence forces' morale would be undermined by fears about the quality of their equipment and weapons. This was spelt out in a hard-hitting article last week by Brigadier N.B. Grant, a former Indian Army officer, who wrote: "With the exception of very few countries, kickbacks and commissions on defence contracts are accepted as being part of the business and are not considered illegal. The main worrying point, however, concerns the role they play in influencing decisions for purchase of substandard equipment or acquisitions of doubtful military value."

The other obvious, and positive, fall-out will be the fact that agents and middlemen will be more cautious and circumspect in their dealings, as will the bureaucrats handling such contracts. There will also be a much closer scrutiny of defence deals in Parliament and by the media, and any government having had its fingers burnt, will be forced to steer clear of the defence pie.

That is perhaps what makes the Bofors deal such a hot potato. The Indian contract for the purchase of the Bofors artillery system FH-77B and its licence production, worth 8.4 billion kroner (Rs 1,705 crore), was not only the largest contract ever signed by Bofors, but also the single largest export order ever awarded to Swedish industry, apart from being the largest signed by the Rajiv Gandhi Government. The Indian howitzer purchase is one of the most fiercely-contested and high-stake deals in recent times. Initial negotiations started in 1977 when the Indian Ministry of Defence, reacting to reports that Pakistan was to acquire American-made 155 mm howitzers, sought information from Bofors and six other manufacturers on 155 mm artillery systems. Indian Defence Ministry sources have confirmed that even the Americans were approached and negotiations started, but were eventually scrapped "due to political reasons".



"We've got an unofficial report from Bofors. We now await the official response from the Swedish Government."

BHUPATRAY OZA
Indian ambassador in Stockholm

By early 1981, the field had been narrowed down to four competitors—the Bofors FH-77B, the British-German-Italian FH-70, the Austrian GH N-45 and the French GIAT 155 TR. Bofors was asked to bring the howitzer to India for field trials in the first half of '81. By '85, the field had been further narrowed to only two systems—the Swedish and the French. In March '86, the contract was awarded to Bofors, two months after the then Swedish premier Olof Palme had visited New Delhi a month before his assassination and made a personal plug for the company. The Bofors contract also benefited a number of other Swedish companies, including Saab-Scania for the tow vehicles, Peab for the sights, Barracuda for the camouflage nets, and Bofors subsidiary Lindesbergs Industri AB and the state-owned FFV for the ammunition. Other arms manufacturers to benefit were Britain's Marconi for fire-control computers, Scotland's Ferranti for navigational systems, Australia's Fairey for muzzle velocity indicators and Switzerland's Wild for survey equipment.

Moreover, a recent article in the authoritative *Jane's Defence Weekly* states that Bofors has acknowledged that the value of the Indian deal is far above the US $1.8 billion (Rs 2,316 crore) initially quoted by the company. The actual figure given out by Bofors is in excess of $3.5 billion (Rs 4,504 crore), which makes it the largest single order in Indian history. Originally, Bofors and the Indian Government had indicated that the agreement was for the supply of 400 howitzers. But a Bofors spokesman told *Jane's* that the company will supply India with 1,500 field guns. Bofors intends to set up two manufacturing plants in India where a major part of the order will be produced. Till last month, Bofors had supplied the Indian Army with around 80 FH-77Bs.

Now, having suddenly recoiled into a major controversy, the Bofors deal is even more significant in terms of the

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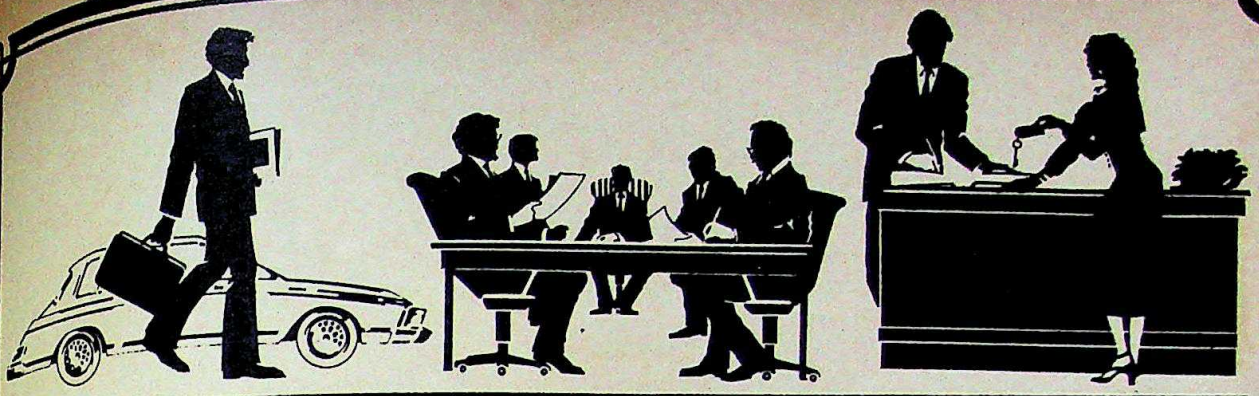

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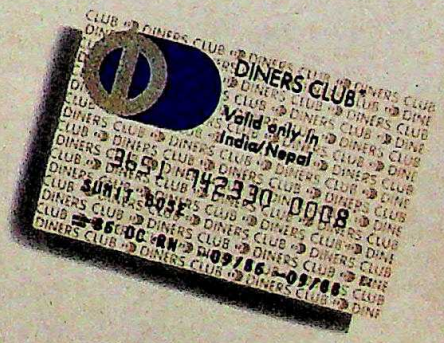

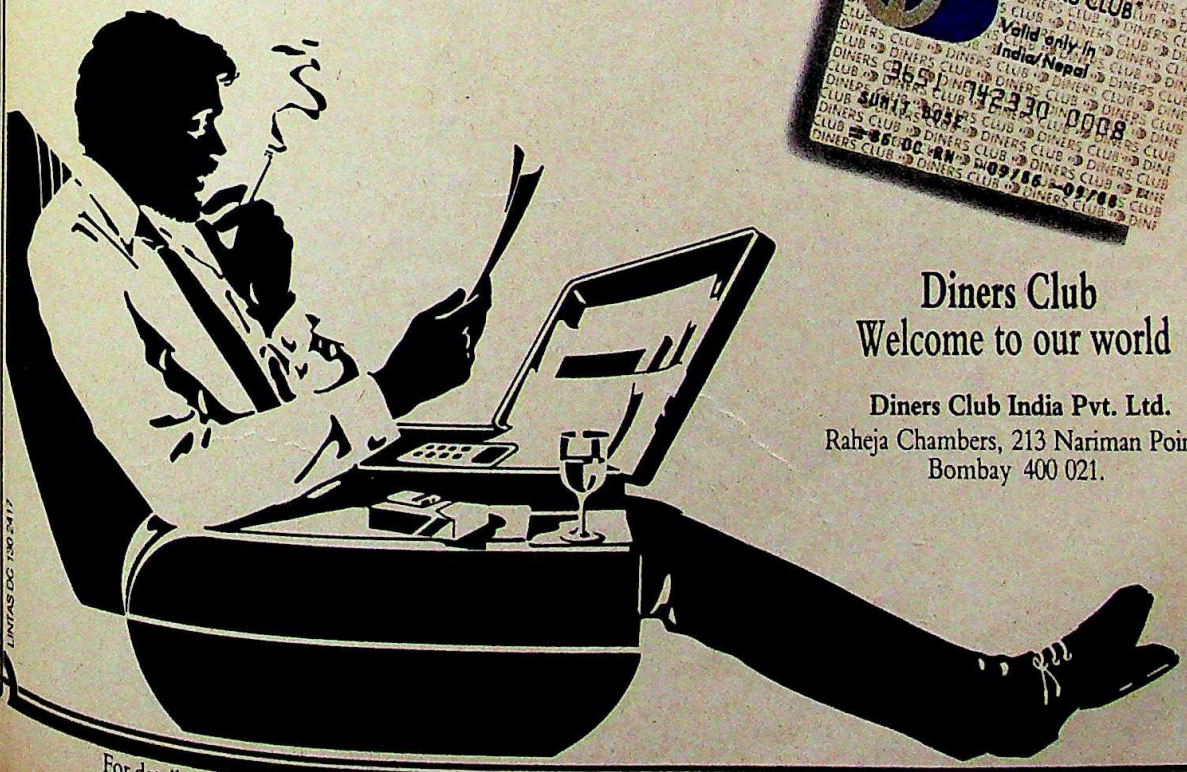

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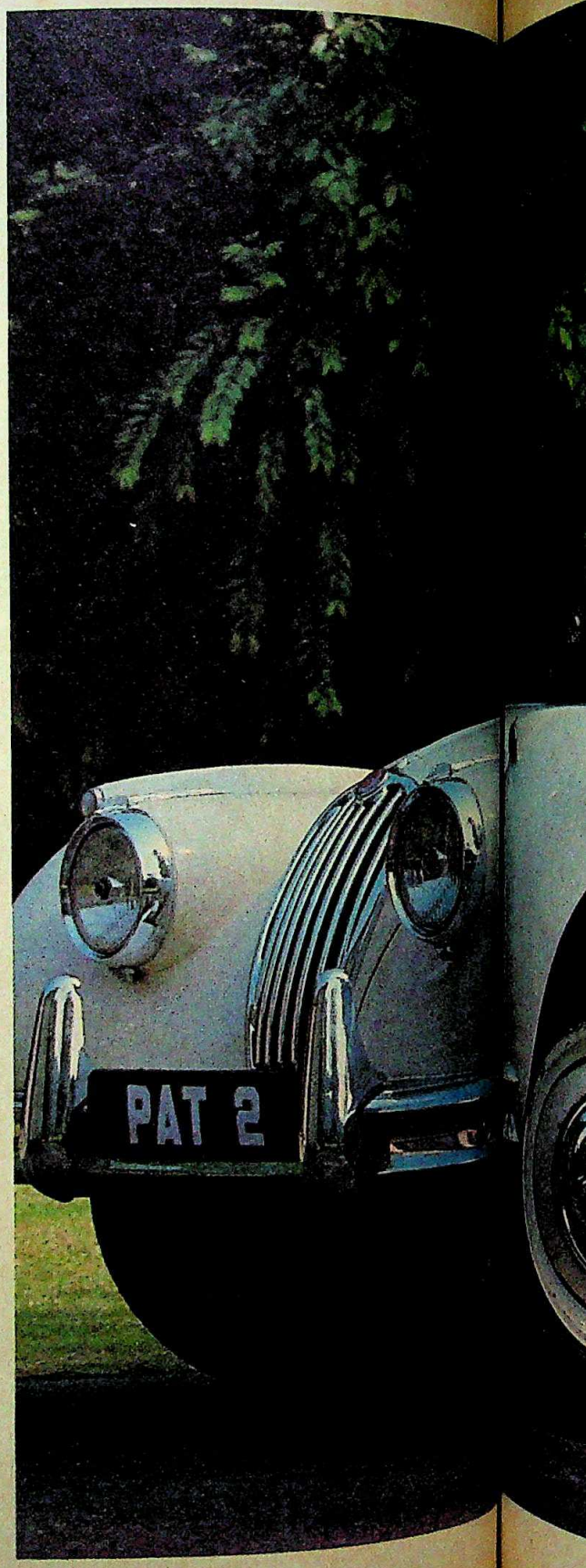
"It's a hectic life, but style is still the name of the game"

"They say I am one of the most stylish batsmen to come out of the post-war era. And Sharmila says that image applies to everything I do. Well, that's true I suppose. I like style... whether it's in the sports I play, the cars I drive or the clothes I wear. That's why I feel so confident when I wear Gwalior Suiting and Shirting. I recommend them to everyone who likes to dress well."

M.A.K. PATAUDI



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other major defence contracts the Indian Government is currently negotiating with western manufacturers. Overnight, it has focussed a harsh and glaring spotlight on the entire murky world of defence contracts and ensured that any future deals will be subjected to similar, if not more intense scrutiny.

► An off-shoot of the Bofors order had resulted in renewed negotiations between the Indian Government and the Swedish submarine manufacturer, Kockums. India is believed to be contemplating changing over to the Kockums submarine type and ending its current contract with HDW.

► India is also considering buying self-propelled 155 mm howitzers to supplement the Bofors field guns and bolster its long-range capability. India has been talking to Vickers, the British armaments firm, which already has its GBT 155 mm turret in operation here, mounted on a Vijayanta tank chassis.

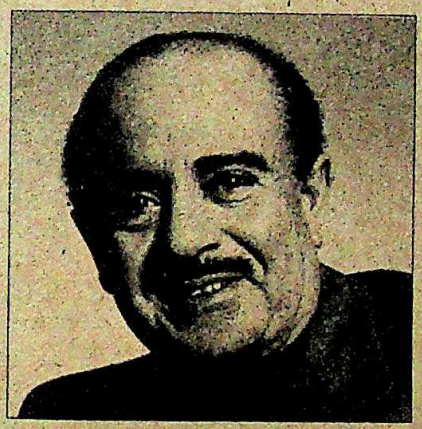
► Last September, an Indian delegation also held discussions with the French Defence Ministry and Dassault Bregeut,

ADNAN KHASHOGGI

King Among Middlemen

WHAT Pierre Cardin is to haute couture, Adnan Khashoggi is to the international arms bazaar. In the mid-'60s, when names like Lockheed, Rolls Royce, and Marconi became synonymous with billion-dollar defence deals, Khashoggi, 50—the Saudi Middleman, as he is called—shot into prominence faster than a speeding bullet. It was a period when mountains of petro-dollars had begun to chase sophisticated armaments. And Khashoggi, the American-educated son of a Saudi doctor, found himself a job as agent for Lockheed. He never looked back. He is today the biggest, the most influential and the richest arms dealer in the world, as well as an encyclopaedic repository of every dark secret associated with the trade. A staggering 20 per cent of the international arms sales to non-Communist countries is associated with Khashoggi, who has amassed a fortune which would be the envy of some of the characters in the Arabian Nights. He owns 12 estates across the world, including a 180,000-acre ranch in Kenya, a $30-million (Rs 3.8 crore) apartment in New York, a dozen villas in the south of France, three jets, a fleet of 50 Mercedes Benz and Rolls Royce limousines, and his 282-foot yacht—*Nabila*. It costs him about $250,000 (Rs 32.2 lakh) a day to maintain his lifestyle.

"Defence deals are dirty words now," he told Senior Editor PRABHU CHAWLA. "In these deals, it is not agents but corrupt government leaders who corrupt their governments." He added: "Most defence companies operate through their market consultants, who are basically spies for their principals. These are the people who alert their companies to upcoming defence orders and give the companies



"In defence deals it is not agents, but corrupt leaders who corrupt their governments.... Companies do not bribe unless asked."

contacts in the buying country." But once the contact is established, the principals take over directly. Says Khashoggi: "A good machine should sell automatically. If it doesn't, that means someone is interested in making money on the deal. Companies don't offer bribes unless asked for."

The clearest signal to arms dealers that a government, politicians, or officials are looking for a bribe is when a government unduly delays a deal, according to Khashoggi. Committees, technical panels and the like, are a handy device for delaying the deal and providing the time necessary for settling the terms of kickbacks. Every manufacturer, he says, makes an inbuilt provision in the cost of equipment for meeting "non-commercial expenses". Khashoggi acknowledges that most governments have banned commissions, but is quick to add that "even where there is an agreement between the Government and the seller, there is no guarantee that no one will make money on it".

Europe has been the major defence supplier to India in the last seven years, Khashoggi observes. In the decade 1976-'86, India bought defence equipment worth over Rs 18,000 crore. What is striking is that close to half of the total amount—Rs 8,000 crore—was for deals signed between '84 and '86. And most of the purchases were from Sweden, France, UK and West Germany. About 180 minor and major defence contracts were concluded in the last two years alone.

Though most of the deals signed by the Indian Government have been made directly with the suppliers, there are indications that agents have been directly or indirectly involved in most of them. The number of agents of arms companies in India shot up from 46 in '80 to over 500 in '86 and just about every defence firm in the West is now represented here.

Taking note of this, Khashoggi adds: "Heads of state like Reagan, Thatcher and Mitterrand are the biggest arms peddlers on behalf of their countries. They use diplomatic channels to influence deals. Still, officials down the line make money because they are the ones who have to prepare the files and release the payments."

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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BOFORS

"No bribes were paid"

THE Bofors Company, a ragged ordnance works, acquired by Alfred Nobel in 1894 for a song, is today among the world's most formidable manufacturers of defence equipment. It gained international prestige in 1936 when it unveiled the 40 mm Bofors anti-aircraft gun. Last year was the 50th anniversary of the 40 mm Bofors, whose silhouette and appearance have become familiar to generations of soldiers, sailors and airmen the world over. The 40 mm—known simply as "the Bofors gun", is today one of the most famous and most widely used of all artillery pieces designed and produced during the 20th century. During the mid-60s, India signed an agreement for licence production with Bofors for the 40 mm gun and still manufactures them.

Today, the Bofors weapons repertoire has a striking range of systems and ammunition. The company employs 5,600 people and is part of the Nobel Industries Conglomerate, 75 per cent of whose activity is chemicals, the remaining 25 per cent being termed "hi-tech", which is Bofors.

Company officials, with some reluctance, agreed to meet INDIA TODAY*'s London Correspondent* RAMESH CHANDRAN *for an exclusive interview at its Karlskoga headquarters. The Bofors' official who explained the company's position was Bertil Bredin, vice-president of the company and project coordinator for field artillery, who dealt with the Indian contract. Excerpts:*

Q. *Were bribes or commissions paid to an Indian or Indian sources in a Swiss bank for the 155 mm artillery deal?*

A. Our official position has been made clear. A denial has been issued by our communications chief that no such bribes or commissions have been paid.

Q. *But the National Swedish Radio insists they have evidence.*

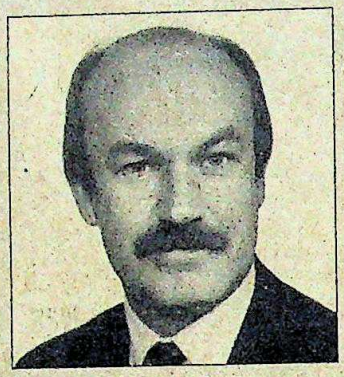
A. I cannot tell you if they have this evidence or not. If they do have this evidence, why don't they produce it?

Q. *And there will be more revelations in the future.*

A. Let us then wait for them. As far as the allegations concerning the Indian contract is concerned, the company has been requested to provide clarifications to the Swedish Government. And I presume these will be offered as soon as possible.

Q. *Is there a "deep throat" in the company?*

A. I don't know. But we have more than 5,000 employees.



"There were no contacts with the Congress Party. We dealt with personnel from the Defence Ministry."

Q. *How does it feel to have one of your employees leaking information about the company?*

A. Nothing. I don't even know if such a source exists.

Q. *You were part of the negotiating team which visited India several times. Is Win Chadha the agent the Swedish Radio is referring to?*

A. I have absolutely no idea.

Q. *But you surely know Chadha? He was your agent.*

A. I have met Chadha. He was our agent until the Indian Government ordered, in 1985, that no middlemen should be involved in defence contracts. He then became our consultant.

Q. *Was Chadha useful in Delhi—in gaining access to government sources, or even the Congress Party?*

A. I do not think Chadha was useful on those lines. I do not even think he had such access. After the government order, he was not even allowed to visit these ministries. We did not use him for political contacts.

Q. *Then why did you employ him?*

A. Well, you always need someone for local support—acquiring telephones, arranging cars, running an office.

Q. *Obviously, he has to be paid for services rendered. Where was he paid?*

Bredin (left) and company headquarters: eye of the storm

A. I have no information about the financial aspects or where he was paid.

Q. *Who were the other Indian sources or agents you dealt with?*

A. I can't recall anyone else.

Q. *How about the Hindujas? The* Dagens Nyheter *stated that they had contacts with Bofors.*

A. I have not heard of the Hindujas being involved in the Indian deal.

Q. *You don't think the Hindujas could have been possible middlemen in fixing this contract?*

A. I don't think so.

Q. *Why not? They have considerable influence and financial clout.*

A. I cannot say anything about this. I have not heard about the Hindujas being involved in this contract. I have not met

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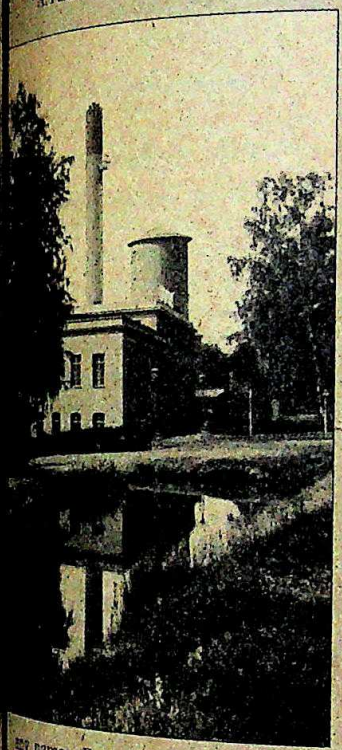
them at any stage of the negotiations.

Q. Who were the other Indian officials who were part of the negotiating team? Did you meet anyone from the Congress Party?

A. No. There were never any contacts with the Congress Party. We dealt with ministry officials and military personnel from the Ministry of Defence.

Q. Which Indian officials?

A. I am not sure if I should mention



any names. But officials like Defence Secretary Bhatnagar, who signed the contract and Finance Secretary P.P. Jain, who signed the licence contract.

Q. We have heard that the first delivery of 60 guns was made in November last year. Have other deliveries been on schedule?

A. We are not authorised to make any mention of numbers or dates relating to deliveries. But deliveries have been on time and, in fact, there have been monthly deliveries.

Q. Can you explain about the financial deal last year.

A. Yes. India has paid 20 per cent of the down payment of the 8.4 billion kronor (Rs 1,705 crore) order in June 1986. The credit agreement between the Indian Government and the Swedish Export Credit Institution gives India credit on the rest of the amount. What happens then is that we supply the order to get paid by Swedish banks.

Q. What is the interest charged on this?

A. I don't have the precise figure, but it is very low. The payment schedule for India runs approximately to 20 years.

Q. There have been reports of problems concerning the 155 mm's range. Has this 24-km range been achieved?

A. I don't know how this rumour cropped up. We have three different grenades for the three ranges—18 km for the short range, 24 km for the standard range and 30 km plus for the long range. There have been no problems with the standard range in India.

Q. Did the Indian Army require the long-range version too?

A. The differences are essentially in the ammunition which operates more like a rocket in the long range. India has been interested in both versions. It depends on what sort of terrain you want to use it.

Q. The licence production appears to be going ahead. How about the self-propelled version?

A. Well, I don't know if we are interested in the vehicles. But we certainly hope when this order is placed, our guns and ammunition would be used.

Q. The Bofors gun was locked in fierce competition with the French Giat 155 mm gun. There were many experts who were of the opinion that the French gun was capable of superior performance and it was even preferred by NATO. *What then swung this deal in Bofors' favour?*

A. I don't think any other NATO country has opted for the French gun, other than France itself. The Bofors gun is reputed for its all-round performance, its easy handling and the range of ammunition. Our overall package, including financing, was most attractive. There were no other reasons for India to have opted for it. It is simply the best gun of its kind.

Q. Is Bofors happy at the way things have worked out for itself—at least until this current controversy?

A. Of course. We have had long years of cooperation with India and I think the Indian Army is most satisfied with the product.

over possible joint aircraft development for Hindustan Aeronautics Limited's LCA (Light Combat Aircraft) project, for the Indian Air Force. Discussions centred on the development of the French Rafale B high-performance fighter.

► The biggest deal currently being negotiated is the army's requirement for an all-weather, low-level, air defence gun which has been hanging fire since 1980. Initially, the leading contender was the Swiss Oerlikon ADS, thought to be the best. Trials began in '80, but a Greek offer delayed a decision, and then Oerlikon reduced its price two years ago. Now, seven years after the Indian Army requested for an air defence system, it has still to get it, despite three army chiefs having stressed the urgency of its acquisition.

The Government, fortunately, cannot be criticised for the Bofors purchase itself. The weapon system is considered one of the best available, though the French TR version is a later model and compares favourably with the FH-77B. But its explosive potential in the current political context is considerable. The Government has tried to appear open-minded on the issue and claimed that it has nothing to hide. But its current lack of credibility has neutralised that effort. Nor is it likely that the full facts of the Bofors pay-offs will ever come to light. Even if the Swedish radio station reveals the Swiss account numbers it claims to have, the process of investigation could be tied up in legal knots for years, owing to strict Swiss banking laws.

"Banks are very tight about secrecy, and leaking of information is a criminal offence," confirms Jean Cuendet, Swiss ambassador to India. But he adds: "Exceptions can be made, if the Government of India follows the procedure prescribed." According to him, the Indian Government must first launch criminal prosecutions against the individual and then file an application in a Swiss court. If the charges are recognised as a criminal offence under Swiss law, the court can then decree that the particular bank involved can reveal the account-holder and his assets.

But even that is not as easy as it appears. While the Swiss courts consider drug-trafficking, kidnapping, ransom money and embezzlement enough ground to order banks to break their code of secrecy, it does not, for instance,

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PARLIAMENT

Bumbling Through

IF the Rajiv Gandhi Government has acquired a reputation for hamming through one crisis after the other, its performance in crucial debates in Parliament last month did little to improve its public standing. There were contradictions in ministerial pronouncements, differences within the Cabinet were publicly aired, errors admitted on the date and time when files were sent, statements and counter-statements, blunders in strategy, and the strange sight of the treasury benches launching attacks on their own V.P. Singh. If the Government still did not come to grief, it was because the Opposition put up a dismal show.

Fairfax: informer, domestic servant or authorised agent?

"Somnath Chatterjee has asked what are Fairfax's credentials. These questions are asked when we keep someone as a servant in the house. But we haven't retained Fairfax even as a domestic servant."

BRAHM DUTT, minister of state for finance
Lok Sabha, March 31

"The Directorate of Enforcement has authorised the Fairfax Group to collect information in regard to certain FERA violations."

BRAHM DUTT, minister of state for finance
Rajya Sabha, April 15

The ball was set rolling with the debate on Fairfax, on March 31, in the Lok Sabha. Virtually every Congress(I) speaker questioned the wisdom of what the Government and V.P. Singh (as finance minister) had done. Dinesh Singh said that Fairfax might provide "a set of disinformation", and P.R. Kumaramangalam said: "Fairfax is known to be connected with international intelligence agencies."

It was left to Minister of State for Finance Brahm Dutt, to clear V.P. Singh by saying: "The manner in which the former finance minister gave permission to Fairfax to investigate was perfectly in order, there is no problem with that." But then what were the Congress(I) MPs going on about, especially since they had been fully briefed before the debate? And couldn't the matter have been defused at the start by saying that an agency had been engaged, others had been similarly engaged in the past, and the Government would act on the information provided?

If that was an opportunity lost, Brahm Dutt was himself in some trouble with contradictory statements in the two Houses. In the Lok Sabha, he said that Fairfax had practically no *locus standi*: "Somnath Chatterjee has asked what are Fairfax's credentials, what are its traditions, what is its experience. These questions are asked when we want to keep someone as a servant in the house. But we haven't retained Fairfax even as a domestic servant. We don't ask such questions of any informer. You give information, we pay you."

But two weeks later, speaking in the Rajya Sabha, Brahm Dutt had a slightly different tune: "The Directorate of Enforcement had authorised the Fairfax Group Inc of USA to collect information in regard to investigation of certain cases of violations of the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act." Informers obviously do not need authorisation. So what really was Fairfax's status: informer, domestic servant or authorised agent?

There was one other notable sally. V.P. Singh said that on the question of whether he had consulted the prime minister on Fairfax, he would need the prime minister's permission to reply. The reply never came. Why?

When it came to the debate on the inquiry that Singh ordered into the submarine deal, the treasury benches were once again critical of V.P. Singh. Darbara Singh asked in the Rajya Sabha: "Was it not undue haste to order an open inquiry on the basis of...scanty information? Did you not suspect the information to be a part of a disinformation campaign to launch another destabilisation offensive? (Was it not) intended to expose the entire defence secrets and demoralise the defence forces...to undermine the security of India?"

Others asked why the Cabinet and the prime minister had not been consulted. Once again, despite getting so much flak, V.P. Singh, it seemed, was in the clear. As Minister of State for Defence Arun Singh said: "The then *raksha mantri* had every right to order (the probe), which he did....The procedures adopted in so far as the inquiry is concerned are in conformity with the rules of business of the Government."

Why did V.P. Singh resign?

"The then *raksha mantri* had every right to order the probe....The procedures he adopted conform to the Government's rules of business."

ARUN SINGH, minister of state for defence
Rajya Sabha, April 20

"Yes, we have some differences whether the probe should have been made public, but that is not the sort of difference on which I would dismiss a minister."

RAJIV GANDHI, prime minister
Rajya Sabha April 20

"The telex tip-off came from a foreign government. And until such time as the foreign government concurs in the release of that information, it is unethical to make it public."

ARUN SINGH, minister of state for defence
Rajya Sabha, April 20

V.P. Singh told confidants that he had maintained the secrecy of the information as he had not disclosed the country and the equipment involved, nor the date of the contract.

What then was the fuss all about? For hadn't Singh been grilled in the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, in the full Cabinet itself, and in the Central Hall of Parliament? The answer came from the prime minister himself. Singh had made the inquiry public knowledge. But even Rajiv said that this was not a serious matter: "Yes, we have some differences whether it should have been made public or it should not have been made public, but that is not the sort

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of difference on which I would dismiss a minister." Yet Singh resigned.

What was wrong in publicising the inquiry? The painstaking Arun Singh explained: "It (the telex tip-off) has originated from a foreign government. And until such time as the foreign government concurs in the release of that information publicly, it is totally unethical to (make it public). Not only is it unethical, but it would severely imperil the release of any information of a confidential nature by any foreign government to this country."

V.P. Singh did not respond to this in Parliament, but is believed to have told confidants that he had maintained the secrecy of the information as he had not disclosed the country and the equipment involved, nor the year of the contract.

Jaswant Singh of the BJP also caught the Government flat-footed when he asked the simple question in the Rajya Sabha as to what the Government had done after it got the telex on February 25. "From the original receipt of the telex of February 25 to April 9, in 45 days...did the Government ask the mission (which sent the telex tip-off) to obtain all details? It was incumbent on the Government by a return telex to ask for more details."

Arun Singh's unflattering answer: "I do not have an answer to this."

But V.P. Singh himself did not seem to be fully forthcoming on the movement of the file. The point became relevant following charges that he had carefully timed the announcement of the probe with a political objective. In explanation, Singh told Parliament that the defence secretary's draft letter to the finance secretary came to him for his approval on March 25 and that "I approved the draft in toto as it was only a replica of my orders". That seemed to imply immediate approval. Yet Arun Singh had told the House that the draft was approved only on April 9—15 days later. But Singh in turn has insisted that this is an irrelevant issue ("such things can be found with any file") and that the point to note is the date on which he ordered the inquiry (March 11—before the Fairfax Commission on April 4).

The Government did not appear in a very good light on other matters of detail either. The prime minister first declared in Parliament that he had got the defence probe file only at 9 p.m. on April 9 (after the press note on the subject had been issued), then admitted what V.P. Singh had declared: that it had been sent to him at 2 p.m. (before the press note). But then he added that the file had been sent in a cover that was not marked 'secret', so that it was opened by a *chaprasi* and eventually put before him only the next morning. None of this invited confidence in the Government.

Finally, there was the question of the Government's attitude to the various controversies. On Fairfax, its attempts to pillory V.P. Singh led to a commission of inquiry that might yet prove embarrassing for the Government. By the time of the Bofors affair, the Government had learnt at least one lesson: not to postpone a Parliament debate, indeed to be done with it quickly. There was also a new openness, with the prime minister saying: "Give us the evidence, and we will produce the proof." But no probe was ordered with the promptness that V.P. Singh showed in the earlier case.

Also, Rajiv spoiled his copy-book by declaring one day (at an army commanders' conference) that Sweden had confirmed to him that there were no middlemen and no payments to Swiss banks, then reiterating in Parliament the next day that, "so far, we have got no specific information from the Swedish Government. We must give them a chance to give us an answer".

The moot point was: how many chances did the Government want to give convincing answers?—T.N. NINAN

Bofors: confirmed or not?

"Sweden had confirmed that there were no middlemen and no money was paid in Swiss banks."

Defence Ministry press note on Rajiv Gandhi's speech to army commanders, April 27

"I would like to reiterate that so far, we have got no specific information from the Swedish Government. We must give them a chance to give us an answer."

RAJIV GANDHI, prime minister Rajya Sabha, April 28

recognise the violation of FERA as an offence. And what queers the pitch in the Indian defence deals is that prosecution would have to be launched on the basis of bribery charges—something the Swiss courts have no precedence of in decreeing a break in secrecy.

In any event, Indian investigators would have to first find out who received the bribes and who paid them—something that is not going to be easy without concrete evidence. If the Swedish probe unearths any proof of illegal payments, the sums involved will be crucial. A smallish figure (and Rs 6.6 crore is less than half of 1 per cent of the total sum involved) could mean nothing more than payment to an agent and could be explained away. Something bigger, say 5 per cent or more, would almost certainly mean kickbacks to people in the Indian Government, or their agents. Of course, the amounts would be irrelevant, if the Swedish probe unearths the names behind the Swiss bank accounts.

In that sense, the Bofors claim of its field gun being a highly effective long-range weapon is an ironic truth. The initial trigger was pulled in Stockholm. And with the Government having clamped a tight lid on the issue as far as any revelations from Indian sources are concerned, the next explosion in the series can only emanate from Sweden.

And the potential implications of any further disclosures that directly indict the Rajiv Gandhi Government is enormous. Apart from the loss of its public image, it will weaken the Government even more and put it squarely on the defensive. It will also give an additional lever to the President who seems determined to hit back at Rajiv for what he sees as deliberate humiliation of himself and his office. It will galvanise an opposition already scenting blood, and cause the Government to lose whatever initiative it has left.

In fact, the events of the last few weeks have already entangled the Government in a restrictive web, blunted its developmental thrust and slowed down the workings of the bureaucracy. It will leave the Government with less time for external issues, causing perhaps irreparable harm to its diplomatic efforts. The ruling party has already lost the high ground. And the ground it now occupies is a minefield of dangerous uncertainty.

—DILIP BOBB with RAMINDAR SINGH in New Delhi and RAMESH CHANDRAN in Stockholm

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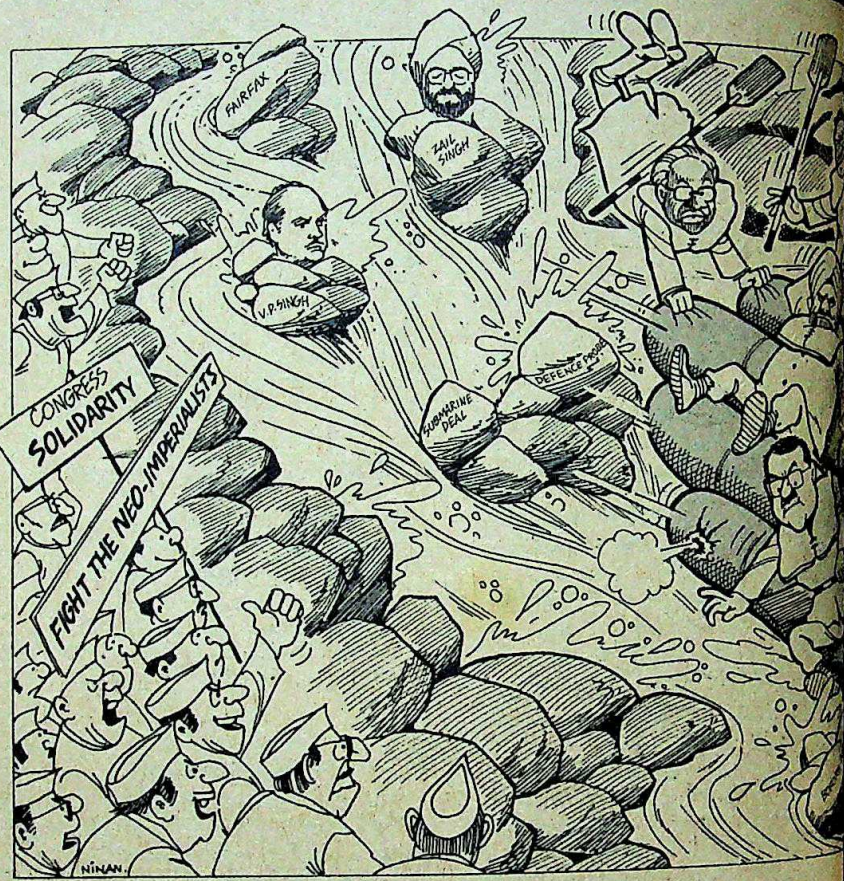
CONGRESS(I) Paranoia in th

LAST fortnight, as hostile pressure mounted on the prime minister and his party, in Parliament and across the country, the nation watched the drama unfold in the capital with baited breath. The ferocity with which the defence scandals exploded in the press and in Parliament—where opposition members, demanding to know the truth, staged several walkouts—caused observers to wonder whether the crisis, in the end, would bring down the Government. In the aftermath of V.P. Singh's resignation, the capital was bristling with speculation about a major fissure within the ruling party, and equally intense conjecture focused on possible moves from Rashtrapati Bhawan to call the Government to account. Clearly, the focus had shifted to the condition of the ruling party, its leader, and their response to the crisis. In an effort to gauge the mood of the Congress(I) nationwide, and to examine what changes in strategy were occurring within the high command and within the prime minister's advisory set-up, Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR, *assisted by bureau reports from Lucknow, Patna, Bhopal, Madras, Trivandrum, Bombay and Calcutta, talked to key players in the scenario. A report:*



TO MANY veteran Congressmen, the mood within the ruling party, last fortnight, was reminiscent of the surcharged political atmosphere that followed the Allahabad High Court judgement against Indira Gandhi in 1974. A prime minister weakened by a debilitating barrage of public attacks on his government and leadership. The party trying to counter-punch its way out, with roundhouse lefts at the demons of "right reaction" and destabilising agents of "neo-imperialism". Partymen stunned, insecure, uneasy, and paranoiac, and yet responding, as they did during the pre-Emergency period, to calls for rallies at the grassroots, in order to demonstrate total solidarity and support for their beleaguered chief.

This time, the overriding compulsion behind this gung-ho rally around the Congress(I) flag campaign—in which party workers, MLAs and MPs from all over the country attended lunches, tea parties, and dinners to listen to pep talks from Rajiv and high command politicos—was the palpable fear among senior Congressmen and advisers in the Prime Minister's Secretariat, that President Zail Singh was getting ready to topple the Government on the grounds that it had failed to discharge its constitutional responsibilities. As a veteran Congress(I) leader admitted: "The real fear is the President. These solidarity resolutions are not because we sense any internal revolt, but because a message has to be sent to Zail Singh that if the party is solid, he cannot destabilise it."

There was no evidence that Zail Singh's relations with the prime minister, notwithstanding desperate attempts by Rajiv to patch things up, have improved. Near panic broke out among Congress(I) members in Parliament's central hall on April 20, when they heard that former Congress(I) working president Kamalapati Tripathi had written a letter to the President, urging him to ignore "mischievous suggestions", such as dismissing the prime minister or dissolving Parliament. Earlier, the Government had expressed the same fear, but in a more guarded vein. When CPI(M) MP Somnath Chatterji raised questions about the defence scandals in Parliament, H.K.L. Bhagat, parliamentary affairs minister, rose to defend the Government by stating that there appeared to be a conspiracy on for a constitutional coup. Even the treasury benches were stunned at this because, by precedent, ministers only intervene in debates and do not defend the Government without prior notification from the speaker.

The scenarios, about how the President would act, being conjured up within high command circles were endless. Under one, the President would simply recommend the dismissal of the Government, on grounds of constitutional improprieties. Under another, he would reque

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in the Party

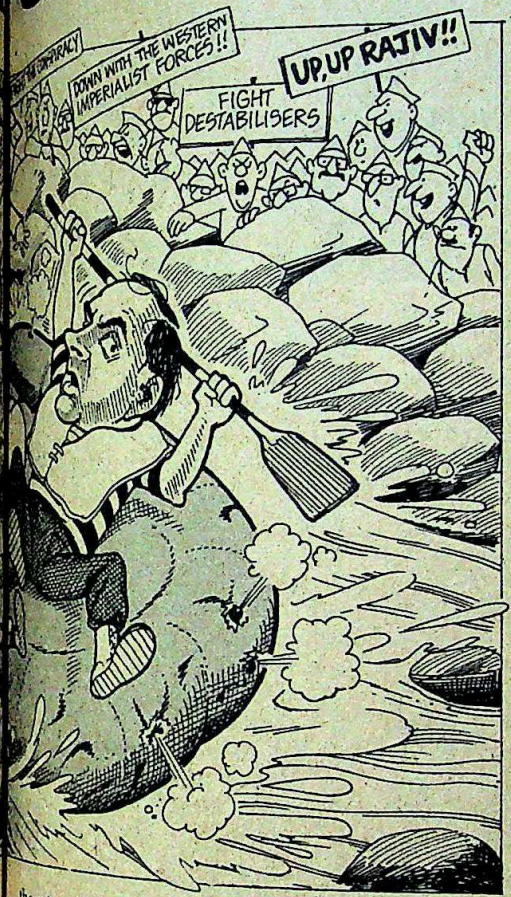

Illustration by AJIT NINAN

With the prime minister weakened by a debilitating barrage of public attacks on his leadership, the partymen are stunned and paranoid, but yet are responding to calls to demonstrate their solidarity.

the prime minister to step down voluntarily, in order to subject himself to an independent inquiry regarding the defence deals, and ask the party to elect an interim leader. And in the midst of these chaotic game plans, real or imaginary, the word was also out that the President had been seeking the advice of several constitutional experts on this subject.

But Tripathi's letter was a double-edged sword. While giving public legitimacy to the powers of the President, and his intentions to dismiss the Government, it also demonstrated that the old Congress war-horse, removed in ignominy from his working president post by Rajiv and at loggerheads with the prime minister, had suddenly bounced back as a member of the "old guard", battling for the health and security of the party.

It also signalled major changes in the political equations around Rajiv. Several Congress(I) stalwarts, while nervous about the threat to the party and its image, were privately gloating over Rajiv's discomfiture. "He is finally coming around to all the people who couldn't get to within five miles of him," said one Uttar Pradesh MLA, who suddenly got an appointment with the prime minister for which he had waited for two years. Added an MP: "Rajiv is like a weakened emperor, and nothing can be better for the old-line power-brokers who were waiting for their chance to control him." One MP even pulled out a cover story that had appeared last year in the *Time* magazine, entitled: "The Political Education of Rajiv Gandhi." Waving it, he said: "The first two years as prime minister were like the fresher's year in college, when you just hang around enjoying yourself with your pals. Now he has to go through his political graduation and take on some serious political advisers."

There is little doubt that during this crisis, party stalwarts have deluged Rajiv with criticism about the "pals" he has been relying on for advice, and who they believe are political novices. Among those frequently mentioned in this regard are Captain Satish Sharma, Amitabh Bachchan, Mani Shanker Aiyar, and a host of his private circle of friends. Sources say the atmosphere of uncertainty within the party stems in part from the "activities of some of the prime minister's aides, and from his total inaccessibility." Any leader, said one MP who is an ardent Rajiv supporter, differentiates between friends and political advisers. "But here the line of demarcation was blurred. Around any leader, there are friends, sycophants and dissidents. But in the atmosphere that prevailed in the Prime Minister's Secretariat, sycophants were treated as friends, friends as dissidents, and dissidents as enemies," he said.

In the process of opening up and becoming more accessible, Rajiv is now surrounded by a new set of political power-brokers. The caucus to whom he has begun to look for help in mending party fences, consists of Shiv Shankar, M.L. Fotedar, Buta Singh, H.K.L. Bhagat, Sheila Dixit, and Nawal Kishore Sharma. And the one person from within his own secretariat on whom the prime minister has relied most heavily on advice throughout this crisis—and who has grown in importance because of his ability to enunciate clear ideological lines and strategies in crisis management—is Gopi Arora, special secretary to the prime minister. Even though he is a bureaucrat, Arora is credited with an uncanny ability to relate to "old guard" Congress(I) politicians, especially those with leftist views. Some of Arora's thinking was reflected in the prime minister's speech to the Congress Parliamentary Party following the state election debacles, as well as in the populist, left-leaning Congress Working Committee (CWC) resolution following the Bofors' revelations.

The new political caucus now around the prime minister, moreover, has been responsible for most of the parliamentary strategy, the party campaign against V.P. Singh, as well as the nationwide party campaign to rally behind Rajiv. But there is still considerable resentment among the younger MPs in the party. They feel that even with the political sidelining of "friends" and the emergence of the new caucus, Rajiv is replacing one set of advisers with another which is basically associated with old-style manipulations and wheeling and dealing. In the bargain, he is ignoring younger people, who also have political experience.

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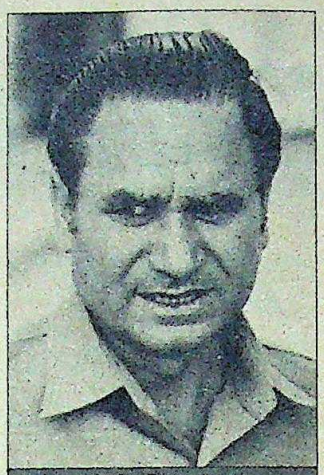
In the process of opening up and becoming more accessible, Rajiv is now surrounded by a new set of political advisors.

Gopi Arora


M.L. Fotedar

Sheila Dikshit

Palace politics apart, within the party at least, Rajiv, notwithstanding his government's considerably eroded credibility and public image, seemed safe for the moment. Any smoke signals of revolt were quickly snuffed out by party leaders at the Central, state, and district levels. They started with the marathon April 18 CWC meeting, which was attended by more than 110 Congress(I) leaders, following the defence deals revelations. And then they began fanning out across the country, in loyaler-than-thou demonstrations, and spreading the shop-worn word among the rank and file, that the party was the target of a diabolical conspiracy. The serpent of the piece was cited, inevitably, as western imperialist forces and their Indian agents, who are out to destabilise a legitimately elected government that has pursued an independent foreign policy.

Whether or not the framers of the CWC resolution, let alone Rajiv, believed in the rhetoric or the anachronistic shibboleths—after all, the party and its programmes had come a long way since the days of influential leftists like Krishna Kant, Mohan Dharia, D.P. Dhar, and Mohan Kumaramangalam and their "socialist thinking"—did not matter. What counted was, the importance of having a public relations handle with which to spoon-feed a bewildered public, which having given its overwhelming mandate to the ruling party only two short years ago was now, as several opinion polls showed, mistrustful and ready to believe the worst. And by taking an ostensibly leftward lurch, it was also a time-tested device of gaining the support of the CPI and CPI(M), for the party and the prime minister.

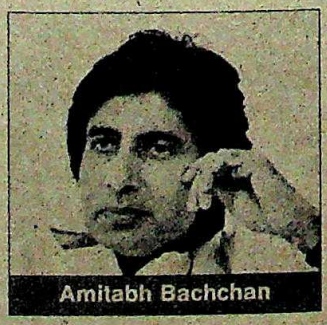
The events that led to the crisis—the leak of the President's March 9 letter to the press, the CBI raid on the *Indian Express* guest-house, the Fairfax probe, the arming of Pakistan by the US, the increase in terrorist activities in Punjab, the announcement of the defence probe and, overnight, the Swedish radio report on the Bofors deal—were all clubbed together as evidence, to provide perfect grist for the conspiracy mill. It is this scenario, spelled out in painstaking detail, that is now being taken to every block and district by Congress workers and elected officials. Participating in the propaganda effort will be the Youth Congress(I) and the Seva Dal, both of which have already organised several rallies. And during these meetings, leaders have been instructed to "talk freely about Vishwanath Pratap Singh". The line to be taken on V.P. Singh is that he was an ambitious politician who betrayed the faith placed in him by the prime minister, and who played into the hands of destabilising elements, by forcing the arms deal debate.

As Congress(I) General Secretary Nawal Kishore Sharma put it: "When the polity weakens, the Congress is the only unifying force. If Rajiv is attacked, then the Congress is attacked, and the stability of the country is attacked." He said that the high command has now called on all the pradesh and district committees to organise several hundred conventions that will be attended by state and Central leaders, including the prime minister. Added Anand Sharma, Youth Congress(I) president: "Rajiv is the standard-bearer of the party and we won't allow him to be pulled down." And Kamal Nath, the brash, brusque MP from Madhya Pradesh said: "Whenever a challenge is thrown at the Congress, we are a united edifice. Congress leaders must realise that the relations between the prime minister and the party at the block and district levels cannot be shaken by the manipulation of those at any tier in between."

This drumbeat of solidarity found an echo in most states, except for Uttar Pradesh, where there seemed to be scattered signs of dissidence (*see accompanying story*). In West Bengal, Congress leaders, even after their debacle

Party stalwarts have deluged Rajiv with criticism about the "pals" he has been relying on for advice, and who they believe are political novices.

Satish Sharma


Amitabh Bachchan

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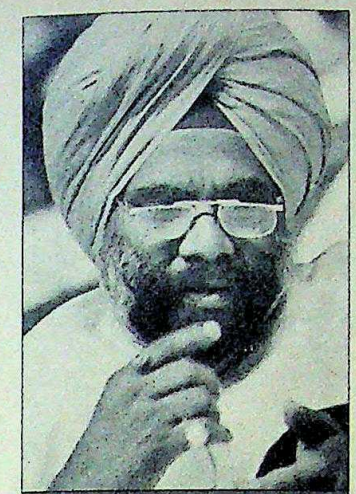
Shiv Shankar


Buta Singh

H.K.L. Bhagat

The new advisors are responsible for the parliamentary strategy and the party campaign to rally behind Rajiv.

were expressing solidarity with Rajiv Gandhi. Youth Congress(I) executive member Syed Shahid Imam, while admitting that "the state level party is a sick organisation because of the present leadership", stated emphatically that "there is no question of looking for an alternative from even within the party, as long as Rajiv is there." In Kerala, partymen seemed unfazed about Fairfax, Bofors, or V.P. Singh. Former chief minister Karunakaran said: "What V.P. Singh did was damaging to the party. There is only one leader, and that is Rajiv."

In Orissa, Fairfax and Rajiv are not so much the issue as the public's near-total alienation from the state Congress party, headed by J.B. Patnaik. The state leadership has lost so much of its credibility because of local scandals and corruption, that its leaders are finding it hard to even gather people for public rallies, leave alone convince them of well-laid "designs" by the Opposition and foreign powers, to destabilise the Rajiv Government. In Bihar, where there is a running feud between Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey and dissident Congress leader Jagannath Mishra, both factions have begun "mass awakening" programmes. But Mishra's supporters—now being actively courted by the high command—have begun to take the lead.

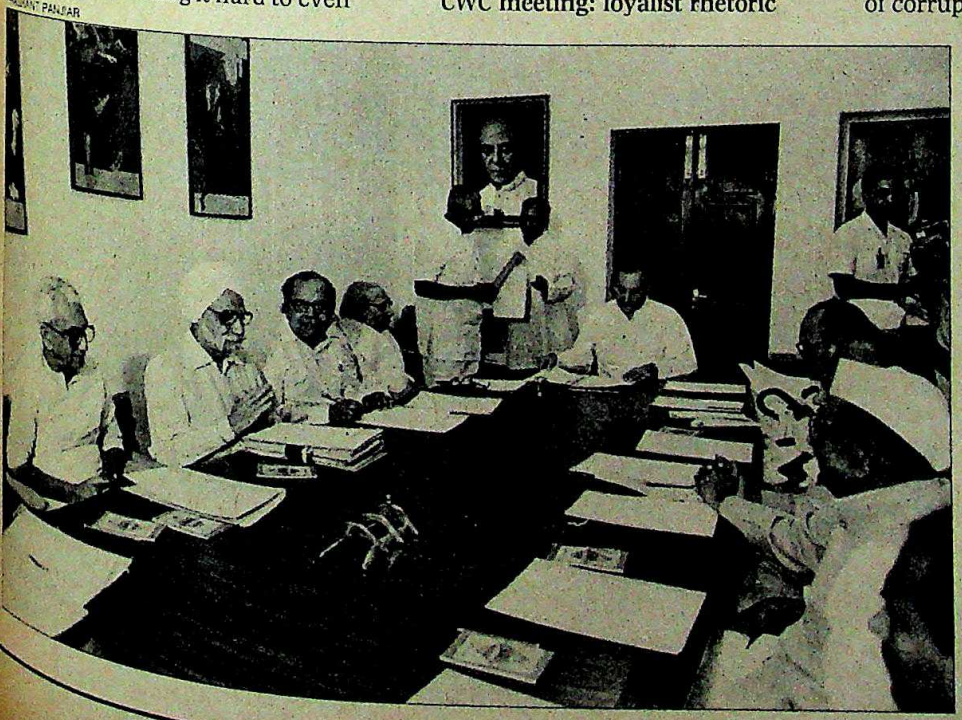
Most Maharashtra Congressmen were blaming the party's present problems on errant newspaper reporting. And here too, the conspiracy theory propagated by the CWC meeting, seems to have taken root. As B.A. Desai, the Congress(I) MLA from Bombay put it: "So far as the party is concerned, it is united solidly behind the prime minister. The whole hullabaloo in Delhi is a result of the recognition by certain world powers of the major role India is playing in international affairs."

In Madhya Pradesh, Chief Minister Motilal Vora emphasised: "All corruption charges have been emphatically denied. I don't feel that our credibility has gone down. Party workers are united to face the challenge." Said Anasuya Uike, MLA, bluntly: "It is clear that opposition parties and certain foreign powers are not too pleased with the clean image of Rajivji." The mood in Tamil Nadu, appeared to be one of disillusionment with the Mr Clean image of Rajiv. While several party luminaries admitted privately that the party had lost considerable ground in the wake of corruption charges, there was no evidence of any revolt against the leadership.

But all these emphatic pronouncements typify what is known as "Congress culture". It is not as if the rank and file Congressman is not worried. He is. And he more than readily admits, privately, that the leadership has been tainted, and that there is corruption at the top. But he is not about to revolt. There are several reasons for this. First, most Congressmen are cautious; they are not adventurous politicians. They stick to what is known as long as they can. And the more they come under attack, the more they crawl for safety, under the security blanket of their leader. It was revealing that most people interviewed, said

SIDDHANT PANDAR

CWC meeting: loyalist rhetoric



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PRESIDENT-PM

Dismissal Steps

AT a recent meeting between Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and President Zail Singh—one of several fence-mending exercises initiated by Rajiv—the prime minister sought to bring up the point that under the Constitution he had the right to advise the President on what kind of government information should be made available to Rashtrapati Bhawan. The President replied cryptically, that under the Constitution he had the right not only to receive any information but also the right to dismiss the prime minister. Zail Singh then went on to say that he would not take such a step—yet.

But during the last few weeks, the President has received advice that if the prime minister's office is not responsive to demands for an investigation of charges of corruption in high places—especially in the light of the Bofors scandal—a process may have to be started to remove the prime minister. According to one scenario, the President is being advised to rely on the precedent set by the Supreme Court judgement in the Antulay case. Even though Antulay, the former Maharashtra chief minister, resigned under pressure, a writ had been filed with the Supreme Court to determine whether a governor could remove a chief minister who was aiding and abetting a cover-up of crimes in high-places.

The Supreme Court ruled that the governor is, indeed, the "appointing authority" and in matters such as the removal of the chief executive on corruption charges, he is not bound by the advice of the chief minister. Even though the governor is bound to act on the advice of the chief minister in all matters, it is hardly possible that a chief minister would advise the governor that he be removed. In these matters, therefore, the governor, the Court ruled, is not bound by the advice of the chief minister, and can take action against him under the Prevention of Corruption Act of 1947.

The same applies to the relationship between the prime minister and President. Rashtrapati Bhawan has been advised that the prime minister can be removed for the following reasons:

► Substantial charges of corruption are made against the prime minister and officials and politicians close to him. This holds even if party members, either out of fear of the anti-defection bill, or threats or bullying, stick by their leader, notwithstanding an erosion of the party's credibility and public mandate.

► The prime minister refuses to order a criminal investigation into the corruption charges, and the various law enforcement agencies choose to do nothing. So, opposition parties and public interest litigation groups, under the anti-corruption act, can lodge a complaint with a magistrate stating that the ruling party leadership and the bureaucracy have refused to institute any corrective mechanism aimed at investigating the corruption scandals.

► But under the anti-corruption act, the complainant's petition to the magistrate will only be admissible and an order for investigation given after the President as "appointing authority" gives his concurrence. And so the petition must be examined by the President.

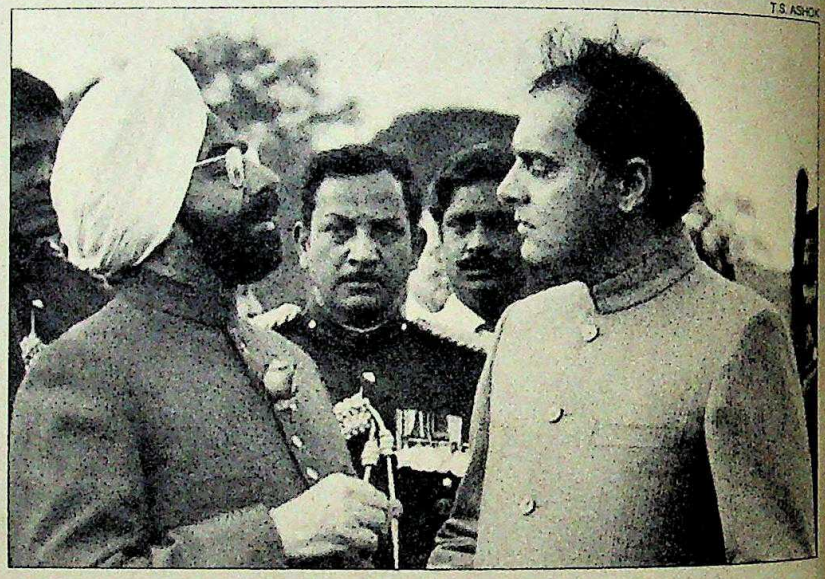
The President will then seek to determine whether or not there is a prima facie case. And in order to do this he will demand from the Government every piece of information concerning the case.

► If the Government stonewalls or refuses to participate in the investigation at that stage, the prime minister, on the grounds that he is abetting a crime, can be removed by the President (the "appointing authority"). He has this authority because in an extreme case, the President is the repository of the power of the people. The prime minister, under the "doctrine of mandate" raised by Dr Rajendra Prasad in several exchanges with Jawaharlal Nehru, must seek a fresh mandate from the public in case the original mandate given by the people has for some reason evaporated.

The removal of the prime minister by the President in such cases is not to be treated as a guilty sentence for the prime minister but simply as a corrective mechanism in which he will have to face the real sovereigns—the people.

A new prime minister, elected in the interim period, will either have to demonstrate a majority or seek a fresh election. If the dismissed prime minister is returned to power—the people of the country having spoken their final word—then the President, even as the "appointing authority" cannot take any action for a second time.

T.S. ASHOK



Rajiv and Zail: constitutional crisis

However, in spite of the palpable apprehensions in ruling party circles that the President might remove Rajiv Gandhi, constitutional experts and lawyers think otherwise. Says R.C.S. Sarkar, retired law secretary and a constitutional expert: "Even if charges of corruption are held to be true against the prime minister, the President cannot remove him as long as he enjoys the confidence of the House of People."

There are others who say that the President has little tangible option left after removing the prime minister. P.G. Krishnan, professor of law in Delhi University commented: "In case the President dissolves the Parliament, and calls

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for fresh elections and if the ruling party wins again, it will put the position of the President in a precarious spot and will seriously undermine his position. Even an interim government, as the situation stands today, will be hard to form."

Some constitutional experts, however, point out that because of the lack of any express provisions or precedents in our constitutional history on the question of removal, one has to fall back upon British conventions. One of these conventions clearly states that the head of state cannot remove the prime minister until he "subverts the democratic basis of the Constitution". Soli Sorabjee, constitutional expert, who subscribes to this view, said: "Such a case of subversion cannot be based on allegations by politicians but incorporates cases like a law passed by the Government to stop the system of elections or turn India into a theocratic state."

Another major bone of contention highlighted by lawyers is Article 75(2). This article states that "the ministers shall hold office during the pleasure of the President". The clause, if read in isolation, means that the President can remove the prime minister by simply withholding his pleasure, a fact which has been pointed out by many as a basis for removing the prime minister.

But the exercise of the pleasure doctrine is clearly restricted by two other articles. The Constitution in Article 74(1) clearly states that "there shall be a council of ministers with the prime minister as the head to aid and advise the President who shall, in the exercise of his functions, act in accordance with such advice". And Article 75(3) points out that the council of ministers shall be collectively responsible to the house of the people. Delhi lawyer Arun Jaitley argues by saying, "The articles put together make it clear that the President cannot remove the prime minister until an except a no confidence motion against the Government is passed successfully in Parliament."

Consequently, while expert opinion dismisses the apprehensions of a large section of the members of the Congress(I), sources close to the President make a strong case for Rajiv's removal under the Constitution. If dismissal eventually becomes a reality, the country will surely be plunged into its most severe crisis yet.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR and SURAJEET DAS GUPTA

openly that a loss in Haryana would not affect the solidarity of the party. In fact, that would be even more cause to hang on to the security blanket. As G. Karthikeyan, Kerala state general secretary put it: "Even if we lose Haryana, it does not make a difference. In 1967, Mrs Gandhi lost almost 13 states, but what a comeback she made!"

Secondly, there is in fact, no alternative force within the party to which dissidents can flock. Even V.P. Singh has not emerged as one yet. And Congressmen are not willing to venture forth in a vacuum. In this atmosphere of accusations and counter-accusations within the party, there is confusion about who represents whom, and a real fear is that the CBI is being used as an organisation to spy on Congressmen suspected of dissident activity. As one Uttar Pradesh MP noted: "V.P. Singh may be responsible for some of this mood. He has lost respect. Instead of keeping silent after he resigned, he began to shout and scream about his loyalty to the prime minister. Most MPs feel that if this man, who had the biggest stake of all, did not stick his neck out, then why should they stick their necks out."

But the most important stick used by the high command to keep Congressmen in line so far, has been the threat from the Prime Minister's Secretariat of dissolving Parliament and calling a mid-term election, if any "alternative" or dissident is seen receiving open support from partymen, against the prime minister. A mid-term poll is the most traumatic event in the life of politicians. As one high command member explained: "First they have to raise funds in a short period. But at least half of them know they won't get Congress tickets if this happens. And of those who get tickets, half are not sure they will win." So the safest bet is to sit it out for the remaining two-and-a-half years, "rather than get involved in the power games being played at the top".

Congressmen say privately that the party may not weaken in terms of numbers, but it has weakened because of the erosion of moral authority at the Centre. What sustains a government, ultimately, is the goodwill of the people. And it is this goodwill that is rapidly evaporating. If there is a lesson to be learnt from this, it is simply, that a numerical party majority is not sufficient to run an effective and smooth government. What is required is not a paranoid CWC resolution and hasty changes at the top, but rather, an assertion of authority, credibility and recognisable policies. The alternative is drift and dissension.

V.P. SINGH

Coming Home

A section of Congressmen, including ministers and MLAs, have started the spadework to bring the former Union minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh back home and address a series of public meetings in different parts of the state. These supporters of Singh are desperate to get him back in action in a bid to nullify the pressure built up against them by the Uttar Pradesh leadership ever since Singh quit as defence minister. These meetings

Bir Bahadur: battling V.P. Singh

will be held in the second week of May and will be patterned on Singh's public appearances in the western districts of the state after he resigned as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh in April 1983.

"Don't call it a revolt. It is perhaps the only alternative if Vishwanath Pratap Singh and his followers have to survive in politics," says a minister who prefers anonymity. According to him, Singh has also given his consent for he wants to "clarify the doubts which have been raised against him, Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress(I) in the people's mind". That the Congress(I) high command is aware of Singh's plan is evident from the qualms which the state leaders, particularly Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh, a traditional rival of V.P. Singh, is having these days. Slowly, the venue of the most crucial political battle within the Congress(I) is now shifting from Delhi to Lucknow.

Bir Bahadur Singh's full-time assign-

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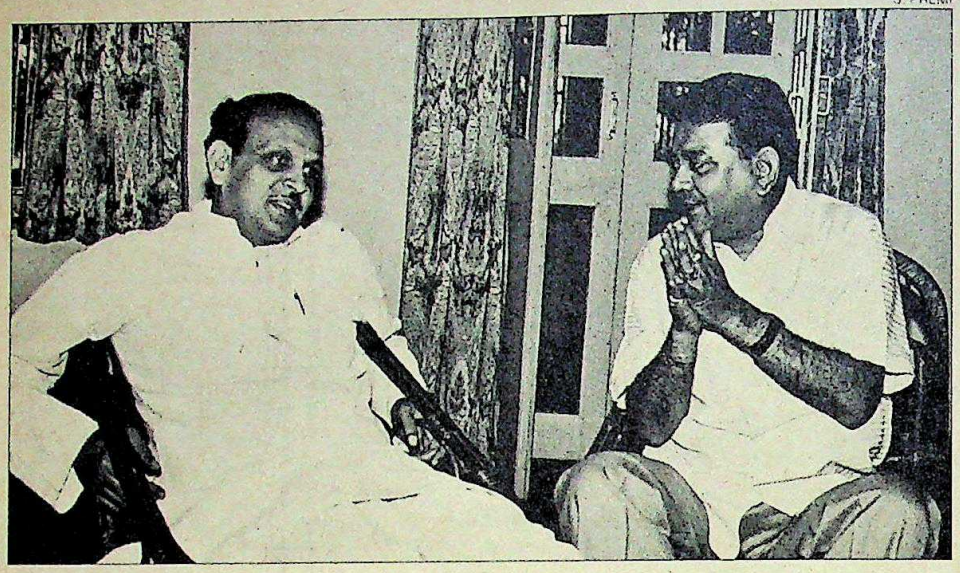

Tripathi with Singh: rallying around

Singh's supporters are desperate to get him back in action in a bid to nullify the pressure built up against them by the state leadership.

ment these days is V.P. Singh. Apparently with the consent of Delhi, the chief minister has been portraying V.P. Singh as a Frankenstein before ministers, legislators and party workers. He warns and keeps swearing dramatically: "Oh! what a dangerous conspiracy against our leader." But he refused to go on record about these statements. "I am the chief minister. How can I answer all these questions?" he said, promptly adding: "Rajiv is the only leader in the Congress. Anybody who weakens him is my enemy first".

The chief minister is going all out to ensure that when V.P. Singh comes to the state for his public meetings he is cold-shouldered. After V.P. Singh resigned, the chief minister convened an emergency cabinet meeting on April 13 in which he lectured the ministers on the need for unity. He excoriated the conduct of the Minister of State for Forests Zafar Ali Naqvi and the Minister of State for Cooperation Surendra Singh, who received V.P. Singh on his arrival earlier in the day. And in the presence of some MLAs, he summoned Surendra Singh and asked him to resign.

In a second cabinet meeting on April 21, the chief minister had a tiff with Energy Minister Sunil Shastri who objected when Bir Bahadur Singh called V.P. Singh a traitor. He told the ministers to be "on the guard and watch their conduct". Said Shastri later: "The mud-slinging will only further harm Congress(I)'s image. The campaign to restore the party's image should not be planned after excluding V.P. Singh from it. We should instead use him for gaining what we have lost."

At the same cabinet meeting a decision was taken to lower the increased power tariff for private tube-wells which had led to unrest amongst farmers in the western part of the state. Said a senior minister: "It was not only for the sake of the farmers that the chief minister lowered the rates. One of the main intentions was to neutralise V.P. Singh's influence in the western districts." The former Union minister had drawn enthusiastic receptions in the western districts when he toured them after resigning in 1983. In fact these turn-outs had forced Mrs Indira Gandhi to consider V.P. Singh for a post in the Union Cabinet. An influential MLA from western Uttar Pradesh predicted: "This time even a better response awaits him there."

UNDOUBTEDLY V.P. Singh has a base in the state. He is personally responsible for making the political careers of at least 100 sitting legislators—by distributing Assembly election tickets in the capacity of Uttar Pradesh Congress(I) Committee chief. Said V.N. Dixit, an MLA from Kanpur, and the former defence minister's confidant: "I am, and will remain, with him as I know that he does not want to harm the Congress. It is in fact the statements of Congress(I) leaders against him which are doing more harm to the party."

Health Minister Lokpati Tripathi, who accompanied V.P. Singh on his visit to Allahabad on March 17, refuses to believe the resignation came in the heat of the moment. "I know the Raja personally and I love him for what he is. But never underestimate him. He is a shrewd politician who has done what he has with a specific purpose. Maybe some miscalculations on his part have turned the plan into a fiasco."

An indication of V.P. Singh's strength among legislators was evident during his last Allahabad visit. His eight-hour visit was organised by eight Congress(I) MLAs of Allahabad led by Bhola Singh and Satish Jaiswal, who had launched an anti-Amitabh campaign. After the visit, MLA Rama Kant Mishra said: "We invited him here because he is our undisputed leader". V.P. Singh's first visit since Bachchan's election, drew massive crowds at all 11 public meetings.

Many prominent MLAs sympathise with V.P. Singh as they feel his presence in their district ensures greater public support. Dr Krishna Vir Singh Kaushal, former minister and an MLA from Agra, who was the leader of the dissident camp against Sripati Mishra, says: "People trying to prevent him from going around and speaking in favour of the prime minister are only creating further confusion." Transport Minister Sanjay Singh says: "V.P. Singh must have realised that he committed some serious mistake. That is why he resigned. Accusing him now would hardly help in ending this discussion."

According to the leaders preparing for V.P. Singh's public appearance next month, western Uttar Pradesh, parts of Bundelkhand including Banda, and some central districts will be on the agenda. What remains to be seen is whether the former Union minister's presence attracts Congressmen or Bir Bahadur Singh's scarecrow—Vishwanath Pratap Singh—frightens them away.

—DILIP AWASTHI

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Credibility Crunch

THE credibility of a government depends not so much on the strength of the ruling party as on the confidence the people repose in its integrity. In recent months the confrontation between the President and the prime minister, the Fairfax episode, the West German submarine scandal and the most recent Bofors field guns deal have between them demolished the Government's credibility.

When Rajiv Gandhi became prime minister after winning a massive mandate in the last general elections, he promised a 'clean' government, a new work culture and a streamlined administration. But the recent episodes, involving allegations of corruption and bribery in various deals, have made a mockery of the Government's clean image. Equally relevant, the disclosures about corruption involved in these deals are by agencies outside India; hardly any information surfaces as a result of the work of Indian investigating agencies. Where then is the promised work culture and streamlining of our administrative machinery?

The Swiss embassy in New Delhi has clarified that though in Switzerland bank accounts are protected against disclosure to third parties even in connection with official investigations, in the case of criminal prosecutions by another country, when the crime involved is also a criminal offence under Swiss law, banking secrecy can be lifted by a court of law. But our administration has never shown any awareness of these provisions. Why doesn't the Rajiv Gandhi Government avail of these provisions to dig out the concerned secret accounts and unearth the sources of corruption and bribery?

The repeated changes in the portfolios being handled by the prime minister, especially in the context of the recent episodes, also throw some light on personality equations, his style of functioning, and the pushes and pulls in Congress(I) power politics. For as V.P. Singh went ahead with his raids on industrial houses to check FERA violations and unearth black money, he began to seem cleaner than Mr Clean, to the great embarrassment of the prime minister. There was also the fear that the Fairfax inquiry would expose persons with high connections. And so V.P. Singh was shifted from finance to the sensitive defence portfolio before he was humiliated, so that he resigned in disgust.

The power struggles in the Congress(I) have acquired a sharper edge after the recent scandals. Having realised that V.P.Singh has fallen from 'majestic' grace, hardly any appreciable section in the Congress(I) is willing to take up cudgels on his behalf. Indeed, there is unhealthy competition among Congressmen to characterise Singh as an inadvertent promoter of destabilisation. Strangely enough, such a person was only three months ago entrusted with the defence portfolio before being forced to resign.

> "The Government and the ruling party are on the defensive, and their entire time and energy are now being spent in struggling to extricate themselves from the interlocking mesh in which they are caught."

One significant result of the new situation is that the Government and the ruling party have been put on the defensive, and their entire time and energy are now being spent in struggling to extricate themselves from the interlocking mesh in which they have been caught. In the pre-Emergency days, the Congress(I) and the Government were similarly submerged in corruption episodes like the Tulmohan Ram import licence scandal, Sanjay Gandhi's Maruti escapade and the Nagarwala affair. In those tumultuous days, the ruling party, thrown into utter confusion, was forced to take a defensive posture and the administration had become almost paralysed. The symptoms of a similar situation are visible today.

In those critical days Indira Gandhi took refuge in the Emergency, only to realise in 1977 that it was an escape route that led to a cul-de-sac. It is this experience of the past that will deter Rajiv Gandhi from promulgating an emergency. In any case, such a promulgation has been made difficult through the amendment of the emergency provision in the Constitution. Also, the prime minister does not have a pliant President at his beck and call.

The other question is whether the ruling party will face a split. Let there be no illusions on this score. Power is the cementing factor for all Congressmen. They will cling to power as iron filings cling to a magnet. Frightened by the unity displayed by the opposition parties, the Congress(I) in its desperation is raising the bogey of destabilisation. But no one will be taken in by this propaganda. The inquiry into the Lockheed scandal in Japan, involving Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka, and the Watergate scandal concerning President Richard Nixon of the United States, could not destabilise the system in those countries.

The Congress(I) has also manoeuvred to try and split the Opposition by alleging a 'rightist' conspiracy in collusion with international forces of destabilisation—a strategy that was tried during the Emergency. But those who have learnt the lessons of the Emergency will not fall prey to any plan now to bring about a right-left divide on the corruption issue.

The scare has also been raised that in the prevailing atmosphere the President may decisively act to dismiss the Government. But this is a fear born of desperation and panic. There need be no anxiety of such a catastrophe, which will only build a halo of martyrdom round those who have sunk to the lowest depths of credibility. Besides, such a step would be most undemocratic.

Emboldened by V.P. Singh's resignation from the ministry, a question is now posed: Will he be the focus of a new consolidation? Before one hastens to reply, let it not be forgotten that V.P. Singh's resignation was just a reflex action of an injured conscience.

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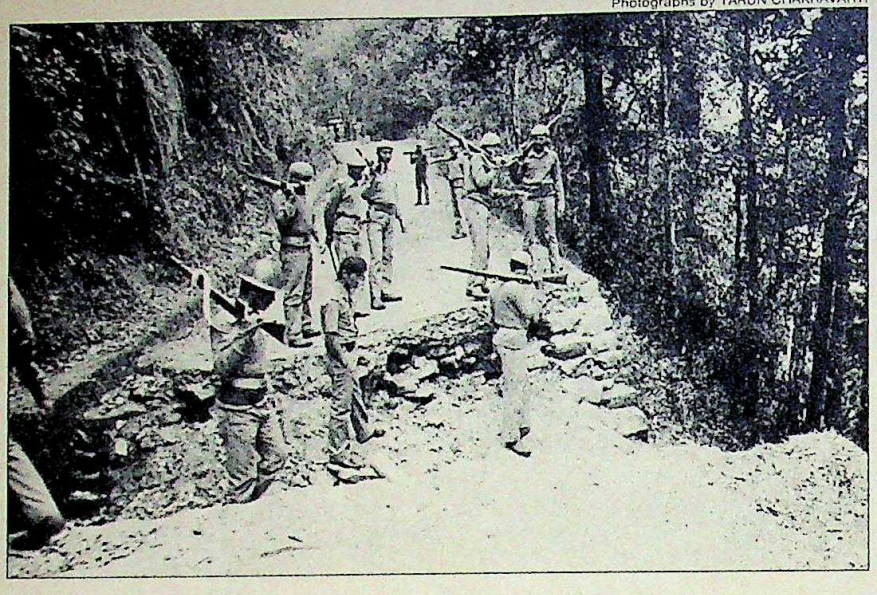

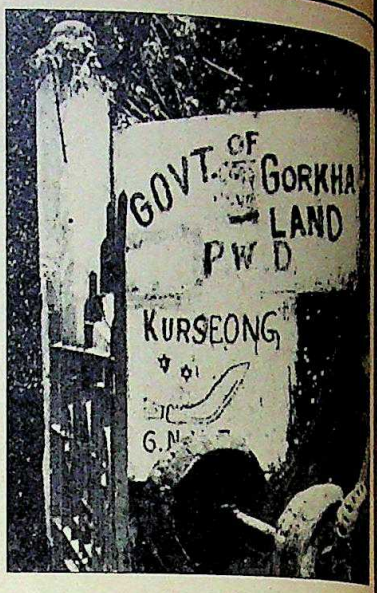

Road damaged by militants (above left); a 'Government of Gorkhaland' board

GORKHALAND STIR

Militants to the Fore

The north Bengal hill resort of Darjeeling is in the grip of a grey spring. Instead of sunshine and holidaymakers, for most of last fortnight, a cold fog curling around the half deserted streets blotted out the season's usual exuberance, turning Darjeeling into a phantom town stalked by the spectre of insurrection. In one part of town, Subhas Ghising, leader of the separatist Gorkhaland agitation, repeated his warnings about how the deadline for his ultimatum to the Centre had expired. In another part, district police overlord DIG R.K. Handa announced that a new plan to counter the agitation had been formulated, even as reports of bomb blasts and ambushes on police patrols poured into his control room. It fuelled fear among residents that the agitation was snowballing towards a state of insurgency.

"During the last few days we find that the police for the first time is being attacked deliberately and without provocation," admits Darjeeling Superintendent of Police R.K. Sahai. Today the police and paramilitary forces are confronted with a counter-offensive that during the past fortnight alone has claimed the life of one CRPF jawan and seriously injured over a dozen more.

In Darjeeling town, the last day of the latest six-day bandh called by the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) in protest against police action, signalled an ominous message. On the night of April 22, the town's tradition for peace was irreparably shattered by an exploding bomb and two rifle shots: a grenade had been lobbed at the district intelligence branch office situated in the heart of town and startled sentries had let loose a couple of shots into the darkness. A week earlier, a similar blast had smashed window-panes and sent lethal shrapnel ripping through the walls of the police control room in Kurseong town. A sentry on duty had narrowly escaped. "It's sheer luck that we have not had more casualties so far," remarks Additional SP Raj Kanojia who has been assigned to lead raids.

Handa too had a narrow escape last fortnight when his convoy was held up at a road block and extremists positioned on the hill tops started lobbying grenades and shooting. A bullet missed Handa's head by inches while a bomb splinter gouged a wound in his hand. There have been several similar ambushes and bomb attacks on CRPF outposts in the latter part of April. Even more disconcerting is the discovery of high explosives and a few sophisticated firearms which suggest that GNLF radicals are gearing up for increased conflict.

The district police intelligence network has so far averted major catastrophes. On April 15, for instance, the police on being tipped off, seized seven land mines that were being planted in the road and connected with detonators. A growing section of GNLF radicals, it is believed, are determined to hit the district administration hard in order to demonstrate their total control in the hills.

Already, the GNLF has succeeded in setting up an underground organisation operating parallel to the official administration. Local Nepali policemen admit that even their families have to pay "taxes" and other donations against which "official" GNLF receipts are issued. In places, especially where local officials are in league with the GNLF, special ration cards are issued. In Darjeeling town, the principal of the local college asked GNLF permission to hold examinations and so did the local Muslim leader for bringing out a Mohurram procession. The GNLF's complete dominance over the hills is similarly demonstrated by the complete success of its bandh calls. Compliance to GNLF edicts is ensured by the highly organised Gorkhaland Volunteer Corps (GVC), which of late has even been helping in combatting heroin peddlars in the towns. During a raid in the Kalimpong area, a couple of months ago, the police had even stumbled across a GNLF thana complete with a lock-up.

Consequently the only force holding out against the GNLF today is the state police aided by 28 companies of state armed police and paramilitary forces. Local policemen are exempted from participating in raids lest they and their families become targets of retaliation. But it is this organised and militant section of the GNLF that could be the greatest threat to Ghising's continued leadership.

"Subhas Ghising has already become

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Militant being held; (right) Ghising: changing balance

irrelevant to the agitation," claims DIG Handa, interpreting Ghising's dismissal of the recent pre-meditated attacks on the police as a sign of his lack of control over the extremists. The police believes that Ghising's attempts at moderation and his tendency to call off strikes every time the Centre offers to hold talks with him, is beginning to rile the militants. Significantly, the beginning of the extremist attacks on the police and the CRPF coincided with the GNLF's failure to establish contact with Union Home Minister Buta Singh. On April 13 a two-member GNLF delegation, consisting of C. Khargha and K.C. Lama, had travelled to New Delhi to meet Buta Singh and fix a date for talks between him and Ghising, but had to return disappointed after merely submitting a memorandum.

As it is, the Gorkhalanders' attitudes have hardened following their success in ensuring a near total poll boycott during the March 23 state assembly elections. In the Darjeeling assembly constituency only 15,485 votes were polled as against a total electorate of about 1.2 lakh; in Kurseong 7,677 out of the 1.68 lakh; and in Kalimpong just 1,100 votes were polled out of an electorate of 1.05 lakh. This, according to Ghising in his memorandum to Buta Singh, constitutes "the greatest political victory of the Gorkhas for the first time in Indian history and cannot be denied or challenged by any single individual or any democratic government". For the GNLF the poll boycott is a referendum for Gorkhaland and the Centre, in Ghising's words, must "concede the demand for Gorkhaland as soon as possible without giving any further scope to the Gorkhaland movement from waging an unnecessary battle between the GNLF, the Central forces and the Marxist Government of West Bengal in the coming future".

But the Centre was not impressed. Union Minister of State for Home P. Chidambaram subsequently declared that the Centre far from being cowed down by the threat would ensure that all paramilitary help is provided to the West Bengal Government. And despite having promised some sort of a "package deal" to solve the Gorkhaland problem, after receiving the April 13 memorandum, the Centre decided not to hold any dialogue with Ghising before the expiry of his April 23 deadline. And Ghising who had threatened drastic action, meekly announced a further postponement of the agitation.

Ghising's unexpected back-tracking suggests a certain desperation beneath the bluster. As a matter of fact, Ghising and his inner circle have been waiting anxiously for the promised Central emissary and the package deal. A member of Ghising's inner sanctum told INDIA TODAY that political columnist Inderjit Khuller has been acting as an unofficial intermediary between them and the Centre. Ghising had been depserately awaiting Khuller's arrival before the expiry of the April 23 deadline. "Every time we heard rumours that Mr Khuller had arrived in Darjeeling we rushed to check it out," says P.K. Pradhan, one of Ghising's assistants. But their enquiries with the hotels proved in vain and Khuller never arrived.

A series of GNLF meetings could not come up with any decision on how to respond to the Centre's rebuff. The idea of a month-long strike was apparently struck down by Ghising, who knows his remaining trump card is his tremendous personal popularity among the district's Gorkhas who view him as a deity. A month-long strike might not prove to be endearing considering that this is the third tourist season the agitation has ruined and even tea-garden workers living on their daily wages have been hit severely. Besides, Ghising has openly promised the creation of Gorkhaland by May 1987 and that perhaps constitutes the limit of the fragile hill economy's endurance. "One mistake now and Ghising will be out of the throne," says Ghising's arch rival DIG Handa who within five months of his arrival in Darjeeling has succeeded in adding a second major slogan to the GNLF programme: after "We Want Gorkhaland", wall writings all over the district say, "Go Back Handa".

Handa's optimism might well be unfounded and the nexus between Ghising and the GNLF's radical wing could be far stronger than it is generally assumed. Among the most hardened GNLF musclemen, Darjeeling's local residents point out, are Ghising's personal bodyguards. In fact, at a meeting at Kurseong, the local Additional Superintendent of Police Ranjit Pachnanda had discovered that Ghising's bodyguards far from being the non-violent type were highly trained ex-servicemen armed with small arms and kukris. And GNLF executive committee members themselves are vehement in insisting that there is absolutely no rift within their ranks.

The problem at the moment, as the GNLF realises, is the understanding the Marxist Chief Minister Jyoti Basu appears to have come to with the Centre on the issue. Basu has already held one round of discussions with the prime minister on the issue and will follow it up later this fortnight. Given the consensus between the two governments on not wanting any division of the state, it is obvious that the promised Central package can at most offer a few economic crumbs, in which Ghising is obviously not interested. In effect, the Darjeeling chessboard shows a stalemate. But as the events of last fortnight suggest, the game might just go overboard and the next round of contest might be without any rules.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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THE OPPOSITION

Cautious Start

THE word 'conclave' made a return to India's political vocabulary last fortnight when six chief ministers of non-Congress(I)-ruled states met in New Delhi to discuss a common problem—the Congress(I). The announcement soon afterwards that a meeting of "like-minded" political parties would be held in May, followed by another get-together of chief ministers in mid-June—probably in Bangalore—indicates that, after their drubbing in the December 1984 elections, opposition parties are finally trying to get their act together at the national level. The meeting was attended by West Bengal's Jyoti Basu, Karnataka's Ramakrishna Hegde, Andhra Pradesh's N.T. Rama Rao, Punjab's Surjit Singh Barnala, Kerala's E.K. Nayanar and Tripura's Nripen Chakraborty. Though Assam's Prafulla Mahanta could not attend, he was represented by party MP Dinesh Goswami.

The new enthusiasm to seriously re-establish old ties is directly the result of the Congress(I) reverses in the recent assembly elections in West Bengal and Kerala. Basu said as much, adding that the embarrassment to the ruling party in Parliament following recent scandals also convinced the chief ministers that the time was opportune.

The presence of three CPI(M) chief ministers—Basu, Chakraborty and Nayanar—was proof that the Congress(I)'s abrupt leftist rhetoric, as carried in a recent Congress(I) Working Committee resolution last fortnight, had failed to have the desired effect. The resolution had attributed the allegations of kickbacks in defence deals and the stashing of funds abroad to "external and internal forces of disruption, reactionary elements and multinationals". It did not succeed in wooing the CPI(M), and consequently, failed to split the Opposition. Noted the CPI(M)'s official organ, *People's Democracy* dismissively: "The attempt to dub genuine protests against corruption as a device of outside forces is just an attempt to cover up the misdeeds of the corrupt." Added senior CPI leader and MP Indrajit Gupta: "We consider the resolution motivated by the embarrassment the Congress(I) finds itself in. It doesn't wash with us at all."

But if Basu, as informal spokesman for the chief ministers, cautioned that people's expectations should not be raised too much, it was easy to see why. In the past, opposition alliances have been so opportunistic and brittle that they have brought discredit to most non-Congress(I) parties.

Conclave politics had really begun in end-May 1983 when Rama Rao had invited leaders of 14 opposition parties—including the communists—to Vijayawada. A month later, 16 parties similarly met at New Delhi but by the time the third get-together took place on October 5 that year at Srinagar, the BJP and the Lok Dal had already dropped out to form their short-lived National Democratic Alliance. A fourth conclave took place in mid-January 1984 in Calcutta but after that the movement petered out. The general elections in end-1984 saw an almost entirely divided opposition.

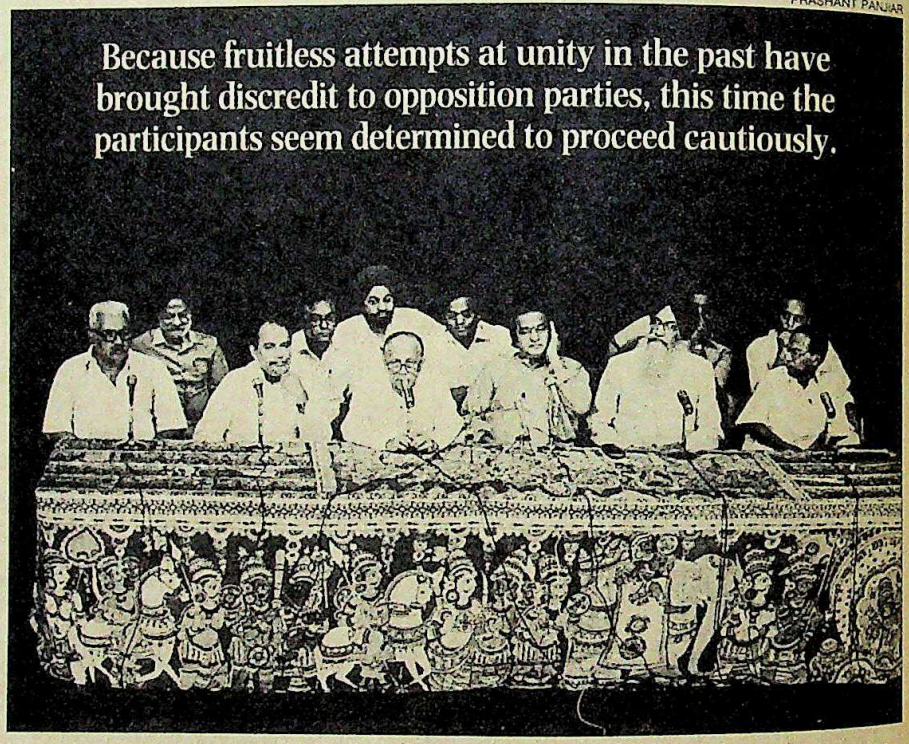
Understandably, then, opposition parties will tread carefully. For one, they have begun the exercise with the present term of Parliament only halfway through, because they want to convince voters that what they are aiming for is more than just an electoral alliance and is based on some commonality of views. The meeting resulted in a resolution that covered corruption in the ruling party and the Congress(I)'s economic policies, the delay in the submission of the Sarkaria Commission's report on Centre-state relations, a greater say for the states in loans advanced by commercial banks and misuse of the radio and television by the ruling party, among other things. Hegde floated a proposal—which had been made in the Srinagar conclave—for an inter-state council as provided for under Article 263 of the Constitution. Hegde and Rama Rao also suggested a 'confederation' of parties at the national level but that issue has been kept in abeyance for now. If little of all this was new, it established the strategy about playing safe initially.

The chief ministers found it easier to arrive at the preliminary consensus since their areas of influence are so clearly demarcated that a clash of interests is limited. Tensions can be expected to arise only when parties based in north India, where none of them is a clear leader, join the exercise in May. But the BJP may not be invited, in part because of the mutual antagonism that exists between it and the CPI(M). The Opposition's immediate test will be the election of President in July. If it fails to put up a consensus candidate, it may set back the unity efforts by several months.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

PRASHANT PANJIAR

Because fruitless attempts at unity in the past have brought discredit to opposition parties, this time the participants seem determined to proceed cautiously.



Non-Congress(I) chief ministers in New Delhi: treading warily

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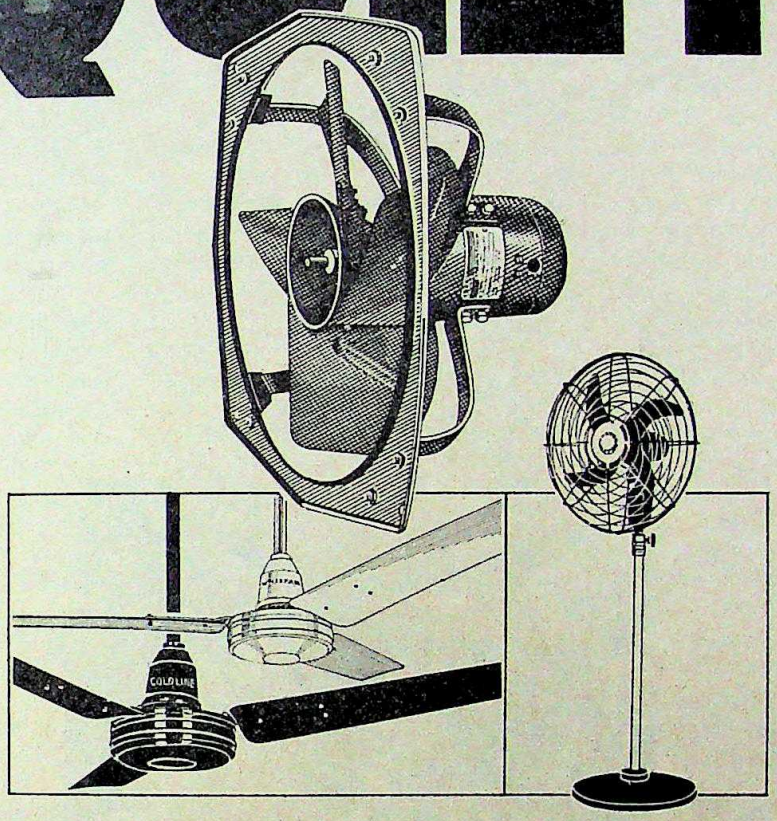
QUIET.



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KERALA

Mixed Moves

THE month-old performance of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) Government has been something of an education. One of the first decisions taken by the E.K. Nayanar Ministry was to scrap the pre-degree board announced by the United Democratic Front (UDF) government in May 1986. "The UDF in the past years has made a mess of the educational system in the state. We intend to clean up the mess. The scrapping of the proposed pre-degree board is just the beginning," the new Education Minister K. Chandrasekharan said.

The LDF's decision has drawn to a close an issue controversial from the start. The Karunakaran ministry, without taking the academic community into confidence, had last year decided to de-link pre-degree education from the universities and attach it to schools. The decision sparked off a revolt in the universities as both teachers and employees felt that a sizeable section of the staff would become superfluous if the two-year study after the 10-year-school education became an extension of school. Opposition parties felt that with elections due the ruling parties wanted to award the plus-two courses to private schools who in return would make contributions to party coffers. The prolonged strike in response to the Government's decision reduced the pre-degree examination conducted in Kerala University to a farce for thousands of students. Striking employees misplaced answerpapers and marklists, and results when they were published were found not to tally with the candidates' past performance. The resultant public uproar, forced the state Government to set-up the Janaki Amma Commission to inquire into the muddle. Former education minister T.M. Jacob claimed then that the striking employees controlled by LDF unions had deliberately misplaced the answer sheets. Significantly, the LDF Government wound up the commission at the same time as they scrapped the pre-degree board.

The new education minister also cancelled 1,500 special order transfers of headmasters, assistant education officers and some teachers issued by the former education minister. He promised not to "issue a single transfer order in the future". Chandrasekharan also announced that unlike under the UDF government when 632 new schools had been sanctioned in five years, "there will be no further privatisation of education". Another very popular government decision was to abrogate the previous government's order to sanction a relief cheque of Rs 5,000 to Harijan rape victims.

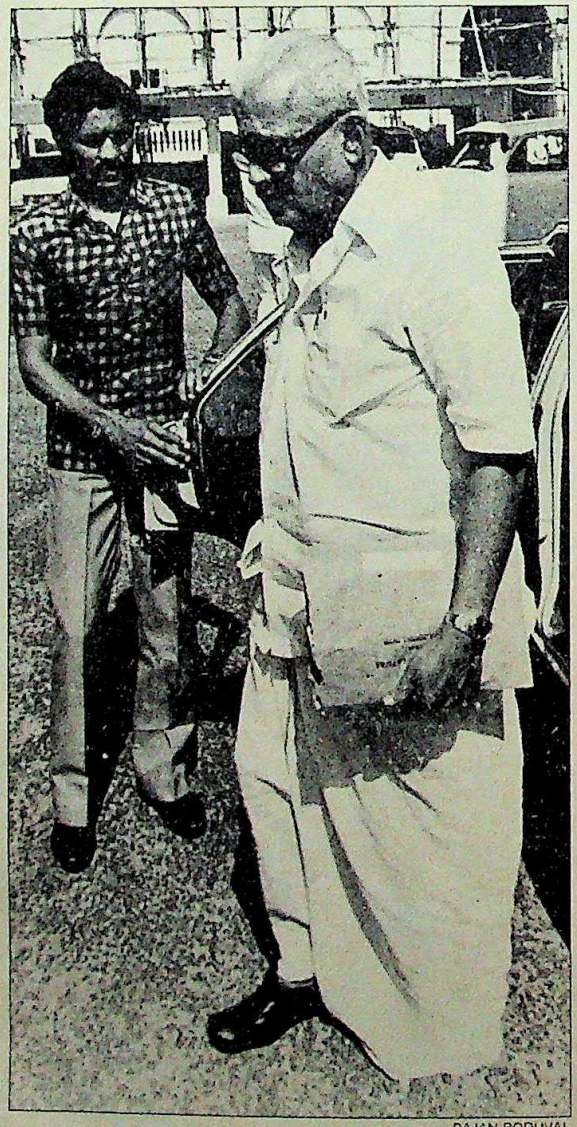
The state exchequer, however, is not in the pinkest of health. Except for two years when there was a surplus, there has been a steady rise in the deficit on the revenue accounts over the past decade. Instead of seeking loans for its capital investment requirements alone, the state Government has been borrowing to meet even its current expenditure. In just four years from 1981 to 1985, the Government's loans from financial institutions and the open market has increased nearly twelvefold, and the Centre had to give money to cover the Rs 340-crore deficit. If the state did not get a budget of Rs 3,000 crore in the seventh plan, it was because the state Government was unwilling to raise the resources it could easily have.

An unexplainable lassitude has also set in in the collection of sales tax, considered the most important source of revenue for any state. The Karunakaran government was reputed to issue large-scale stay-orders on sales tax collection. According to Viswanatha Menon, the new Marxist finance minister: "The stay-orders on the collection of sales tax created a record revenue account deficit. We are still trying to figure out how much sales tax collection has been stayed."

Doles handed out liberally by governments to gain popularity, are another major drain on state finance. "Currently the Government coughs up Rs 40 crore annually for old-age pension, agricultural workers pension and unemployment assistance. And it looks like the LDF will announce more doles, which would leave a gaping hole in the exchequer," said a concerned state planning board member. Bowing to populist pressures last week, Nayanar announced in the state Assembly that the Government would implement a pension scheme for workers in traditional industries like coir, cashew and handloom.

In its allocation of portfolios too, the Nayanar Ministry seemed to have chosen to adopt the conventional ways of the UDF government. Even though the UDF had upbraided Karunakaran for burdening the exchequer with a 19-member cabinet in 1982, the new cabinet too has an equal number. But the Marxists have monopolised the important portfolios of home, finance, industry and electricity, while giv-

Chief Minister Nayanar: taking charge



RAJAN PODUVAL

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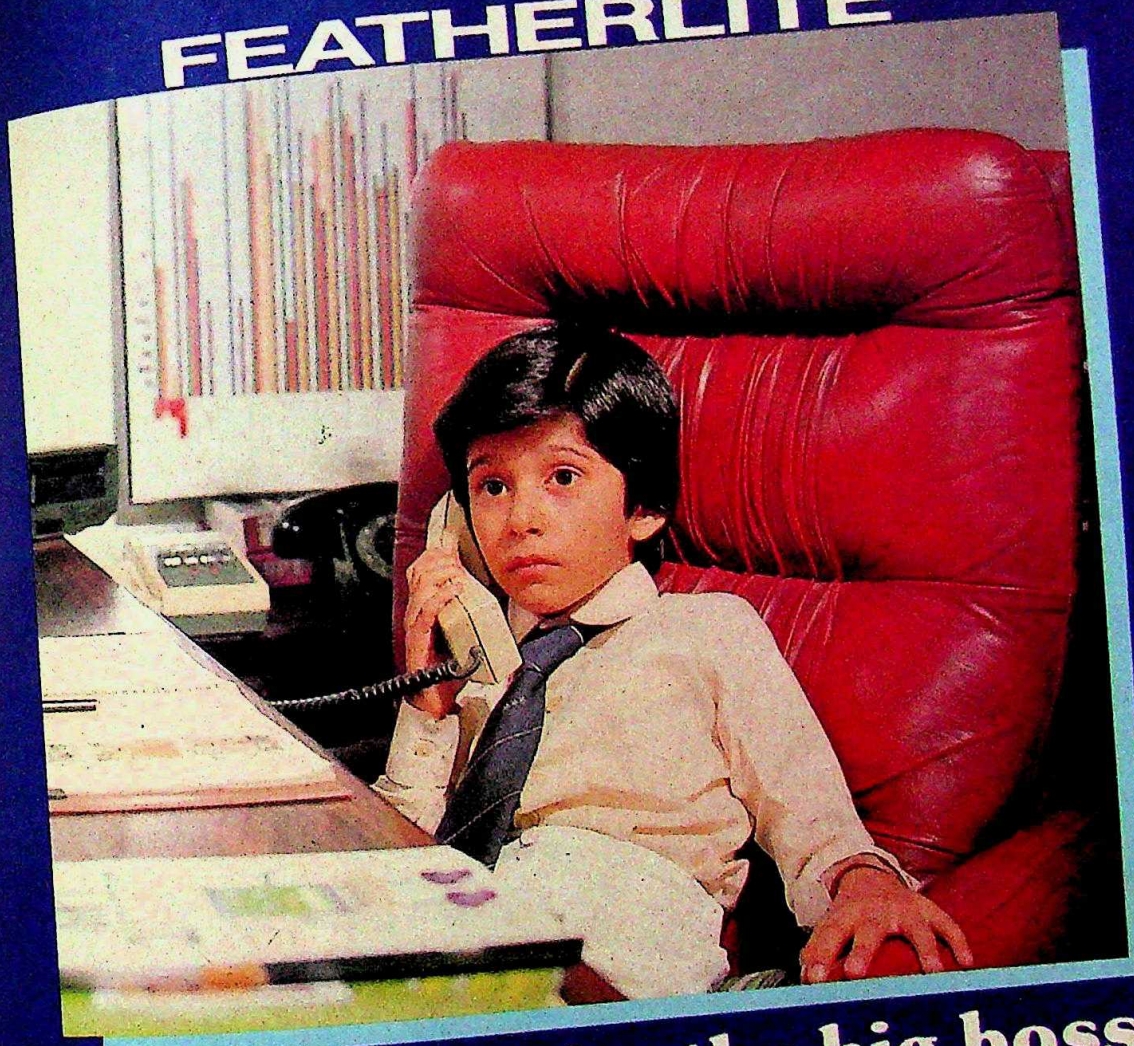
FEATHERLITE



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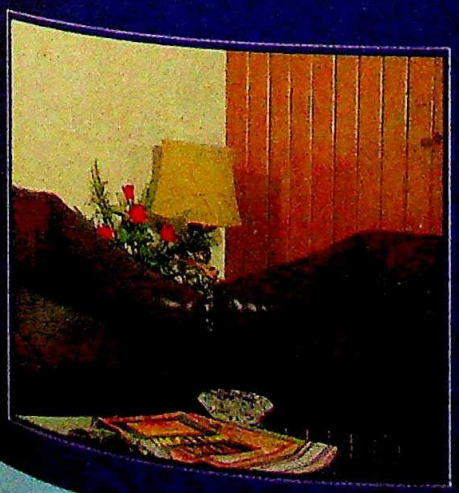

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ing the CPI(M) revenue, agriculture, food and civil supplies. "The Congress(I) in the past made the big mistake of allotting high profile portfolios to its constituents and it was left with almost nothing other than the chief ministership. To run the coalition, we have to call the shots," explained a senior CPI(M) leader.

Detractors claim that the real power behind the LDF throne is E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the CPI(M) general secretary and the architect of the LDF victory. The education minister's statement in the Assembly that the new educational policy would be framed after consulting Namboodiripad provoked K.M. Mani to say "the LDF ministry is being remote controlled from the A.K. Gopalan Centre, the Marxist headquarters in Trivandrum". The Marxist leadership has also made it clear that no policy decision would be made by other Front partners without consulting them. All LDF ministers have been asked to travel only in official ambassador cars and that too without police escort. As Nayanar said: "We would like to give a new image to the Government and the thrust of the new ministry is to provide an honest and efficient administration."

Meanwhile, the LDF euphoria was dampened briefly when, 48 hours after his appointment, Janata Party forest minister M.P. Veerendra Kumar resigned because of the pressure of intra-party fighting. Kumar is the managing director of the state's second largest newspaper *Mathrubhoomi*, a fact which is believed to have influenced his nomination. He was replaced by N.M. Joseph, a college professor whose appointment was okayed by the state's Janata MLAs who met in Bangalore in the presence of the Karnataka chief minister.

But the biggest problem facing the Marxists is how to keep both the state's police force and the CPI(M)'s trade union, CITU, under control. Nayanar has not made any major changes in the police since taking office. Meanwhile, Ananthalavattom Anandan, the powerful CITU leader and MLA, has promised the CITU "will definitely be more restrained and politically conscious".

The LDF, however, is optimistic about its future. A.C. Shanmughadas, the Congress(S) leader and health minister philosophised: "They say that the LDF has never completed a full term in office. But this time, come what may, hell or high water, with the help of the people, not only will we survive but provide a clean administration."

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

LAST WORD/RAJINDER PURI

Cleaning Up

PEOPLE are wondering what the real inside story is about V.P. Singh's resignation from the Government. The decision that V.P. Singh must be forced to quit was taken at a high-level top secret meeting attended by the prime minister and his closest aides. This is how the discussions went.

The prime minister sighed and said with distress: "Gentlemen, you know why we are meeting here. There are mounting demands in the party that V.P. Singh must be forced to quit. Frankly, I don't see why it should come to that. V.P. Singh is a loyal chap and I like him a lot!"

Buta Singh was the first to speak up. "He may be loyal to you, prime minister, but is he loyal to the party? You know that we have exacting standards of public conduct which are part of the AICC tradition!"

"Have you any specific charge against him?" the prime minister asked gravely.

For a while they fell silent. Then N.K.P. Salve spoke up: "Prime minister, you might be ignorant of this, but the whole party is talking about it. In fact, the whole country is talking about it. They say that V.P. Singh is not corrupt! Repeatedly he has committed acts which are clean! This is ruining the morale of the party!"

The prime minister said in a shocked voice: "That's a serious charge! Is it true?"

K.K. Tewari snapped: "Of course! That man is thoroughly clean and nothing can save his reputation!"

H.K.L. Bhagat coughed and said: "Aren't we all being a little hasty? I concede that many rumours are going around, but that's no reason to condemn a man. Don't forget that every man should be considered corrupt unless he is proven clean! Do we have any documented proof that V.P. Singh is clean? If not, we should give him the benefit of the doubt!"

Buta Singh objected: "Come prime minister, let's be realistic! We all know how difficult it is to get documentary evidence that a person is clean! But we also know that V.P. Singh has done enough to convince us that there is a strong prima facie case that he is clean! We may not have written proof of his cleanliness, but how can such a man be considered fit for holding public office?"

Just then the Law Minister, H.R. Bharadwaj, cleared his throat. Everybody turned his attention to him. "It seems to me that there is one aspect of this whole business which has escaped your attention, prime minister," Bharadwaj said slowly. "How will this crisis effect the entire country? Once people know that a clean minister is being allowed to function in the Government, the entire population right down to the level of the ordinary peon will want to become clean! How will our present system survive the crisis?"

Everyone nodded solemnly. The Foreign Minister N.D. Tewari, was the last to intervene. "Prime minister," he said in a sombre voice, "there is an even more serious aspect! If word gets around that there is even the slightest breath of cleanliness in our government, it will cause irreparable damage to our reputation abroad! Not a single armaments' manufacturer or foreign government will be prepared to do business with us! How will we carry on?"

"Oh, all right," the prime minister said regretfully. "I guess you're right, the party is bigger than any individual..."

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UTTAR PRADESH

Communal Flashpoint

THE Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy had already kindled communal tensions in Etah, Faizabad, Jaunpur and Ayodhya. All that Meerut needed was a tiny spark and this was provided last fortnight by a small and tragic misunderstanding. Two colonies of Muslims, celebrating Shab-e-Baraat with the traditional fireworks competition, clashed. Hindus in the neighbourhood, confused by the commotion, thought they were being attacked and quickly retaliated. For Meerut, which has a long history of communal clashes, this was enough to leave a trail of havoc that left 10 killed, 23 injured, 52 shops burnt and property worth lakhs destroyed. Raging mobs, themselves unsure of what had triggered off the riots, stalked the streets, assaulting passers-by, brickbatting their opponents, and creating pandemonium when they burnt down the screen in a jam-packed cinema hall.

As always, innocent people paid the price. Devender Kumar, on his way to the Nauchandi-ka-Mela for which Meerut is known, was stopped by some ruffians who asked him his name—and tried to slit his throat as soon as he uttered it. Razauddin, returning home in a rickshaw, was attacked with knives and lathis. Later in the fortnight, lying in a stupor in the local medical college, both considered themselves lucky to have escaped alive—and they still did not know what it had all been about. Equally ignorant were most people in the walled city of Meerut who had been caught in the web of an intense rumour campaign which bred suspicion and tension.

The group clashes and brickbatting soon faded out, but the administration was stumped by the isolated stabbings—typical of a tense Meerut—that continued. On the third day, curfew was clamped and the police strength swelled to 5,000. Preventive detention was used against 355 suspected trouble-makers and 60 arms licences were suspended. Peace meetings were organised and compensation quickly distributed. Belated "air-dashes" were also made to Meerut by Union Home Minister Buta

Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Meerut riot victims (right) and burnt shop: pointless violence

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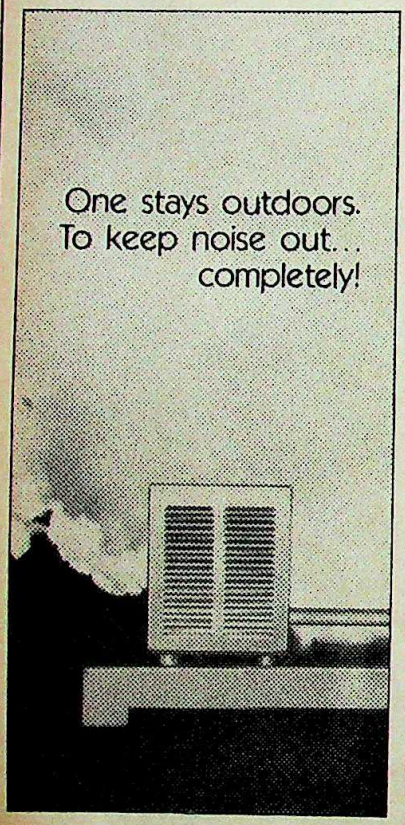

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Singh, Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh and state Home Minister Gopinath Dikshit.

The Nauchandi-ka-Mela, which had drawn thousands from all over the country, was abandoned and school examinations were postponed indefinitely. Yet the tension persisted, feeding on rumours—a Hindu was stabbed in a Hindu locality in a case of mistaken identity; a headless unidentified man was found lying in a drain. And the toll kept mounting. A confounded administration tightened curfew restrictions, increased the police presence and probably blamed itself for not having anticipated a clash. Recalls Deputy Superintendent of Police Shailendra Pratap Singh, circle officer in the Kotwali and Lisari Gate area, the nerve-centre of the riots: "The atmosphere was charged due to the Babri Masjid dispute. There was no other local problem. It needed only a spark, not an issue."

On the night of April 14, when the Shab-e-Baraat celebrations were at their height, there was a pittance of a police force to face the huge mobs. Says Senior Superintendent of Police V.K.B. Nair: "Our hands were full that night. Besides this celebration, there was a Baisakhi procession, then the Dr Ambedkar Jayanti and of course, the Nauchandi-ka-Mela." Explains District Magistrate Radhey Shyam Kaushik: "The police deployment was not for a riot situation as it was a happy occasion being celebrated."

Clearly, no one in the administration had anticipated trouble although, after the Babri Masjid issue resurfaced at the national level with the mammoth rally taken out by Muslims in New Delhi recently, the reverberations had been felt loud and clear throughout Uttar Pradesh. It was only after the damage had been done that the administration rushed about banning the entry of religious fundamentalists into town. But with the air thick with tension, it will now take a long time before normalcy returns to the riot-prone city.

Although the local administration has received a clean chit from the state Government for its handling of the situation, the fact remains that it will need greater foresight if a repetition of such ugly situations is to be prevented in future. Communal tensions in the state have escalated to such a fever pitch that henceforth the spark may be provided not by a local issue at all but purely by the hatred that is being generated across a huge state.

—TANIA MIDHA

UTTAR PRADESH

Culture Wise

UTTAR Pradesh's Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh is an inspired man these days. The song that he and his government are humming is culture—and the tune has obviously been picked up from Rajiv Gandhi. Apart from setting up regional cultural centres and research institutes, Singh himself has inaugurated or graced as many as 17 cultural functions in or outside the state in the last four months. And each time, his presence was not a short, ceremonial affair but a highly visible performance.

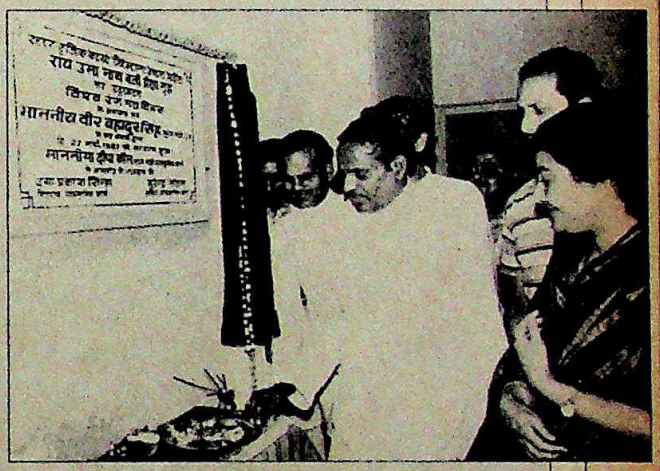
As many as 31 major cultural events were organised in the state during 1986-87 as compared to 15 in 1985-86. These included state and folk drama festivals at Lucknow, a national Hindi drama festival at Dehradun, a multi-lingual drama festival at Allahabad, Ramayana Mela at Ayodhya and Shardotsava in Vrindavan. The state capital also saw four national-level music conferences between February 13 and March 25, besides the Lucknow Mahotsava. For good measure, 200 artistes performed in an Uttar Pradesh Parva organised at Madras in January, this year.

Now the state has drawn up a cultural calendar. Six festivals—the Ramayana Mela in Ayodhya, Shardotsava in Mathura, Yamunotsava in Agra, Lucknow Mahotsava in Lucknow, and two drama festivals, one at state-level and the other national-level—will be held every year. The anticipated bill: a sizeable Rs 1 crore.

The Cultural Affairs Department has naturally benefited most from Singh's new-found enthusiasm. Its budget has been hiked up sharply from Rs 60 lakh in 1985-86 to Rs 1.74 crore in 1986-87—a 190-per cent leap. What is more, it is expected to rise to a hefty Rs 4 crore in 1987-88. Says Surendra Mohan, cultural affairs secretary: "Our intention is to lay emphasis on analytical studies of our cultural background and to set up research centres for this purpose."

To translate this goal into reality, Rs 25 lakh has been sanctioned to transform five state museums into regional cultural centres. Equipped with audio and visual recording facilities, these centres—Lucknow, Mathura, Jhansi, Almora and Gorakhpur—will organise cultural activities in their zones, and undertake research work on existing art forms. "The idea is to revive and exploit the rich cultural tradition of Uttar Pradesh," says Daya Prakash Sinha, cultural affairs director.

As a first step, these centres will be assigned specific dance forms to study and promote. The studies are expected to regenerate interest in Uttar Pradesh's 24 dance forms: currently, the state is known only for Kathak. The centres will also take up projects in sculpture and painting.



Singh inaugurating auditorium: new-found enthusiasm

In addition, the Singh Government has set up three research institutes at Vrindavan, Ayodhya and Sarnath to study art forms related to Krishna, Rama and Buddha respectively. Another research institute to study Jain culture is likely to come up either at Hastinapur (Meerut) or Devgarh (Lalitpur). All these institutes will have laboratories capable of dating antiques—a facility which the state has lacked until now.

This stress is sure to give culture in Uttar Pradesh a new staying base and boost the chief minister's image as a crusader for culture.

—DILIP AWASTHI

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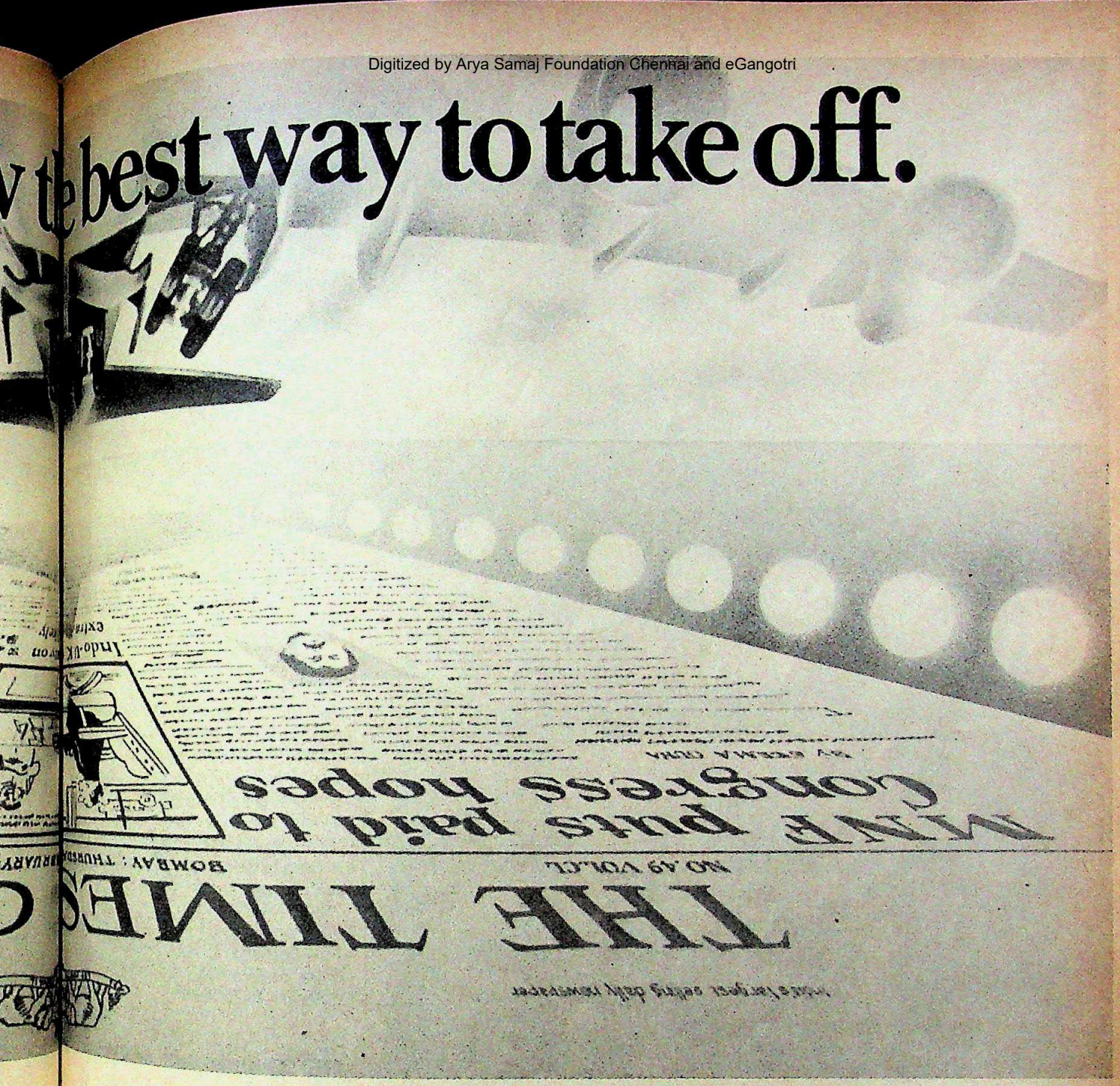

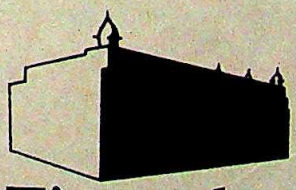

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TAMIL NADU

Above the Law

LAST fortnight, three armed men stormed into the house of General Insurance Surveyor S.L. Prabhu, 46, in Anna Nagar in northwest Madras and decamped with diamond and gold jewellery worth Rs 68,000. Police rounded up 20 Sri Lankan Tamil militants belonging to the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) for interrogation. They were subsequently let off.

The case was symptomatic of the fact that the Tamil Nadu police, for extraneous political reasons, are not able to strictly enforce the law of the land over the Tamil militants whose number in the state is now conservatively put at 5,000. What causes greater concern is that most of the Tamil militants in India belong to the less disciplined and financially less resourceful People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the TELO.

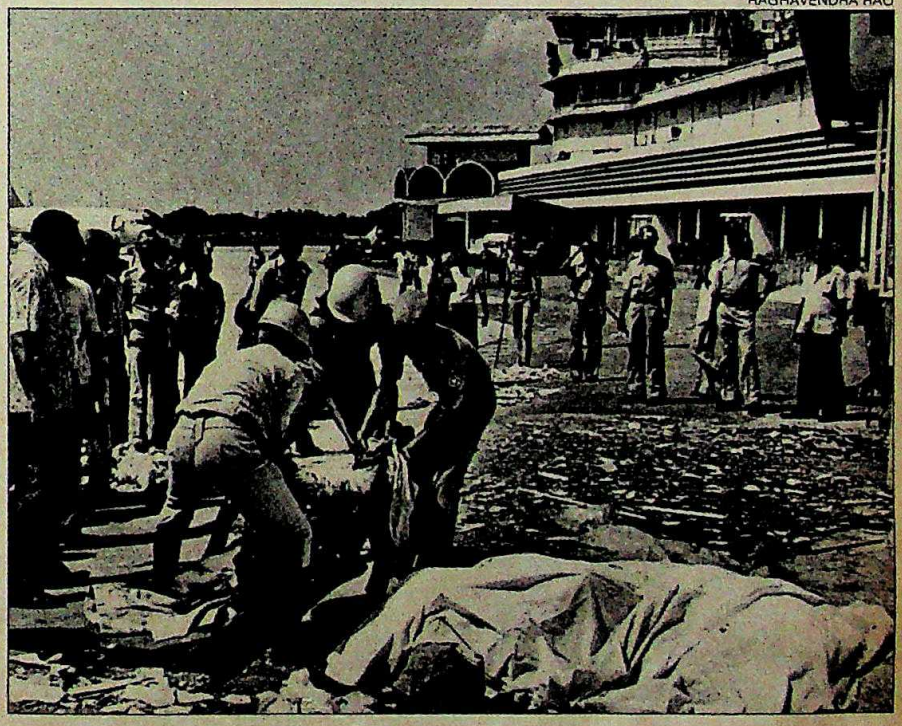
It is a potentially dangerous situation and the police seem to be powerless to act. As early as 1983, the additional sessions judge in Madras had issued a non-bailable arrest warrant against the leader and military commander of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Velupillai Pirabhakaran. To date, the police have been powerless to execute it. Instead, they have had to undergo the embarrassment of providing security for him during his frequent trips to Delhi in 1985 and 1986 for discussions on the Sri Lankan ethnic problem. Indian security forces had to fly him to Bangalore during the summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Confided a police inspector, who has been dealing with a number of criminal cases involving the militants: "We have had to wink at some of these things for political reasons. How do you go with a non-bailable arrest warrant to a man who is frequently invited by the chief minister for breakfast?"

The non-bailable arrest warrant had been issued against Pirabhakaran and his former close associate Raghavan after they jumped conditional bail in a criminal case. The case related to the two opening fire on PLOTE Secretary-General K. Uma Maheswaran and his associate Jotheeswaran on the night of May 19, 1982, in the busy Pondy Bazar area of central Madras. Raghavan has since been in and out of Tamil Nadu, while the police have looked on helplessly.

In the criminal case relating to the bomb blast in the international arrival hall of Meenambakkam Airport on August 2, 1984, which left 30 killed and 37 injured, the judicial second class magistrate in Saidapet in the city issued non-bailable arrest warrants against both Thambapillai Maheswaran, leader of the small militant group, the Tamil Eelam Army (TEA), and Vigneswara Raja, a retired customs collector from Sri Lanka. Both of them were out on conditional bail after three months' remand and both have subsequently jumped bail. While Raja has not surfaced after that, Maheswaran has reportedly made several trips between Madras and Singapore. In fact, reliable militant and police sources confirm that the TEA leader was in Madras on March 11 this year. State police are now working on the assumption that Maheswaran must have provided the technical expertise for the recent bomb blast which resulted in the

In spite of a non-bailable arrest warrant issued as early as 1983 by the additional sessions judge in Madras against Pirabhakaran, the police till date have been powerless to execute it.

RAGHAVENDRA RAO



In the Meenambakkam Airport bomb blast case, both Thambapillai Maheswaran and Vigneswara Raja have jumped bail despite non-bailable warrants against them.

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Ariyalur train accident near Tiruchi on March 15. Disclosed a top police official: "On the face of it, it is the extremist Tamil Nadu Viduthalai Padai (Tamil Nadu Liberation Troop) which is responsible for planting the bomb. But the expertise of the explosive seems to have been provided by a Sri Lankan Tamil militant group called the Tamil Makkal Padukappu Peravai (Tamil People's Protection Assembly) which has close links with the TEA." Maheswaran is now believed to be in hiding near Madurai.

THANKS to the regular boat traffic between Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu and Jaffna across the Palk Straits, it has become common for militants, accused in criminal cases in Tamil Nadu, to jump bail and cross over the moment they are freed from remand. Two years ago, for instance, five LTTE men—Sankar, Pattu, David, Kumar and Selva—were accused in a police case regarding their assault on some PLOTE members at the Tamil Information Centre in Kodambakkam in northwest Madras. All five are known to have sailed to Jaffna soon after the case was registered. And the fact that the additional chief metropolitan magistrate in Egmore in the city has issued non-bailable arrest warrants against them doesn't help. All five have been charge-sheeted and the criminal case is due to begin shortly. But the police have given up their search because they have concluded that the accused have returned home.

In January 1986, the Tamil Nadu police unearthed a full-fledged explosives factory that PLOTE had set up at K.K. Nagar in northwest Madras. The factory was regularly turning out hand grenades on a large scale. The cops arrested six PLOTE men from the factory—Vinoo, Jayachandran, Anandan, Selvam, Sriram and Chandran. All stayed on remand for 60 days, after which they were allowed to come out on conditional bail. They promptly jumped bail and vanished. The subdivisional judicial magistrate of Poonamallee near Madras has issued non-bailable arrest warrants against all of them, but to no effect. "We believe that all these boys have escaped by boat to Jaffna," admits a top CID official.

It is not only the militants who have been jumping bail with impunity. Kandaswamy Naidu, a former Sri Lankan CID official was once part of the security network of Sri Lanka's Rural Industries Minister S. Thondaman. He is now an accused in Tamil Nadu in the sensational espionage case unearthed last year relating to the passing on of militant secrets to the Colombo Government and also in the bomb blast case in the home of LTTE adviser A.S. Balasingham. Naidu has now disappeared. He and four others had been arrested on an espionage charge, and they all came out on conditional bail. Though they had to report regularly to the additional chief metropolitan magistrate's court in Egmore, Naidu has not appeared in court for the last two months. The police are planning to ask the court for a non-bailable arrest warrant against him. But considering past experience, the warrant may not be very useful in locating him. And for the last six months, police have been awaiting Central Government sanction for laying a complaint against Naidu and the four others for violation of the Official Secrets Act.

There are countless criminal cases registered against Sri Lankan Tamil militants in Tamil Nadu. There are no exact statistics, but the fact is that in the past five years these militants have been operating out of the state, the police have been able to secure the conviction of the accused in only one case—against PLOTE leader Uma Maheswaran for attacking the police at Gummidipoondi railway station in Tamil Nadu in May 1982. But even in that case, the sentence of three months' rigorous imprisonment given by the additional sessions judge at Trivellore in Chingleput was adjusted against three months' remand. As a police official said: "In cases in which the militants are involved, it takes between six months and two years to secure conviction. And in the sole case where we were able to obtain conviction, the guilty persons didn't have to be imprisoned after the judgement."

SHYAM TEKWANI

State police are working on the assumption that Maheswaran must have provided the technical expertise for the recent bomb blast which resulted in the Ariyalur train accident.

Unlike the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, the Tamil militants should technically be considered as illegal entrants on Indian soil. Yet even when these militants get involved in criminal cases in India, no cases are registered against them under the Indian Passports Act of 1947 or the Foreigners Act of 1939. And despite the much publicised 'operation disarm' on the militants on November 8 last year, no case has been registered against them for contravening the Arms Act. The militants have obviously been enjoying more privileges than the citizens of their host country.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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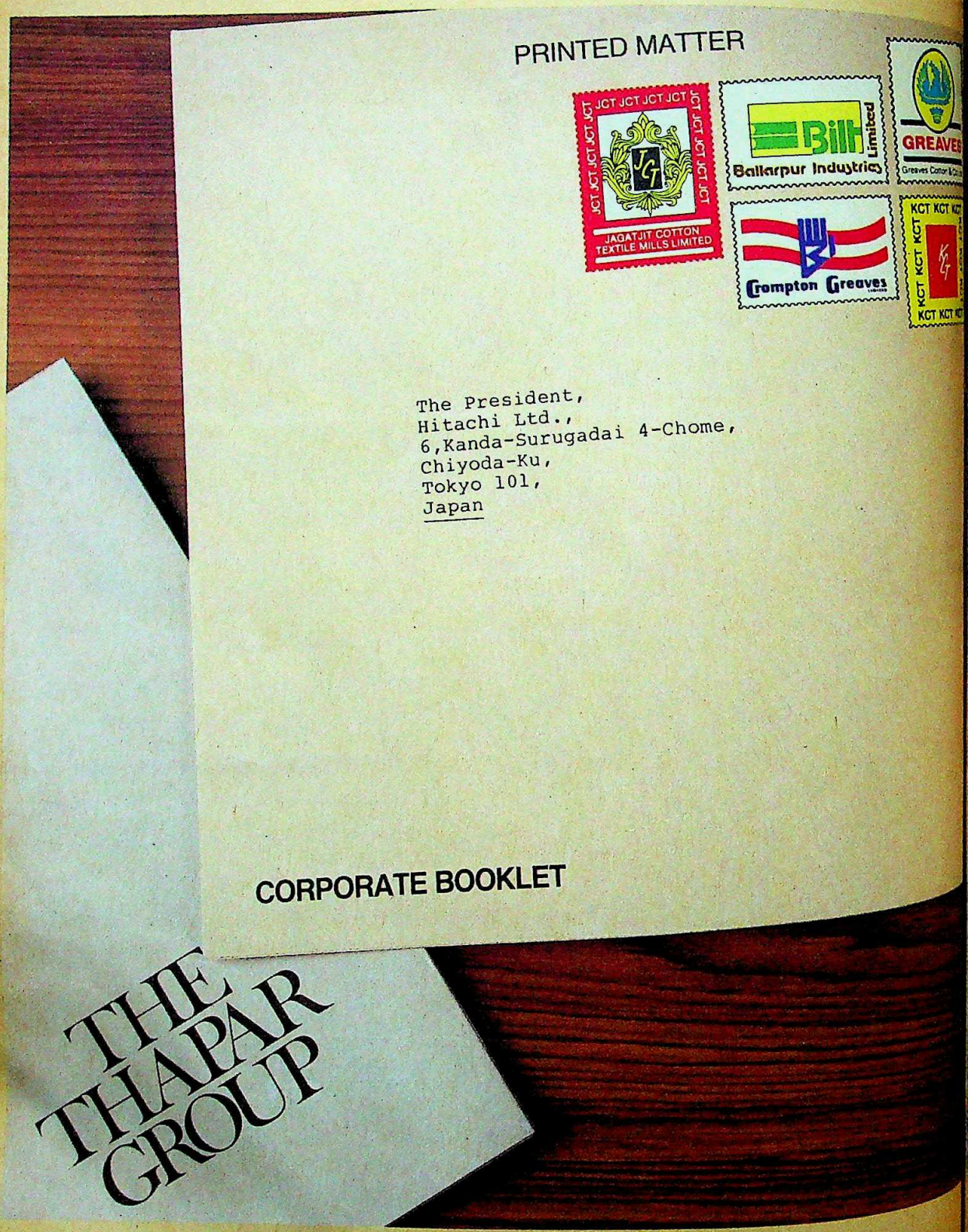

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BIHAR

Raising a Storm

SO sudden was Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey's move that it took even a state used to ordinances by surprise. Last fortnight, with just two months to go for the statewide panchayat elections in June, the Government passed an ordinance reserving the post of 'mukhiya' for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes on the basis of their population in the districts. While the final list of panchayats is still being prepared, the measure is likely to mean reservation for the chiefs of about a quarter of the 11,378 panchayats in the state. But meanwhile, elections have had to be postponed because of the legal confusion this decision has caused.

The ordinance also bars MPs and legislators from holding the post of mukhiya simultaneously, a clause which will affect about two dozen leaders. Explains Congress(I) MLA Jai Kumar Palit, who had earlier been both legislator and mukhiya together: "The whole purpose of panchayati raj system gets defeated when a single person occupies both posts. Now an independently elected mukhiya can look after the interest of the panchayat while the MLA will be able to look after the whole constituency comprising many panchayats." The mukhiya forms the backbone of village administration and his post is politically important as he directly influences developmental work in his area.

Though the measure looked good, Dubey's critics within the party feel that his 'concern' for the weaker sections is in fact a cover to counter the irrepressible former chief minister Jagannath Mishra's growing popularity among these groups because of his "Jana Jagran" campaign in Bihar. Says Kamalnath Singh Thakur, MLC: "If Dubey was really concerned, he should have brought a bill in the recent legislative session so that members could have debated it and made it more dynamic. The ordinance reflected his desperate mood." Interestingly, the ordinance was promulgated just a week after the budget session finished.

Whatever Dubey's reasons, the sensitivity of the subject was attested by the fact that most leaders—in and outside the Congress(I)—preferred not to criticise the measure too strongly. Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Karpoori Thakur says: "It is definitely a good and daring job Dubey has done but if he is hoping to catch Harijan and Adivasi votes, he is mistaken. Political bases are not created through ordinances."

K.M. KISHAN

Dubey and his associates point out that the ordinance is the only way to help Harijans who rarely succeed in getting elected as mukhiyas.

The Government appeared in such a hurry to promulgate this ordinance that it even forgot to consult experts in the area. Bihar Rajya Panchayat Parishad Vice-Chairman Jageshwar Mandal says that the Government did not care to seek the opinion of the parishad which is an advisory body. He adds that the parishad successfully intervened when the Government wanted to take "wild and wide" measures. The parishad said that though reservation existed in Madhya Pradesh, its manner was different from that of Bihar. And no other state had barred MPs or legislators from being mukhiyas and, indeed, in many states, MPs and MLAs are associate members.

Incidentally, the Constitution does not provide for any reservation at the panchayat level. Last fortnight writ petitions were filed by several mukhiyas in the Patna High Court challenging the legality of the ordinance. As the judgement can have serious implications, it has been referred to a full bench which will hear it in May. Responding to the uncertainty, the state Cabinet has now decided to postpone elections until the legal mists clear.

There are many who feel that the ordinance is bound to heighten the caste and social tensions in villages where Harijans are already victims of atrocities which are committed regularly. This was evident during the 1978 panchayat elections in which, even by the official version, 57 people had been left dead and 350 injured—unofficial estimates indicated a death toll of more than 500. Since then, caste consciousness has increased manifold and this can only mean that the scale of violence in the next elections will be greater too.

Yet Dubey and his associates disagree and point out that the ordinance is the only way to help Harijans who rarely succeed in getting elected as mukhiyas. Says the Assembly's Deputy Speaker Shivanandan Paswan (of the Lok Dal): "Though Bihar's Harijan population is over one crore, there are only half-a-dozen Harijan mukhiyas in the state."

The recent government action has also drawn attention to a distressing fact: that the state Government has virtually ignored the three-month-old Supreme Court judgement which had made a scathing criticism of the state's habit of resorting to repromulgation of ordinances instead of getting bills passed in the Assembly. Since judgement day, the state Government has promulgated 29 ordinances and repromulgated another 17, although they could easily have been put up before the Assembly in the recently-concluded budget session. That the Government chose not to do so, although a boycott of the session by the Opposition had made its task easier, reflects poorly on its desire to respect the rule of law.

—FARZAND AHMED

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KARNATAKA

Expansion Ills

FIVE months of speculation and suspense in Karnataka's political circles finally came to an end on April 26, with the expansion of the Ramakrishna Hegde Ministry. But with resentment and resignations surfacing in the party almost immediately afterwards, the chief minister was probably left wondering if he had created more problems than he had solved.

After securing the resignations of his 14 ministers, Hegde's reconstituted team comprised 34 ministers, 20 of cabinet rank, besides the chief minister himself. And initially, the new ministry looked so well balanced that few expected the tantrums which followed. Not only were all the state's 20 districts represented, even the proportional representation to the different castes, communities and religions seemed perfect. It comprised eight Lingayats, six Vokkaligas, two Bunts (who are sometimes categorised as Vokkaligas), eight backward classes, six Scheduled Castes, two Muslims and three Brahmins (including Hegde).

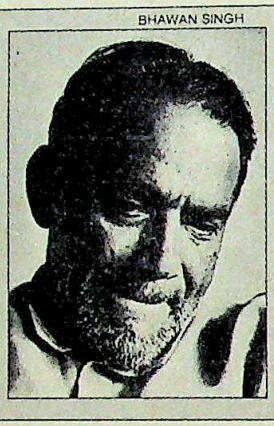
To counter allegations of non-representation of women, Hegde also included Shivakantha Chature. Another welcome aspect of the expansion was the infusion of fresh, young blood in the Cabinet. Hegde inducted as many as 11 new faces in the ministry. Said Hegde: "I wanted a blend of youth and experience, of dynamism and wisdom."

A variety of factors had prevented Hegde from pushing through with his expansion earlier. First, the party did not do particularly well in the zilla parishad poll in January. And since the mandal panchayat elections were to follow after a three-week gap, Hegde had to defer the exercise because he could not afford to risk any anti-party activities by ministers who would have been dropped. Then the Assembly's budget session followed the elections, and Hegde apparently felt that there would not be enough time for the new incumbents to pick up the threads of their ministerial responsibilities and effectively handle questions from the Opposition.

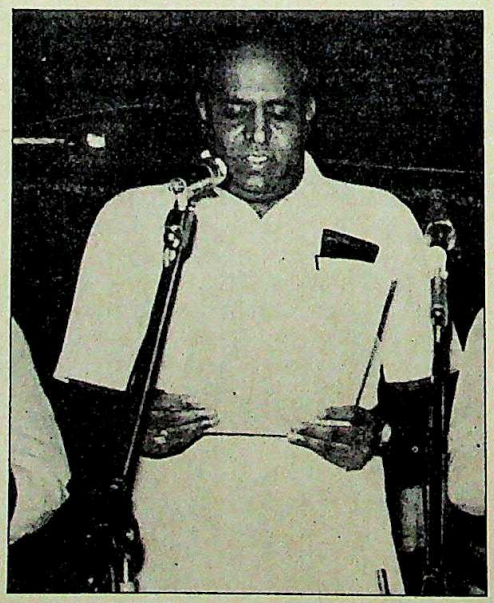
Four ministers—H.T. Krishnappa, K.M. Krishna Reddy, D. Manjunath and J.S. Deshmukh—were dropped from the outgoing cabinet, basically for what Hegde called "caste considerations". But there were other reasons too, and these ranged from shoddy performance to poor health.

On the other hand, 10 of the 14 ministers whom Hegde had dropped last June, following a memorandum submitted by 98 of the 144 Janata MLAs, were reinducted. Several of them were even given cabinet rank. Asked whether the earlier charges of corruption, inefficiency and arrogance against them had ceased to be valid, Hegde replied: "Actually, among these people, there were specific charges only against M. Raghupathy who, the MLAs felt, was arrogant. I think he has learnt his lesson."

BHAWAN SINGH



Hegde's new ministry looked so well balanced that few expected the resentful drama that followed its formation.



Raghupathy being sworn in: quick developments

But Raghupathy, who on April 26 had sworn eternal loyalty to Hegde for his reinduction—"I am so grateful to our chief minister"—made a volte face the next day when he learnt that he had been given the minor portfolio of ports and fisheries. On April 28, he threatened to resign not only from the ministry but also from the Assembly and swore to give up politics.

Raghupathy wasn't the only one to express his resentment. M.S. Narayana Rao resigned from his post of general secretary of the Janata Legislature Party, and Legislator Vishwanath Reddy Mundal gave in a letter to the assembly Speaker B.G. Banakar wanting to quit his seat. But Bankar rejected it on the grounds that it wasn't in the prescribed form. By April 28, party MLAs Leelavati Prasad and K.R. Molikere had also indicated their desire to quit their assembly seats, though neither had put anything down in writing.

Ironically, Hegde's failure to please everyone became evident only after he had formed the biggest-ever ministry in Karnataka. Its size had made a mockery of the Janata Party's oft-repeated claim of austerity. The Congress(I) was quick to point out that it was Hegde, among others, who had attacked the late Devraj Urs, then chief minister for expanding his ministry to 33. Criticism at the size also came from within the party ranks. Said Narayana Rao, who feels that the size of the ministry should not have exceeded 26: "The reputation of the chief minister himself will suffer because of the large size of the Cabinet and the improper choice of candidates." Though Rao's anger stems from the fact that none of his men have been included and because most of those dropped from the ministry following the legislators' memorandum have been reinducted, he was at pains to point out that "I am only registering my protest. There is no question of an open revolt. I myself will see to it that this does not snowball." While that may be so, with reports of dissident MLAs getting together coming in, Hegde will surely have to do a lot of pacifying in the coming days.

—ANITA PRATAP

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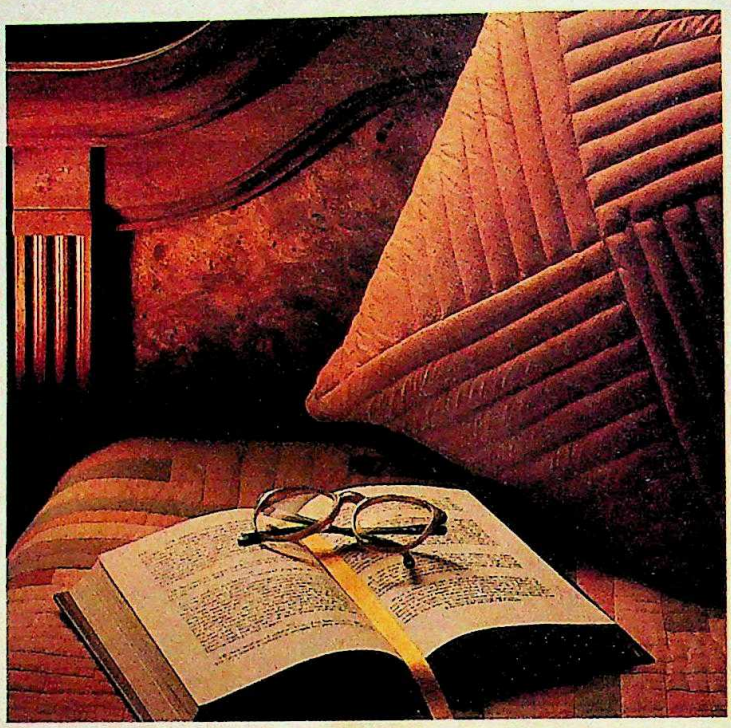

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KARNATAKA

Tape Scrape

AFTER gaining extensive political mileage over the Moily tape scandal, the Janata Government in Karnataka now finds itself at the receiving end. Veerappa Moily, the Congress(I) leader who had been accused of trying to bribe legislator Byre Gowda in November 1983, has now been exonerated by the Justice R.G. Desai Commission while Gowda himself, an independent MLA who later joined the Janata and became a minister, has been indicted.

The scandal, which involved the supposed offering of Rs 2 lakh as bribe to Gowda to defect to the Congress(I), had provided the Janata Party a halo of self-righteousness, united the party MLAs and tarred the Congress(I)'s image indelibly. What had given the charge credibility was the alleged recording of the conversation between Gowda and Moily, who was then the Congress(I) leader of the Opposition.

But now, the Desai Commission, appointed by the Janata to bring out the truth, has ruled: "Conversation on the tape produced by Mr Byre Gowda is not the conversation between Mr Veerappa Moily and Mr C. Byre Gowda." The contradictions in Gowda's statements were many. Among them:

▶ In the original tape, there is no mention of the sum of Rs 2 lakh, whereas the transcript released earlier specifically mentions it. Gowda's explanation is that the amount only changed hands and that there was no talk regarding the amount. But Desai was not convinced.

▶ Gowda had mentioned the number of Moily's Ambassador car—fitted with a diesel engine—in which the taped conversation allegedly took place as MYV 5368. On verification, the commission found that the number belonged to a Standard Herald belonging to somebody else. Desai's observation was scathing: "It is admitted by Mr Gowda that he was owning an Ambassador car fitted with a diesel engine then. So the possibility of the tape having been prepared in his car cannot be ruled out."

▶ Gowda had alleged that the Centre had sent Bhajan Lal—"its expert in the art of horse-trading"—with massive funds to induce defections in Bangalore. But, during cross-examination, he admitted that he had not seen Lal himself, nor was he in a position to produce any proof to support this allegation.

▶ While Gowda claimed that many Janata legislators had been approached by Congress(I) inducers, not one testified before the commission.

▶ The claim that the agreement with Moily on the amount of bribe was reached a day before the taping incident proved mendacious—at the time at which Gowda claims that the deal was struck, Moily was attending a Public Accounts Committee meeting.

▶ While Janata leader Madhu Dandavate had said that Hegde had in his possession fingerprints taken from the currency notes, Gowda admitted during the commission's proceedings that no fingerprints had been taken.

▶ State BJP leader V.S. Acharya had said publicly that Gowda possessed letters from Moily—but this was untrue.

▶ Gowda had produced Lingaraj, a Congressman, who deposed that Moily had asked him in October 1983 to bribe Janata and independent legislators with Rs 50,000 to cross vote for Congress(I) candidates in the council elections. In fact, the council elections had been held six months earlier on March 31, 1983.

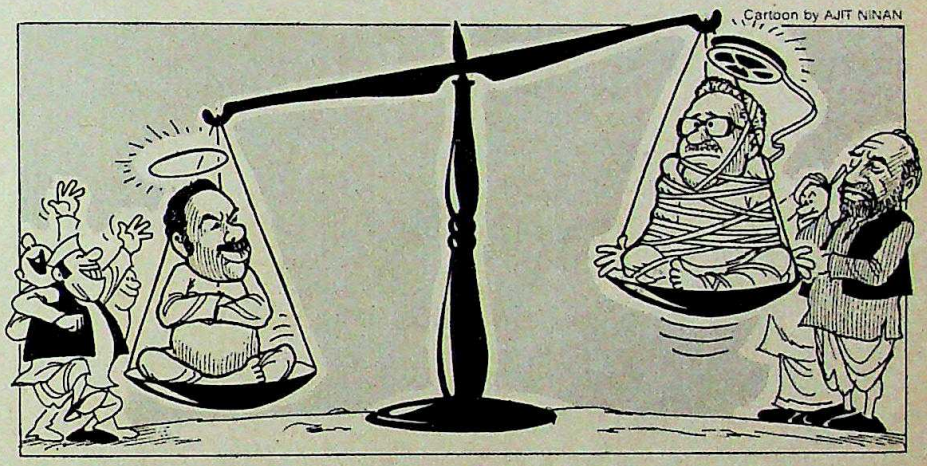
Gowda, however, was not happy with the judgement. Listing 14 reasons why he found the commission's report unacceptable, he said: "My complaint is that the commission went through the proceedings with the sole premeditated intention of exonerating Moily. All the evidence I submitted was discussed threadbare, just to find flaws. Moily made some admissions but these were not considered by the judge."

Gowda was also irked by the commission's conclusion that a portion of the transcript "must have been manipulated and concocted". "Am I so foolish? If I wanted to concoct, why should I do it in my own car and that too with all that disturbance and background noise?" he asked. His main grouse, however, was that the judge concluded definitely that the conversation was not between him and Moily although experts from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras, had said they were not in a position to identify the voices in the time given to them. But Desai felt it "unnecessary to wait further" and announced the verdict on the basis of existing evidence. Gowda's bitterness was also directed against the Hegde Government for having accepted the report. Said Gowda: "The Government was in more of a hurry to accept the report than the commission was to submit it."

Congress(I) leaders, however, point out that for pledging loyalty to the Janata Party, Gowda had been rewarded with the chairmanship of the Karnataka Urban Water Supply and Drainage Board in August 1983. And after the sensational tapes scandal that blighted the Congress(I)'s reputation and electoral chances in March 1985, Gowda was made a cabinet minister. But in June 1986, he was among the 14 ministers who were dropped. Hegde, aware of the contradictions in Gowda's statements before the commission, knew which way things were heading and probably chose to drop him before the Congress(I) could demand his removal.

The commission's report, which has adversely affected the Janata image, has predictably been received with exhilaration by the Congress(I). Said Moily: "It is now clear that the entire Janata Government machinery had been used for the concoction of an episode and the preparation of a fraudulent document to support it." Moily's exoneration has provided the enfeebled Congress(I) an opportunity to once again flex its political muscle.

—ANITA PRATAP



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HARYANA

Dramatic Shift

WITH assembly elections in Haryana due in June, the state's politics, murky at the best of times, is getting murkier by the day. The dramatic shift last fortnight of the Congress(I) MP from Rohtak, Hardwari Lal, to the Lok Dal (Bahuguna), looked at first like the isolated gesture of a perennial defector. But now it seems to fit into a pattern in which the Congress(I) could find itself up against a sort of Congress(I) B-team fielded by its main opponent in the forthcoming elections, Chaudhuri Devi Lal.

Devi Lal has already managed to enlist in his Haryana Sangharsh Samiti the services of two former Congress(I) chief ministers, Bhagwat Dayal Sharma and Banarsi Das Gupta, as well as Ajit Singh, son of former Union agriculture minister Rao Birendra Singh, and a former Congress(I) legislator, Khurshid Ahmed. The exit of Hardwari Lal has enhanced the fears of an already worried Congress(I) not only because the going of a sitting MP is a serious matter on the eve of the crucial election but also because Hardwari Lal's proximity to Union Minister of Environment and Forests, Bhajan Lal, is well known.

It was Bhajan Lal, then chief minister, who had ensured a party ticket for Hardwari Lal and his hand is now being seen in his follower's departure as well. Bhajan Lal when questioned about this is all bluster and denial: "Hardwari Lal has left not because of me but because he is a man without any faith or honour. I gave him a ticket last time because I thought that he would finally stick somewhere. These stories of infighting in the Congress(I) are all rubbish. I have no problems with Bansi Lal."

Hardwari Lal himself, in his letter to Rajiv Gandhi, has mentioned stepmotherly treatment to Haryana and the Punjab accord as the reasons for quitting the party. His resignation letter reads: "Haryana, treated as a stepchild ever since its creation in 1966, was robbed of its due share of river waters and territory by the Punjab accord, which you concluded without consulting the representatives of the people. The accord has indeed negated the solemn promises made and formal agreement concluded in the past. What I have been saying in this regard has remained a cry in the wilderness." But when interviewed, he said he did not dislike Rajiv, "who is charming and cultured. But it is impossible to coexist with Bansi Lal".

The turning and twisting of Hardwari Lal, a former vice-chancellor of the Maharishi Dayanand University, Rohtak, and Kurukshetra University, are hard to follow. Just last June he had written to Surinder Singh, Bansi Lal's son, expressing happiness at his father having been made chief minister, adding: "Together we will be able to demolish Devi Lal." But last fortnight he calmly observed: "Devi Lal with his Sangharsh Samiti is Haryana's first true revolutionary."

PRASHANT PANJIAR

"I do not dislike Rajiv who is charming and cultured. But it is impossible to coexist with Bansi Lal."

HARDWARI LAL

The Congress(I) in Haryana appears to be quite overwhelmed at the moment by problems of coexistence within the party. A team of Congress(I) MPs' which returned to the capital recently after a preliminary reconnaissance of the state's political terrain, has pointed to a fairly dismal scenario if Bansi Lal and Bhajan Lal do not put personal differences aside. Said an MP who did not wish to be identified: "The Congress(I) vote in Haryana which comes mainly from the Brahmins, the backward castes and the Punjabis is still intact but if the infighting continues, there can be serious problems."

Ajit Singh, president of the Lok Dal faction that carries his name and from which Devi Lal separated with a large section of his Haryana unit intact, sees an even more devious plot behind the emergence of a Congress(I) B-team in Devi Lal's camp. Said Singh: "Bhajan Lal and Hardwari Lal basically want to see Bansi Lal out. They hope to do this by strengthening Devi Lal. I am not sure if this will work, however, because according to our reports, Devi Lal has lost a lot of credibility by taking in people like Hardwari Lal." Indeed, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), an important constituent of the Haryana Sangharsh Samiti, and its state leader Mangal Sein have objected to the new entrant because "he is known to be a strong supporter of Congress(I)'s Bhajan Lal".

If the Congress(I) is facing problems, the Opposition isn't exactly without troubles of its own either. Ajit Singh admits frankly that Devi Lal's departure has been a blow to his party and that opposition leaders like Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao have tried to work out some sort of seat adjustment between the two groups. Said Ajit Singh: "It is not easy to fight the Government but Devi Lal thinks he is already a chief minister and can fight alone. He accuses us of being Congress(I) agents and then takes in people like Hardwari Lal. The only party which is going to benefit from all this is the Congress(I)."

With the farmers in Haryana totally involved at the moment in harvesting the wheat crop, public meetings are currently few and far in between. Election issues are yet to emerge. What is clear, however, is that the Haryana Sangharsh Samiti and the Lok Dal (Ajit Singh)-Janata combine will evolve their strategy around Rajiv Gandhi's alleged favouritism to Punjab. With the issue of territory and water already an explosive one, the ruling party is going to be hard-pressed to make a convincing stand unless all its local satraps and workers rally around.

—MADHU JAIN and TAVLEEN SINGH

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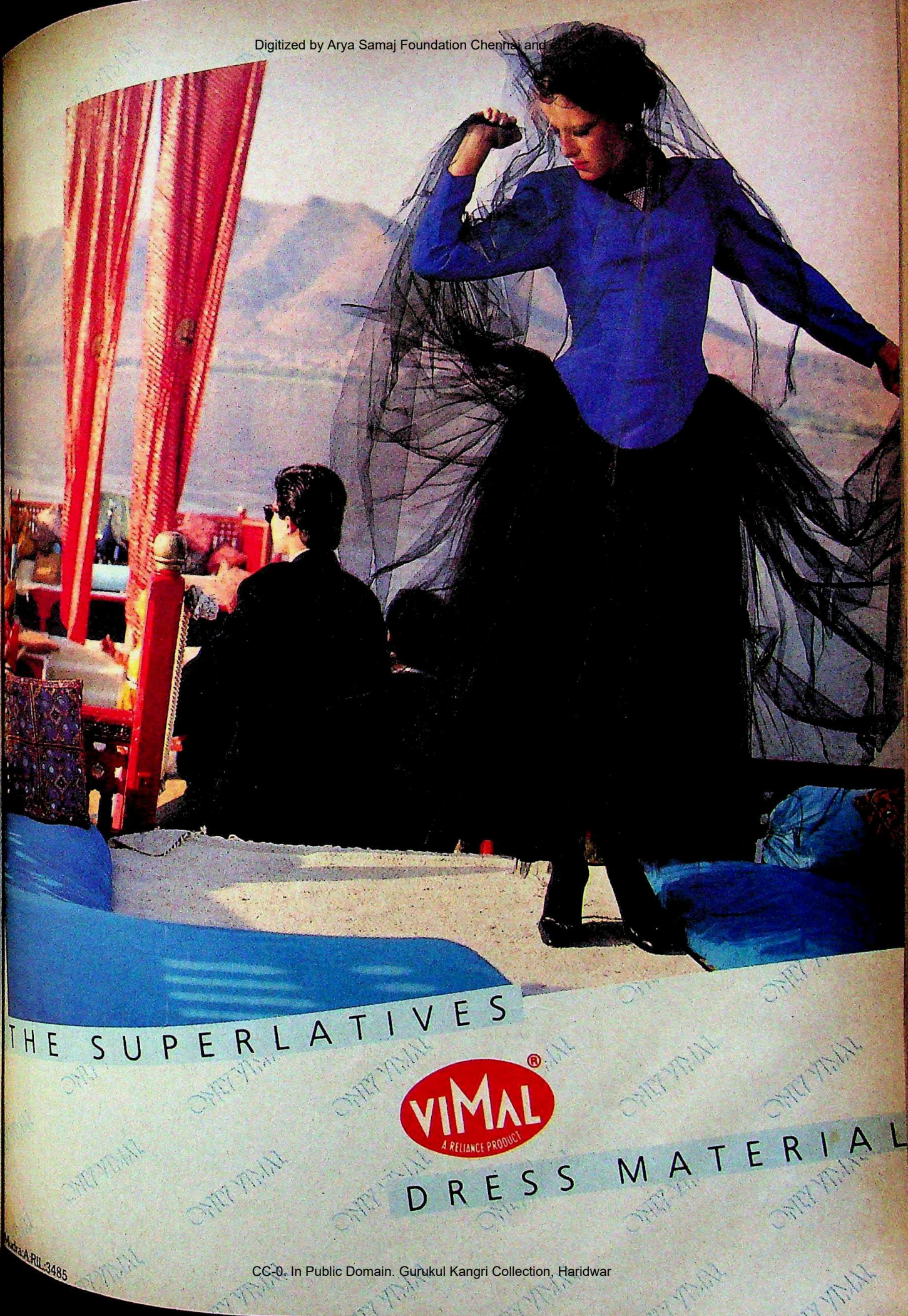

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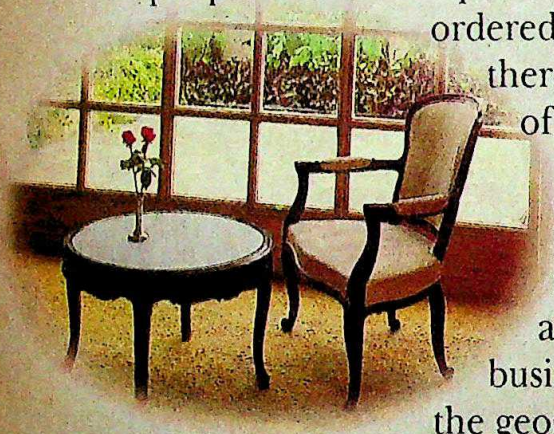
The Concept of The Three-Da

For a 'perk' as attractive as the sabbatical, there are far too many resistances to making it a reality—not the least among these being the manager's own corporate stoicism and, of course, the genuine problems of continuity.

The need of course, is for creating among the more brilliant of one's people the mental spaces for creativity and personal innovation. Within the ordered routine of maintenance and day-to-day fire-fighting there is usually no mental room for the free movement of intuition and breakthrough thinking.



However, by a process of business evolution perhaps, senior executives worldwide seem to have fashioned as it were a clever, convenient, legitimate and effective substitute for the real thing—the quick, business-dictated trip outside the work city. Be it the geographical stimulus of another place or the mere distancing from the sources of expediency, managers have confessed to a perceptible shift in patterns of thinking during these trips.

A study of this phenomenon of contemporary business metaphysics inspired the hospitality designers of Welcomgroup to innovate a totally new genre of hotel services. "Can we", they asked themselves, "create an environment for the encouragement of this 'mental space' for executives?" They realised that it called for more than the obvious provision of commercial facilities like secretarial services and equipment. It meant carving out a whole new quality of properties and services. It involved programmes of executive life-style study and, very important, intensive training programmes for a new breed of hotel managers and personnel.

Maurya Sheraton Towers

Thus was born the idea of the Maurya Sheraton Towers.

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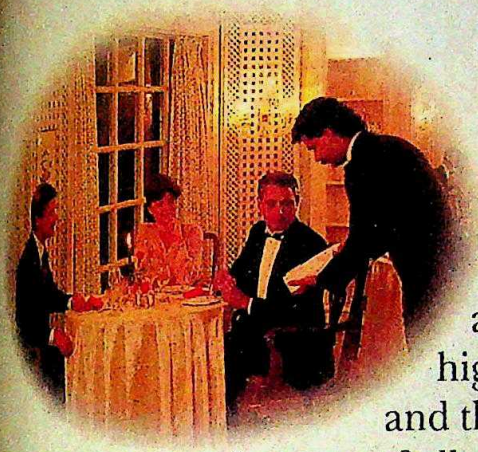
Three-Day Working Sabbatical.



When we in the advertising agency were briefed about this unique concept and were 'shown the product', it was indeed difficult to contain the hyperbole of traditional advertese. The glossy photographs of the highlights of the Maurya Towers property and the services looked impressive; but we saw too the inadequacy of all these to convey the real discriminator between the Maurya Towers and other five-star deluxe hotels.

The exclusivity of each floor, the elegant design of the rooms; the Business Centre and conference rooms; the intellectual stimulation of the Tower Club with its library and bar, the dining room and the health club; the exquisite taste with which every corner is designed...all these were incomparable, but in a way not the real discriminators.

What makes the Maurya Towers another genre in the art of executive hospitality is the intangibles which the sensitive and mature intellect will perceive—in the finesse, the unobtrusiveness of the service, the incredible efficiency, the charm and the flair with which the personnel allow you that 'mental space' which in fact is possible during your stay.

Admittedly not for everybody, the Maurya Towers should be seen as an imaginative investment in creativity for you and your nucleus of brilliant people. Perhaps the next time you are in Delhi on business, it may be a good idea to try this attractive new idea of the micro-mini working sabbatical.

The Maurya Sheraton Towers at Welcomgroup Maurya Sheraton, Diplomatic Enclave, New Delhi-110 021

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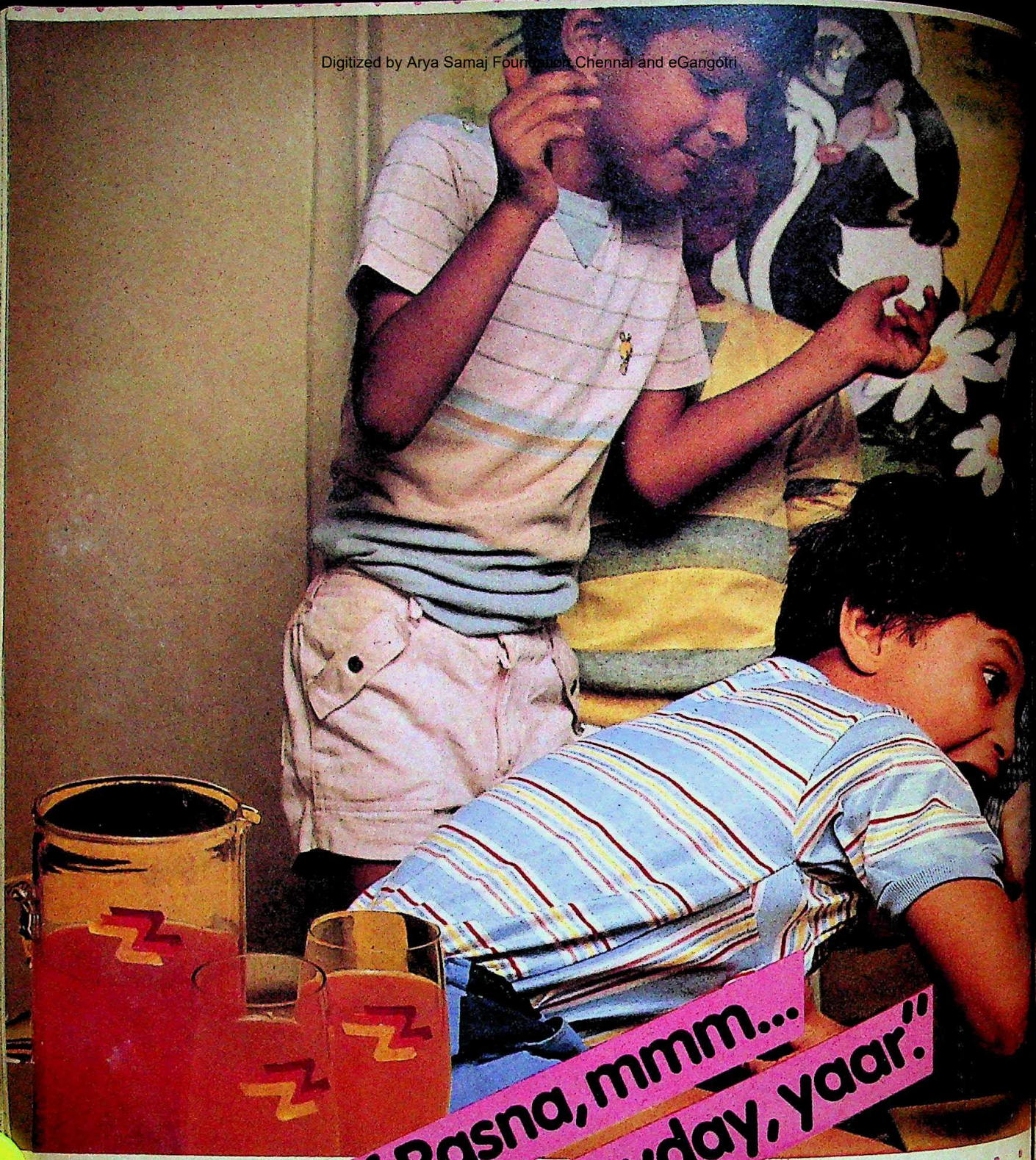

"Jugful of Rasna, mmm...
I'll beat him anyday, yaar."

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Rasna

SO ORANGIE-ORANGIE!

INDIA'S LARGEST SELLING SOFT DRINK CONCENTRATE

Manufactured by: Rasna Industries, Asoka, Ahmedabad-380 016.

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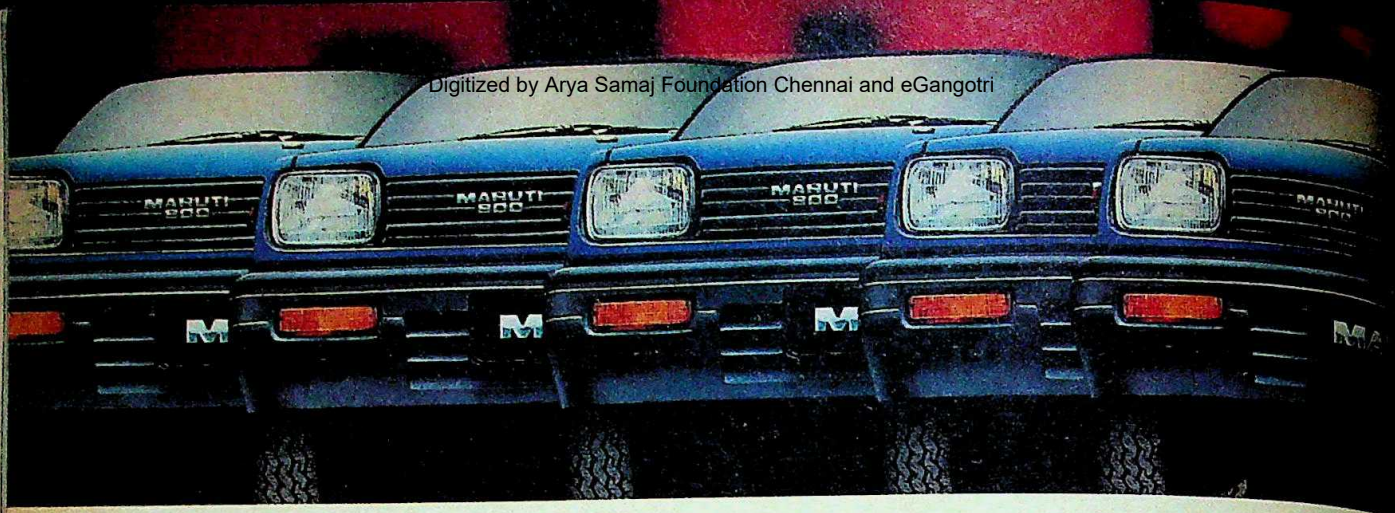

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DUNLOP

Radial Class

A classier way to travel–say thousands of Maruti owners. How about you?

DUNLOP
Radial Car Tyre

Always ahead.

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You can enjoy the same cooker that's the favourite in America's top department store

The Hawkins Futura has been exported to leading department stores in the United States of America. This success is based on unique consumer benefits and product design that has been awarded patents in the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

In actual cooking trials the Hawkins Futura on average proved 46% faster than microwave cooking.

The Hawkins Futura's beautiful, jewel-grey Satilon finish combines the advantages of quick-heating aluminium with the non-tarnish quality of stainless steel.

The fingertip control provides safe, automatic, direction-controlled steam release.

Enjoy cooking in the world's latest and best pressure cooker – the Hawkins Futura.

Twenty-nine traditional Hawkins models are also available from Rs. 180* upwards.

Hawkins Futura pressure cookers on display in a Bloomingdale's store in New York. Bloomingdale's is America's leading department store chain for high-quality products.

Hawkins®

FUTURA™

The New Generation pressure cooker

* Maximum recommended retail price excluding all taxes. Check with your nearest Hawkins dealer. If you need further information write to: Hawkins Cookers Ltd., Dept. No. 102, P.O. Box 6481, Bombay 18. ® Registered Trade Mark © 1987 Copyright by Hawkins Cookers Ltd. ™ Trade Mark. Patent pending.

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Unlawful Marriages

CHILD marriages—banned by the law—continue to take place and enforcement authorities continue to look the other way, especially if the families of VIPs are involved. In Madhya Pradesh, a Congress(I) MP, an MLA and a general secretary of a District Congress(I) Committee (DCC-I) were among the ruling party leaders who attended a function arranged by a colleague, Indore Premier Cooperative Bank Director Hukum Singh Panwar, to celebrate the wedding of his daughters, Prembai, 6, and Sonabai, 4, and nephew Bhagwanan, 10. A social worker of Indore, who had learned of

Child marriage near Indore: continuing evil

the event, lodged a report in advance with the police in Indore, and also rushed telegrams and petitions to the SP of Indore, seeking his intervention.

But Hukum Singh, an office-bearer of the Block Congress(I) Committee, kept the police at bay by ensuring the presence of bigwigs such as Radhakrishna Malaviya, Rajya Sabha member and Indore DCC(I) Chief, Rameshwar Patel, MLA from Deialpur and a general secretary of the DCC(I), and R.C. Verma, chairman of the Indore Premier Cooperative Bank and another general secretary of the DCC(I). Says the social worker, who has been running from pillar to post for action against the culprits: "I provided all evidence to the police but instead of taking any action they are threatening people who gave information."

Statue Stealing

IN the weeks to come, the Gujarat police is expected to dig deeper into a suspected international idol running racket carried out with much finesse by Vijay Aggarwal and his accomplice Gajendra Prasad Aggarwal, who have been arrested in the case.

Vijay Aggarwal would dress trendily, sling a camera across his shoulder and visit various temples like any tourist. He would then take snaps of the idols from every possible angle. Next, he would visit the local historian with the prints, pretending to be a novice who wished to learn the details and value of the statue. The photographs, complete with footnotes, would later be taken to antique dealers and bargains struck.

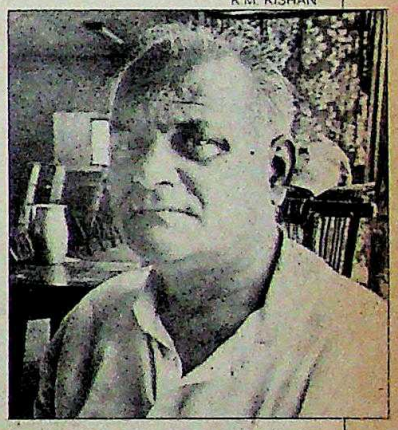
Gajendra Prasad Aggarwal would then take over. He was the brain behind the removal of priceless statues, some of which were carved into the rock walls of the temples. The two did this, either by bribing the temple priests or conning them into believing that they were experts who had been assigned to touch up and restore weather-beaten statues. Many temples gladly surrendered the statues in the belief that they would be restored and returned. Of course, they were not. Police now suspect that they have uncovered the tip of an iceberg with international ramifications involving crores of rupees.

Real Estate Scandal

REAL estate, it is said, is the broad foundation on which nearly all the guilt of this world rests. Last fortnight the Bihar Government came close to pleading guilty in what is widely known as the "Vijay Housing Cooperative Society land scandal". The multi-crore scandal, which involves, among others, Revenue Minister Ramjaipal Singh Yadav, set the state afire following an expose by the Patna edition of *Nav Bharat Times*, a Hindi daily.

The scandal revolves around the circumstances under which Yadav allotted 128 acres of choice irrigated farmland on the outskirts of the state capital to the cooperative society for a song—a paltry Rs 2.62-crore against the estimated market price of Rs 12.5 crore. Even curiouser was the fact that the society paid the entire amount through cheques even though its bank balance was only Rs 1 lakh at the time. No less intriguing is the fact that in October 1984 when Yadav was the agriculture minister, he had opposed this move. And last September Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey had decreed that the Government should not allot farmland for non-farming purposes. However, despite this announcement, the land was allotted by Yadav on March 22, even before the Patna High Court could adjudicate writ petitions filed by villagers challenging the proposed move.

K.M. KISHAN



Yadav: dubious moves

Patna Divisional Commissioner Krishna Singh expressed strong opposition to the proposal in a letter to the Government. But she was sidelined. The minister asked his department to withhold all files from her, and awarded the land without any investigation of the genuineness of the society and its financial health. Last fortnight, Dubey found himself trapped in the controversy. Following an initial silence on the issue, he called a high-level meeting and took Yadav and several officials to task for their failure to check the antecedents of the society. Dubey has now ordered an inquiry into the deal and asked the officials to stop proceedings for the acquisition of land.

Protesting Doctors

NOW it is the turn of the 5,990 state employed doctors to cripple the already shoddy health services in Andhra Pradesh. Last fortnight they decided to "work to rule" in protest against the Government's decision to ban private practice. Alternatively, they are demanding fatter pay packets—costing a staggering Rs 36-crore—as compensation for the ban. State Health Minister Dr M.S. Koteswara Rao, himself a physician, admits the doctors have a case for "a

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decent non-private practice allowance (NPPA) but demands like conveyance allowance, rent-free accommodation, risk allowance and secretarial assistance is like asking for the moon."

The doctors argue that they were always given a raw deal. Says Dr A. Gopalkrishan, chairman of the agitating doctors coordination committee: "For a long time assistant engineers and deputy superintendents of police got less and deputy collectors and munsif magistrates were on par with civil assistant surgeons. Now all of them get more." But the minister insists that the state has been more than generous because it has recommended a compensatory allowance of about Rs 500 for assistant, deputy, and civil surgeons, as recommended by the pay revision commission. The doctors are not satisfied. In 1983, when the ban was to have come into effect, the doctors obtained a stay from the high court to continue private practice. When the Supreme Court, in another verdict some months ago, declared that state governments have the right to prescribe service conditions for doctors and ban private practice, the Andhra Pradesh Government moved the high court, got the stay vacated and imposed the ban. With the Government firm on its stand on the ban, and the doctors determined to fight it, the crisis could carry on.

Airy Altercation

ONCE again Maharashtra's volatile Minister of State for Education Chandrika Kenia was at the centre of a self-created public controversy, and as it happened, this time the storm broke several thousand feet in the air in an Indian Airlines Avro flight from Pune to Bombay. The young, attractive Congress(I) politician, who in the past has got into public squabbles with newspaper photographers, journalists, student unions and other Congress(I) leaders, was involved in a messy altercation on board IC 102 on its brief, half-hour journey. By the time she landed in Bombay, Kenia

Chandrika Kenia: in a self-created public storm

was so incensed that she wrote out an eight-page complaint charging two air hostesses for not providing prompt services and accused them of "rude behaviour", adding, "If the air hostesses do not improve their behaviour, God save Indian Airlines and Air-India".

Indian Airlines immediately ordered an inquiry, which found that the air hostesses had in fact behaved properly and done an excellent job looking after the passengers in the short duration of the flight. Two of the passengers submitted their written testimonies to the airline, and one of them, a passenger from Pune, wrote as if in response to Kenia's complaint: "If such people become ministers, God help our country". In response, Kenia has written a letter to Indian Airlines protesting that their inquiry was "hasty, unfair, and one-sided." She is determined to pursue the matter.

Close Connections

THE days when the judiciary and executive seemed to be pitted against each other in Tamil Nadu are no more. The state Government and the Madras High Court used to consistently disagree on recommendations for higher judicial vacancies, and instances are legion where judges have set aside executive actions.

During the second half of last year, Chief Justice M.N. Chandurkar of the Madras High Court wrote no less than three letters to Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran seeking an appointment to formally invite him to participate in the 125th anniversary of the high court. MGR treated the requests for appointment typically—he didn't respond. Neither politicians nor journalists enjoy access to the enigmatic chief minister.

MGR: enigmatic

But the ice between the chief justice and the chief minister has now thawed. Last month, Chandurkar had a two-hour pow-wow with MGR. After that, the first bench of the high court, consisting of Chief Justice Chandurkar himself and Justice M. Srinivasan, upheld the Assembly resolution expelling 10 DMK MLAs for burning the Constitution. The high court has also submitted 18 recommendations for district judges' posts, from which the Government will select six names.

Hollow Protests

THE Opposition in Uttar Pradesh has now reached the stage of bare survival. Two unsuccessful gheraoes of Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh, last fortnight, revealed not only the hollow unity among them, but also more than amply demonstrated that they were without a leg to stand on.

The newly formed Krantikari Morcha—comprising the Lok Dal(B), Janata, Congress(J), CPI and CPI(M)—was created on the rebound. Mulayam Singh Yadav, opposition leader of the Vidhan Sabha, united with other "like minded parties", in response to the Lok Dal(A)'s move to dislodge him. And to make its presence felt, the morcha decided to gherao the chief minister to protest the hike in power tariff for private tubewells, bus fares and registration fee for commercial vehicles.

But the cracks in the Opposition combine were manifest at their pre-gherao meeting itself. They could not arrive at a consensus memorandum as one section demanded Rajiv Gandhi's dismissal and the other protested against the demand. Interestingly, the Lok Dal(A) also put up a similar show on April 25 outside Singh's office. However, the Government's reaction to both was similar. The protestors were first arrested and then released after a sumptuous lunch on the house.

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Reaching out to you. Wherever you are.

A nationwide network of sales offices, stockyards, warehouses and consignment agencies maintaining close contact with customers.

A team of helpful application engineers, advising on product usage.

A Company where marketing is not an impersonal sale of products.

That is Tata Steel.

Reaching out to customers.

Responding to ideas on new product development.

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Tata Steel. The Company that is closer to you.

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TATA STEEL

The first and still the foremo

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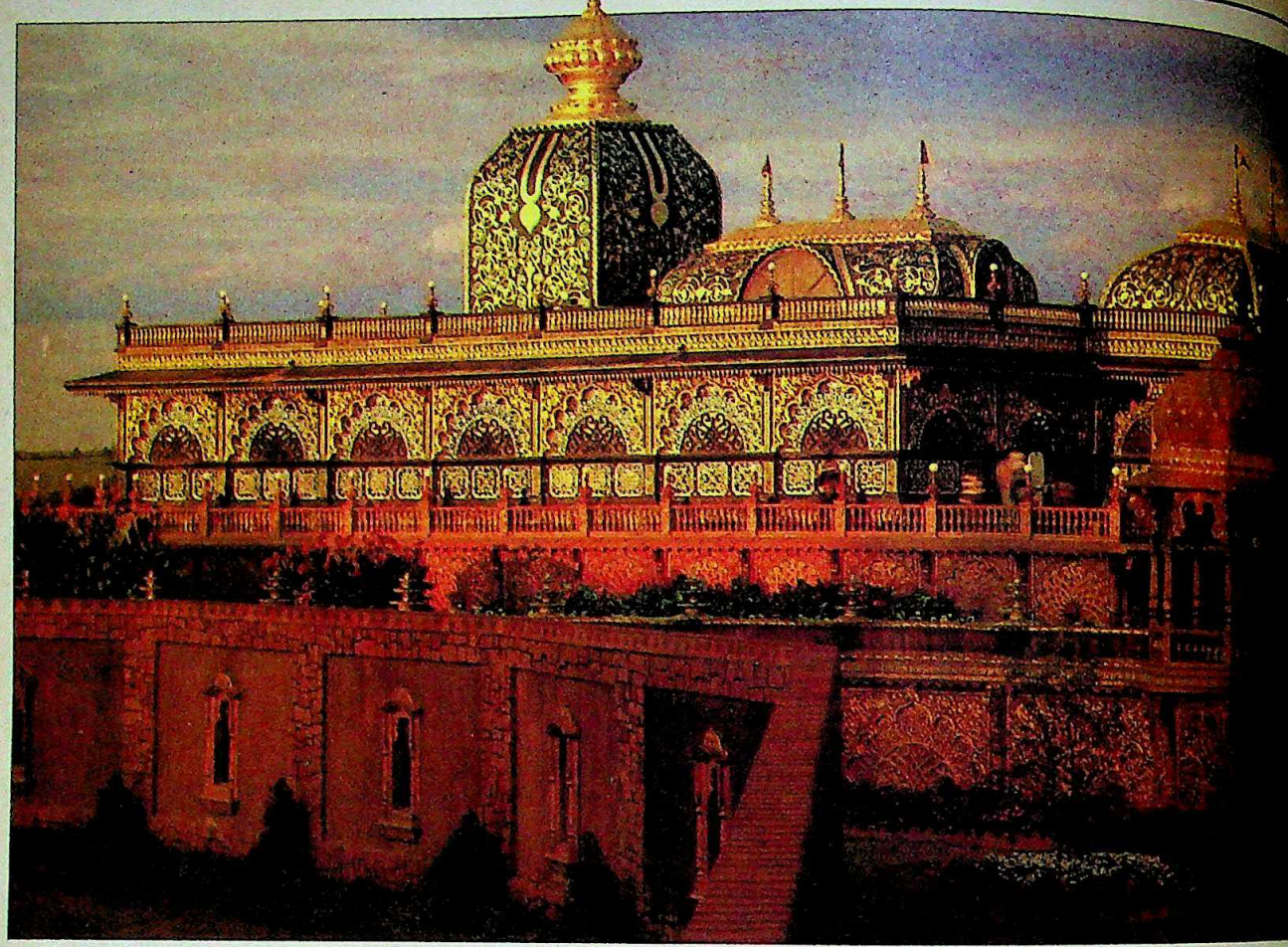

ISKCON

The Palace of Intrigue

SIXTY miles west of the steel city of Pittsburgh, the six-lane highway yields to a narrow winding hill road. At several sharp bends, bright, big signboards indicate the distance to the destination, Prabhupada's Palace of Gold. The $ 7 million (Rs 9 crore) palace in a 4,000-acre commune called New Vrindavan straddles the Appalachian Hills in West Virginia, and now ranks as the second-biggest tourist attraction in the state. But recently the commune, its 700 "Krishna conscious" residents and their chief, Swami Bhaktipada, have been in the news because of serious criminal allegations against them. To find out the facts Special Correspondent SHEKHAR GUPTA *visited New Vrindavan, and talked to scores of devotees, federal officials, and local politicians. His report:*

The commune's brochures call it the Taj Mahal of America. The leaders of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) call it a magnificent tribute to the glory of Krishna. But for the average American, the New Vrindavan commune, the showpiece of the entire ISKCON movement, is fast becoming familiar for entirely non-spiritual reasons.

The commune and its spiritual and temporal leader, His Divine Grace Swami Kirtanananda Bhaktipada, face charges ranging from murder to panhandling (begging), child molestation to copyright violations, and from kidnapping to tax evasion. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) have already raided the commune and taken away a truckload of documents, files and even computers. The FBI and the Marshall County police have been investigating charges of murder and drug smuggling while a Federal Grand Jury has been looking into the entire gamut of charges for the past six months. To take the controversy to a still higher pitch last month, the supreme Governing Body Council (GBC) of ISKCON, based at Mayapore in West Bengal, has expelled Bhaktipada from the society.

Bhaktipada, who himself is a member of the council, was accused by the GBC of turning the commune into a "centre of controversy in which bodies have recently been exhumed and former members convicted of murder and charged with child molestation". He has also been charged with attempting to "establish himself as the sole spiritual heir to ISKCON". Bhaktipada has responded by undertaking a publicity tour of the US, organised through a New York-based public relations firm, talking to millions of Americans every day on radio and television talk shows, dismissing the attacks on his commune as part of a right-wing conservative federal campaign against the cult (*see interview*). Even the spokesmen of the GBC admit that they cannot dislodge him from the commune since "he

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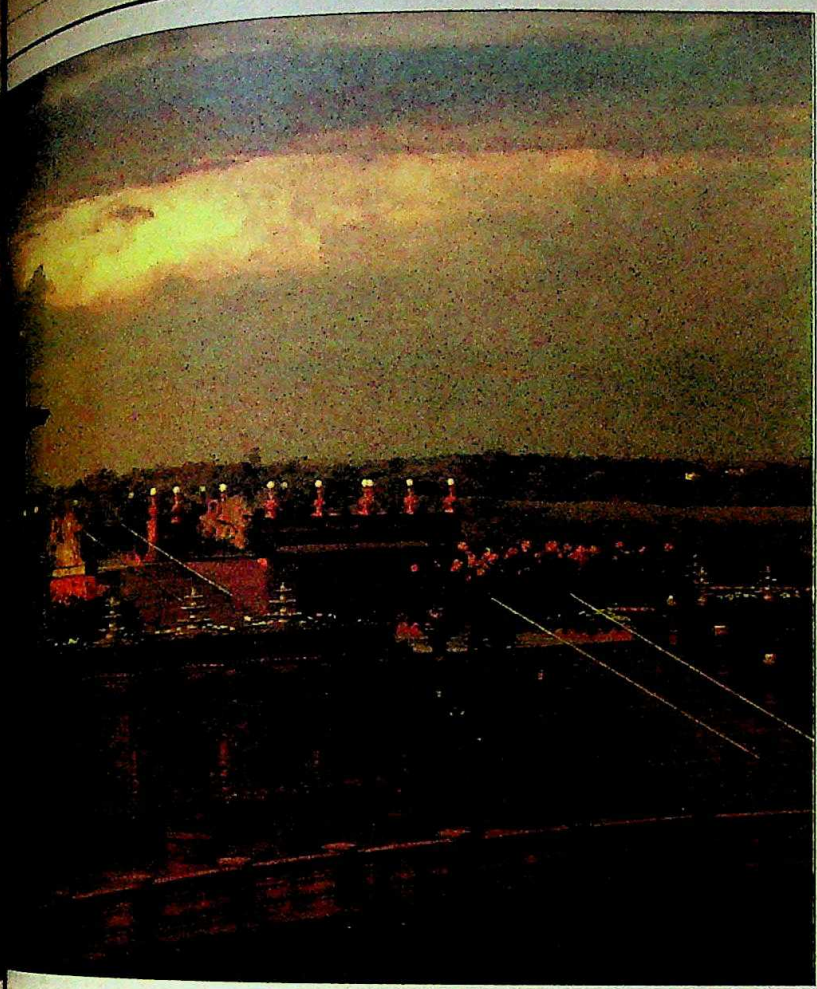
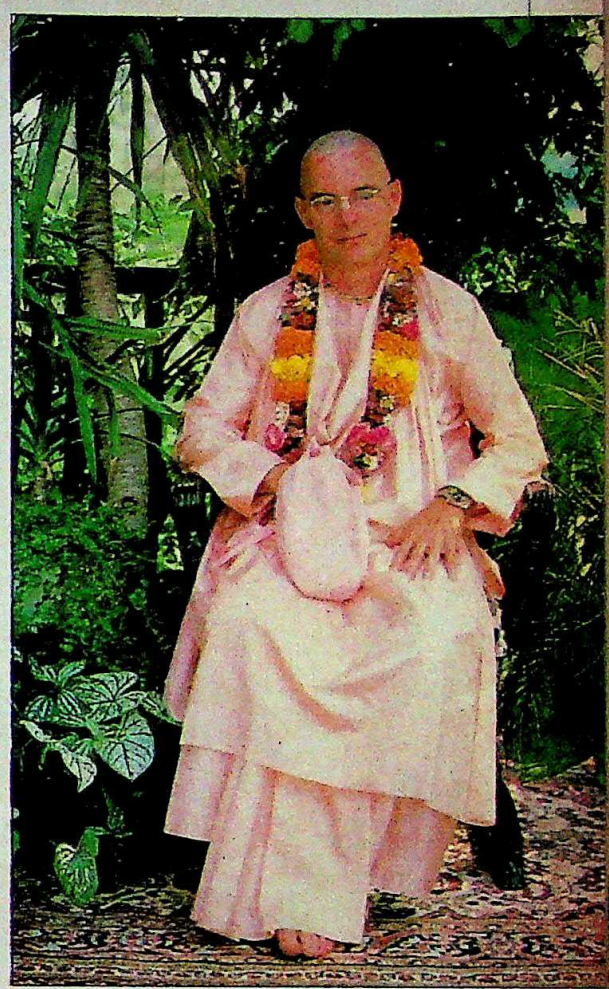




Vrindavan commune in West Virginia; and Bhaktipada: controversial haven

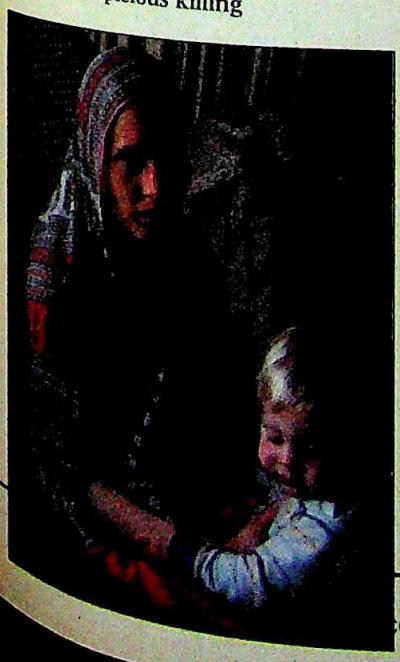
has built New Vrindavan almost independently". Says Bhaktipada of the GBC: "We have been preaching the glory of Krishna while they bothered themselves about mundane management issues."

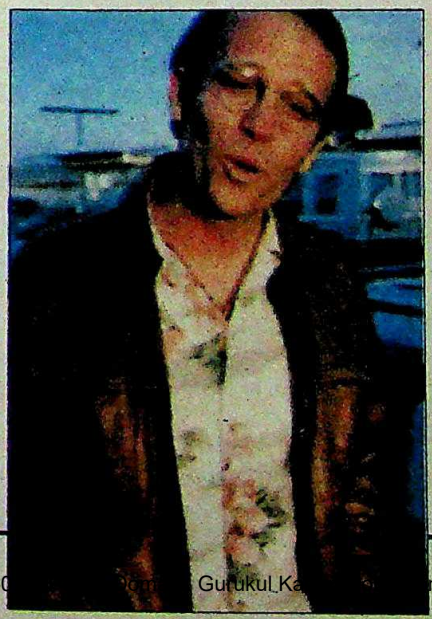
In a way, the commune's problems began three years ago as the population there increased and there was a resource crunch. The devotees were building the entire commune, including the ornate palace of gold with its Italian and French crystal, marble and gold-plating, other temples, a lake and gardens entirely on their own, without blueprints and using just do-it-yourself books. Some money was raised through panhandling, some through generous donations from the 30,000 life members, most of them rich Indians and some, the commune's critics allege, through shady deals.

These critics included Steven Bryant, a Krishna follower estranged from his faith and his wife Jane, alias Jamuna Devi Dasi, a British devotee. Frustrated and angry, Bryant left the faith and carried on a relentless one-man crusade against Bhaktipada and his commune until someone put two bullets from a high-calibre handgun into his skull in Los Angeles in May last year. But Bryant dead is more of a nightmare for the commune than when he was alive. Says Marshall County Sheriff Donald Bordenkirscher, who has stalked the Krishnas unflinchingly for more than two years now: "When Bryant came to us with allegations of child molestation and drug smuggling against the commune we thought he was a man frustrated in life and spurned in marriage. But now he has become a martyr. All that he said has acquired a new significance."

For months before his death, Bryant had threatened to destroy New Vrindavan to get his wife—who had been married off to another devotee by

Bryant (right); and his wife and son: suspicious killing





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Long before your clothes were rolls of cloth, we thought up the drape and handle of your trousers, the sharpness of the crease, the soft comfort of your shirt, the richness of shades...

Because all this is determined by the quality of the fibre used for the yarn used for the fabric.

Jailene.

The premium Polyester Staple Fibre, imparts the desired feel and appearance to your clothing.

Your dream clothing. Swadeshi Polytex makes it possible.

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Bhaktipada—and his children back. When he tried to smuggle his children out, he was caught and beaten up by other devotees. He then got together with other bitter ex-devotees to churn out reams and reams of charges against the commune. And finally, when even that failed, he appeared one day in Moundsville, near New Vrindavan, with a loaded Colt .45 revolver threatening to kill Bhaktipada.

At that point, the police were vigilant as an attempt on Bhaktipada's life had already taken place: Michael Shockman, another frustrated follower, had hit him on the head with an iron rod and nearly killed him. Says Bhaktipada: "Bryant told the police he had come to complete the job Shockman had started. And yet they did not prosecute him. They just let him go. Even Shockman was given just a minor sentence. He was never charged with attempted murder. All this makes you suspect if there is any

SWAMI BHAKTIPADA

"Our problem is success"

IT is hard to fault his sense of style. The latest Karma Cola Guru to hit American headlines has a personalised car number-plate that reads 'Acharya'. He takes a few bites out of a huge ornate thali *at a ceremonial feast and walks away majestically as the leftovers are distributed as* prasadam *to squatting devotees, most of them rich Indian expatriates who pay upwards of a thousand dollars every year for a week's blissful stay at the New Vrindavan. In the imposing study of his temple-house, a tube of Vicco Vajradanti Ayurvedic toothpaste shares a shelf with expensive perfumes. Tapes of Bach nestle alongside those containing devotional ragas and bhajans, and the book Sex Can Be Harmful To Your Health adorns a book case full of both spiritual and philosophical literature.*

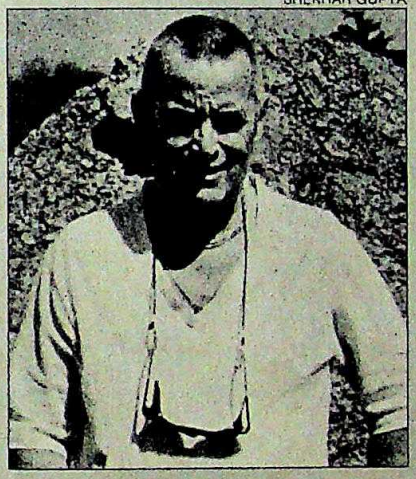
A large German Shepherd named Gadushaka, one of the many names of Arjuna in the Hindu epic Mahabharata, follows His Divine Grace Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada (nee Keith Ham of Peekskill, New York). Swami Bhaktipada says he acquired the dog after an attempt on his life that nearly killed him only three years ago. That blow on his skull from a disgruntled devotee left him with an unsteady gait, loss of sensation in the limbs and also a defective vision.

Today Bhaktipada, a Christian minister's son who once dabbled in American religious history as a Fulbright Fellow at the Columbia University and ended up in the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in his search for Nirvana, asserts in an interview with Special Correspondent SHEKHAR GUPTA *that "we are fighting on behalf of the entire Hindu faith" and dismissed allegations against the commune. Excerpts:*

Q. *How can you continue to head New Vrindavan when you have been expelled by ISKCON's Governing Body Council (GBC)?*

A. Because the GBC's action is all politics. They were afraid of associating with someone who had so many charges against him. They never even notified us. Now they have realised their folly and want me to return. Someone told me your problem is success. They were afraid of that.

SHEKHAR GUPTA



Bhaktipada: committed cultist

Q. *Would you say that after the death of Swami Prabhupada you are ISKCON's supreme leader?*

A. Yes, it amounts to that. After Prabhupada's death the GBC failed to run the movement efficiently. The followers were going away. Now I am reversing that process.

Q. *But didn't the GBC say that you were being expelled because of the serious criminal charges and mismanagement at New Vrindavan?*

A. There is no evidence. Anyone can make charges. Socrates was called a child molester and Christ a cheat. The KGB chief Beria said give me a man and I will give you a charge. The Federal Grand Jury has investigated us for six months and found nothing.

Q. *But haven't there been murders among your followers?*

A. In this country a murder takes place every 20 seconds. But when others kill they are not called Baptist, Catholic or Jew murderers. Why do people then go around saying two Krishnas killed each other, when both had already left ISKCON?

Q. *But Thomas Drescher, accused of murder, says you gave him $3,000 to follow Stephen Bryant.*

A. I only gave the money to the head of our Ohio Mission to buy a vehicle. I can't be held accountable for who he gave it to. In fact, the police are fabricating the case on evidence by a drug addict and a prostitute.

Q. *And wasn't there also a confirmed case of child molestation in your commune's school?*

A. Child molestation is a huge, huge problem. Something like this happens in every school. But because of that how can you go around saying Krishnas are hiding child molesters? We stand against all illicit sex.

Q. *How can you go around saying that anything said against your commune is motivated?*

A. Because there was a Federal decision a year ago to get rid of cults. It is part of the new conservatism with which the Mormons, the Scientologists, the Moonies and the Seventh Day Adventists have already had problems. The conservatives say, you are not mainline faiths, so we don't want you. So we are harassed.

Q. *How much damage have the charges done to your campaign?*

A. None at all. On the other hand, by the grace of Krishna we have got this marvellous opportunity to spread our message. People want to know about us and that is good for us.

Q. *Do you think you will survive the current pressures?*

A. Yes, indeed. As the scriptures say there are two kinds of people, devotees and demons. Krishna promised in the Gita: "It is my promise my devotees shall never perish." So we don't worry about demons at all.

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collusion between these people and the police." But the police promptly put Bryant into jail. Not long after, he was shot in his van while he sat chanting *hare Rama hare Krishna*.

The man suspected for the murder is Peter Drescher, another former Krishna follower. Drescher, significantly, had already been convicted for the murder in June 1983 of Charles St Denise whose body, wrapped in polythene and weighed down with bricks, was dug out of a shallow lake near the commune. According to the conviction, Drescher and his accomplice Daniel Reid, who pleaded guilty in court, killed St Denise for reasons impossible to establish.

The Los Angeles police looking into Bryant's murder and the Marshall County Sheriff's Department say Drescher was an enforcer for the commune. The West Virginia police say that St Denise, a regular visitor to the commune, was a cocaine addict and peddler. "We all suspect that drugs may have been involved, particularly considering the brutal murder," says a Marshall County policeman. St Denise was shot at least 10 times, then stabbed several times till the blade of the knife broke and then hammered in the head. In contrast, Bryant's death was more merciful.

The police say that Drescher has admitted to the fact of having been a spy and said that he had been paid $ 3,000 (Rs 38,600) by Bhaktipada to keep an eye on Bryant. But he claims that he had returned to Columbus, Ohio, a day before Bryant was killed.

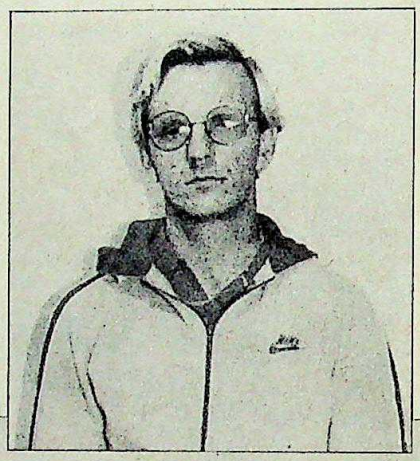
With the police asserting that Drescher was hired by the commune to kill Bryant because of his campaign against Bhaktipada, the trial in Los Angeles promises to be a major media event. But even the most exhaustive trial will not be able to answer all the questions raised by the happenings at the commune, which look interconnected and yet form no logical sequence. For example:

► About a year after St Denise's murder, his five-year-old son as well as the six-year-old son of his self-confessed murderer, Daniel Reid, were found suffocating inside a refrigerator in the commune. According to the *Rolling Stones* magazine, which carried a damning article on New Vrindavan, they had a dead bunny lodged between them.

► Last November, six months after Bryant was murdered in Los Angeles, his three-year-old son was found dead in a lake at the commune.

► Just two days after Drescher was arrested by the police, an explosion blew up the house of Ranjal Gorby, another commune hanger-on and drug addict with whom Drescher stayed and who reported to the police on Drescher.

But commune leaders say there is no connection between the incidents. Says Bhaktipada: "There is no evidence linking Drescher with Bryant's death. And his earlier conviction for St Denise's death was purely on circumstantial evidence. It could have only been done in the court here for it was so biased."



Drescher's trial in Los Angeles promises to be a major media event, with the police asserting that he was hired by the commune to kill Bryant because of his campaign against Bhaktipada.

Commune leaders also say that Gorby's house was blown up because he was stealing on the gas company by rigging his supply lines. And the defence on the death of Bryant's child comes from none else than his mother Jamuna, Bryant's estranged wife. Says she: "It was purely an accident. Who would need to kill a three-year-old child?"

On the other hand, the New Vrindavan leaders find it harder to rebut the other major charge of child abuse against them. The sheriff's office has already arrested Frederick Difransisco, assistant to the headmaster of the commune school—called Gurukula—and Larry Gardner. The headmaster has fled to either India or Texas to evade arrest on charges of child molestation. They are accused by Susan Hebel, a former commune member, of repeatedly molesting her 13-year-old son. Bhaktipada doesn't deny the charge outright but says that child abuse is a "huge, huge" problem and happens in every school of the world: "Far from insulting women and children, we look after them much better than the rest of the American society."

He accuses the police, the press and the courts of having launched a tirade to destroy his movement. "The *Rolling Stones* magazine will get its answer in court. We are also initiating action against the others," he says. He points out that the investigation against the commune had begun merely on the charges that the devotees were violating copyright laws by printing and selling T-shirts, mementoes, badges and pendants in the name of well-known social organisations and sports clubs to raise money but have now been raised to much higher levels by involved parties. He claims that his publicity blitz has left the Reagan Administration unnerved.

But one thing neither Bhaktipada nor his followers deny is the sudden fall in donations since New Vrindavan hit the headlines. The commune's Architectural and Planning Director Murti Das points out that the commune's grandiose new temple project—to be completed by 1995—will need a hundred million dollars (Rs 129 crore): "We have hired the same company that brass-plated the Statue of Liberty. The entrance to the temple will be bigger than the Gateway of India and the prayer hall substantially bigger than St Paul's Cathedral at 48,000 sq ft." Such an enterprise obviously requires large-scale funding. The devotees also admit that while in a normal year 300,000 tourists visit the temple, paying $ 4 (Rs 51) each as entrance fee—besides buying souvenirs and food at the commune shops—the inflow has suffered this year.

But Bhaktipada is confident that the Indian community in the US "which is the second-richest minority after the Jews" will not let him down. If, and when, he succeeds, he will have built the most striking monument in the western world for the glory of Hinduism. However, before that dream is realised he will have to survive a few court cases and a tough, square-jawed and determined Sheriff Bordenkirscher, who has made the investigation of New Vrindavan the biggest challenge of his life.

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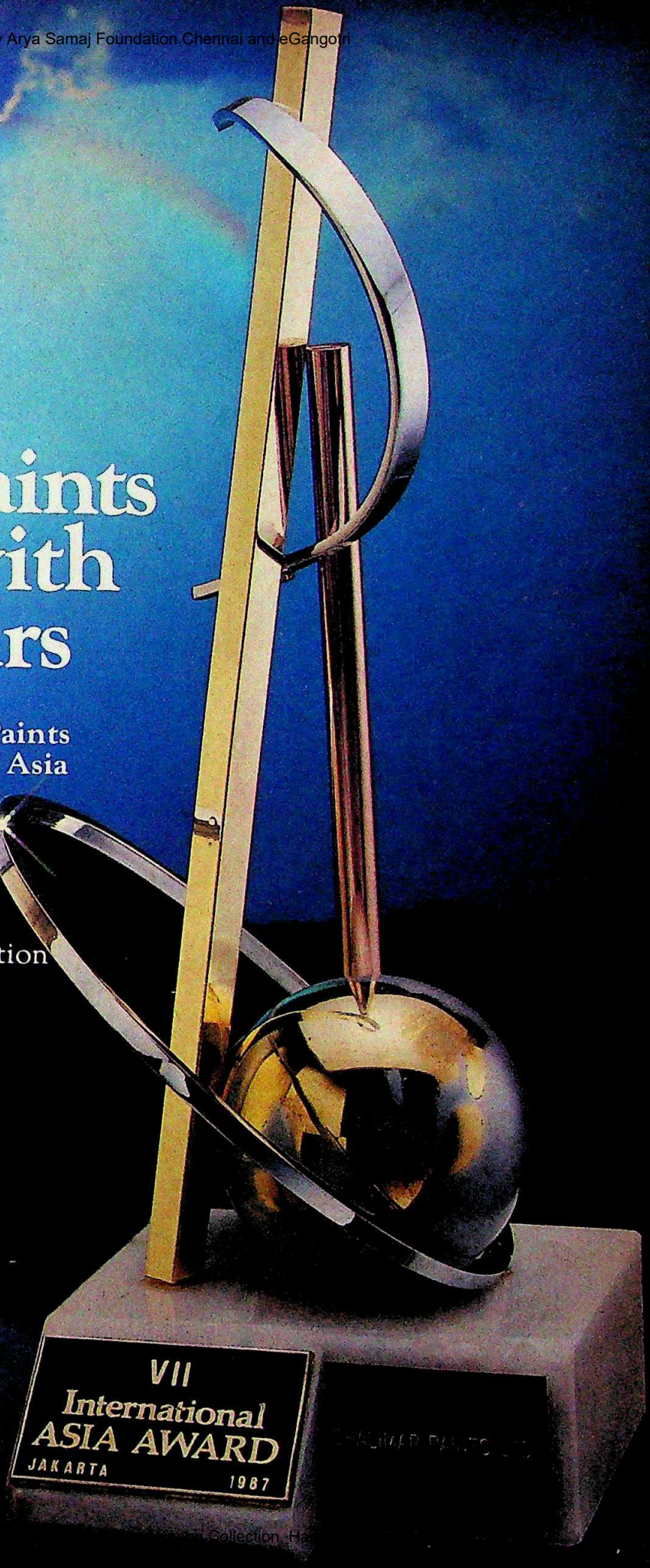

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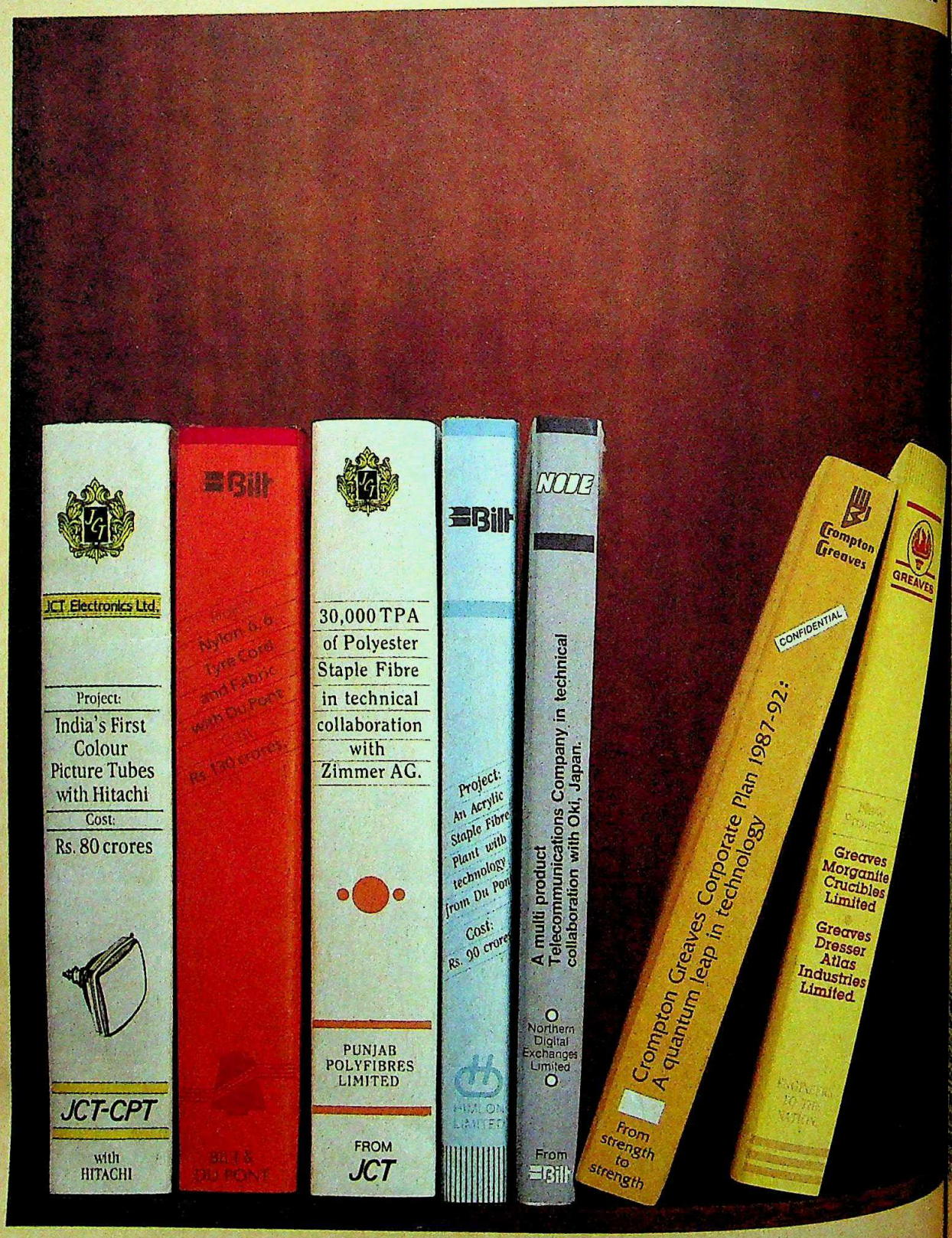

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FAVOURABLE RULING

THE Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission has upheld the refusal by International Instruments Ltd, the Bangalore dashboard meters outfit, to register some of its equity which three investment firms had acquired. Last October's ruling, which came to light recently, links the three firms with Sanjay Dalmia. The investment firms had appealed to the commission against the company's decision, claiming they had bought the shares in the normal course and had no links with the Dalmia group. But International Instruments argued that the Dalmias' stake in the company would go up to 16 per cent if the shares were registered and help them to gain control of it; that Dalmia had held talks with their German collaborators on buying their 16 per cent holding, and produced letters from the German officials to back the point. While all three denied this, the commission plumped for International Instruments' version as the firms had not submitted their shareholders' lists.

MUSHROOM GROWTH

PONDS India is planning a new sortie on the export front, with a project based in Tamil Nadu for exporting canned mushrooms. This marks yet another diversification for a company that had started out with cosmetics and then moved into the leather industry and other areas. Thus, Ponds is already selling thermometers to Canada and the UK, shoe uppers to Germany, Japan and the US, and cosmetics to the Soviet Union. The mushroom project could be followed up with yet others, because serious thinking is now going on regarding the role to be played by the different companies in the Lever group (Ponds' overseas shareholding was recently acquired by Unilever).

CARS STALLED

ALL the companies that had hoped to enter the car industry, and who had tied up collaborations with leading international manufacturers, have now virtually given up hope of their efforts fructifying. The new automobile policy being hammered out by a government committee has more or less decided that no new capacity need be created till 1990. This knocks out Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company (which had tied up with Honda), Escorts (which had teamed up with Citroen), the Raunaq Singh group (BMW), the Mahindras (Peugeot) and others, not to mention the Soviet gambit of trying to get the Lada made in India. The Lada project could however materialise as a 100 per cent export unit at Madras.

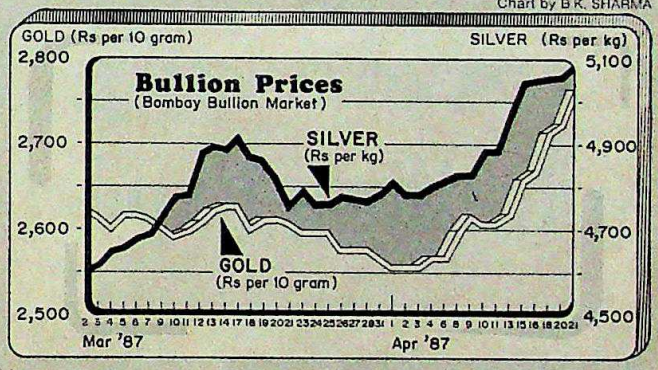
DRY CLEANING

ESCORTS may finally be rid of its dry dock, a Rs 20-crore white elephant that has been costing the company Rs 4 crore in losses every year. The navy has offered to buy the dry dock, but at no more than its book value—with the company bearing the cost of moving the dock to where the navy wants it. The dry dock—the first in the country—was acquired by Escorts five years ago as part of a tax-saving plan, but promptly ran into problems over its being moored near the Nhava Sheva port. The rapid devaluation of the rupee since 1982 made the foreign exchange loan on the dry dock very expensive to repay. And though Escorts feels the price is unattractive, it is glad to be rid of the burden.

STEADY RISE

POLITICAL uncertainty and a depressed share market are both tailor-made situations that persuade people to invest in bullion. And true enough, both gold and silver prices have been rising steadily in recent weeks. Gold has climbed from Rs 2,560 for 10 grams in early April to Rs 2,725

Chart by B K. SHARMA



on April 20—a rise of over 6 per cent in three weeks. This has also been helped by rising world prices for gold, following the dollar's slide. Silver in turn has topped the Rs 5,000 mark for the first time ever, hitting Rs 5,067 for a kg on April 20—up by almost 10 per cent from the level of Rs 4,604 in early March.

POWER TUSSLE

SHARP differences have surfaced between the Department of Power and Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) over the power equipment manufacturer's future. The state-owned BHEL notched up record sales and profits last year, but is worried that imports will squeeze its business in the eighth five-year plan period. Over half the power equipment orders placed so far for 1990-95 have gone to foreign suppliers because they were tied to bilateral aid deals. Going by this, BHEL believes that the utilisation of its production capacity will dip from about 85 per cent this year to 28 per cent in the first year of the eighth plan in the case of thermal equipment. The Power Department argues that BHEL has the capacity to supply barely 60 per cent of the equipment needed for the eighth plan and that the rest has to be imported. If that's true, BHEL may be crying wolf. Nevertheless, the order-books are thin right now, and there could be problems if fresh orders don't come in soon.

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Inside a Delhi shoe factory: unprecedented boom

LEATHER INDUSTRY

Spiralling Exports

WHEN business executive Shyam Prakash went to the United States last summer, he picked up a Florieshem shoe in a prestigious department store. On carting it home, he discovered to his consternation that the shoe had been made in India.

Prakash need not have been surprised. A host of leather wares, from shoe uppers and shoes to bags and garments, are witnessing an unprecedented Indian summer overseas. Back home, growing numbers of entrepreneurs are leaping into the leather export business and riding the crest of the latest business wave—leather exports.

Around the capital alone, nearly 100 small, leather exporting units have opened shop in the past one year—and most of them are flourishing. Pawan Sachdeva, for example, floated a manufacturing outfit in Delhi called M.S. Shoes East last year, and already reports sales of roughly Rs 6 crore. "We have orders worth Rs 5 crore in hand and are booked for the next six months," he says.

Rita Singh is faring well too. The enterprising businesswoman launched Middle East Shipping three years ago and plunged into leather garment exports. Along the way, she kicked off two more manufacturing units on Delhi's outskirts. Sales have vaulted from an initial Rs 40 lakh to this year's Rs 7 crore, and Singh now has a Rs 3-crore shoe uppers venture planned. Says Singh: "Ten years ago, we faced a boom in textile garments. We are now in the same position in leather."

Certainly, leather exports are booming like never before. "Over the last four years, leather exports have grown by almost 100 per cent," explains A. Sahasranaman, executive director of the Council for Leather Exports (CLE). He is right (*see chart*). So buoyed is the Government by the trend that the 1989-90 target of Rs 1,170 crore may rise to Rs 1,300 crore. As CLE Chairman M. Mohamed Hashim puts it: "Exports are increasing, more value added products are being exported, new markets are opening out, and new entrepreneurs are coming up in the country. I'd say there's a boom."

Even the big daddies are leaping into the arena, or feverishly expanding their production capacities. Early this year, the Government threw open shoe manufacturing, hitherto reserved for small businessmen, to companies covered by the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act on condition that they export 75 per cent of their output. So Larsen & Toubro obtained a licence to make 7.5 lakh shoes in Gujarat and is now scouting for a collaboration with a European outfit. Indian Hotels (the Taj group) is seeking permission to throw its hat into the ring. Companies that already have shoe uppers abroad—Ponds India, Gordon Woodroffe and Wipro—have either expanded their production capacities or plan on doing so shortly. Nearly all the big boys will also move into the more profitable business of exporting shoes.

Some of them plainly see advantages in establishing a track record in exports. "A presence in the export market helps our image," confesses the senior executive of a big concern. "We can get government permission to expand in other areas." The rush that is now on is also propelled by the vacuum in overseas markets, the tax deductions (2 per cent of turnover and half the profits are tax exempt) available to exporters and profit margins that can run to 25 per cent. "With government incentives, we see a 35 per cent rate of return on investment," says L.M. Jaidka, Larsen & Toubro's deputy general manager, exports.

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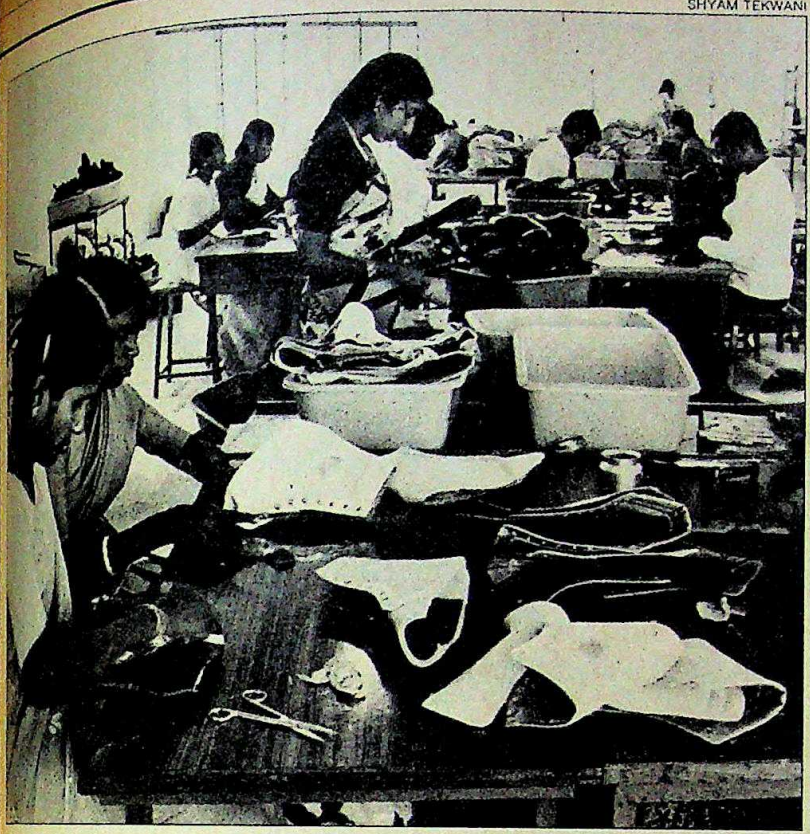
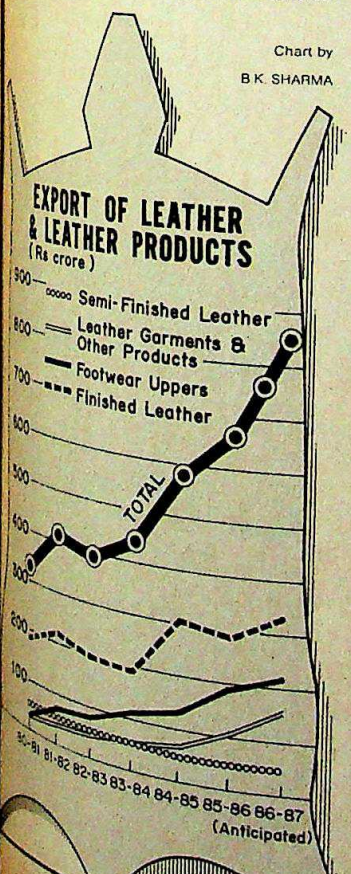
SHYAM TEKWANI



The Wipro factory in Madras: upgraded technology

The West is increasingly phasing out the production of labour intensive uppers and even shoes, and businessmen in India are eager to fill the void. "We contribute to only 1 per cent of the world shoe market. That shows the potential. One day, India will become shoemaker to the world," predicts V. Balaraman, executive vice-president of Ponds India. And Gordon Woodroffe Managing Director R. Krishnan Kutty talks of more than tripling his company's sales turnover in the next three years. Says Kutty: "By 1990, we expect a turnover of Rs 30 crore from finished leather and shoe uppers."

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



So far, the signals justify the upbeat mood. Overseas buyers are flocking to India in droves, and many of them are new customers. "The USSR was the traditional buyer but new buyers from Europe, the US and Japan are entering the market," confirms Balaraman. For the first time too, domestic manufacturers are in the enviable position of being able to turn down business. "We can pick and choose customers," brags a Wipro official.

Exports are of course piggybacking on cheap labour, the devaluation of the rupee (which makes Indian exports more price-competitive), and fresh government incentives. "Labour costs three times more in competing South Korea than in India," notes CLE's Sahasranaman. And in North India at least, small sweat shops work round the week, paying on a piece rate basis, often with unregistered labour that is not paid statutory dues. Concedes a small businessman in Delhi: "They work like horses, 18 hours a day."

But the Government's role in pushing exports is a major factor too. Last year, it handed out fatter cash incentives to exporters, thereby providing them with a cushion to manoeuvre in the marketplace and quote lower prices. Equally important, the Government recognised that a host of good quality leather ware components are not available in the country. So it eased import procedures for both inputs and machines, and slashed customs duties from around 200 per cent to 40 per cent: a gift that has cost the exchequer some Rs 80 crore in revenue.

Finally, the quality of Indian goatskins has been a great advantage. Says G. Thyagarajan, director of the Central Leather Research Institute (CLRI): "The export boom is also due to the quality of goatskins, which is the best in the world."

A striking characteristic of the rising export graphs is that the export mix has changed dramatically. In 1974-75, raw and semi-finished hides and skins along with finished leathers accounted for 79 per cent of the year's Rs 167 crore exports. Last year, their share in the export basket (excluding raw hides and skins whose export is now banned) dipped to just 44 per cent. "The value of exports has gone up, but the quantum has increased only marginally. Nearly half the total value of exports is accounted for by the diversification into products," argues C.K. Duraivelan, president of the All India Skin & Hide Tanners & Merchants Association.

This was encouraged by the Government, which adopted a two-pronged strategy of banning the export of most raw materials or slapping quotas on them, simultaneously holding out financial carrots to manufacturers to move upmarket into finished products. Recent examples: while finished leather exporters are not entitled to cash incentives, the incentive rate for shoe uppers is 25 per cent and for shoes 33 per cent. Expectedly, many tanners and leather processing units (the Madras-based Farida group of companies, Hashim's M.A. Khizar Hussein & Sons) switched to finished products. Symbolising the success of the official gambit, several of them now talk of exporting their products under their own brand names to foreign department stores directly, eliminating middlemen.

The official policies have had other spinoffs. Technology is being updated, manufacturers are investing in better equipment, mass production techniques are being introduced in an industry that

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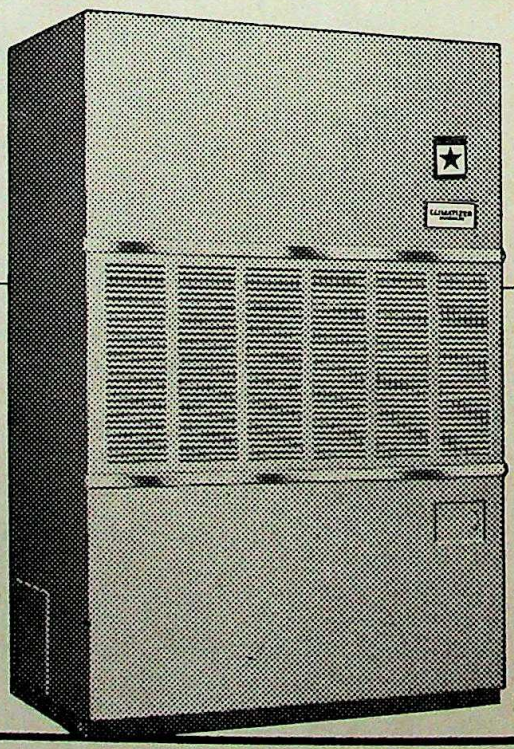

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has traditionally sworn by man rather than machine, and component units are springing up to feed exporters with items that are now being imported. "Technology is being gradually upgraded. Exporters who travel abroad have introduced new machinery in their tanneries. A silent revolution is on," says Thyagarajan of CLRI. That is true enough. Gordon Woodroffe, for instance, will invest Rs 1.5 crore this year in new machinery. Wipro installed spanking new imported equipment last March.

Many ancillary projects too are on the anvil. In Madras, the Farida group has banded with other leading exporters to set up a Rs 10-crore venture to make leather boards, heels, insoles and to upgrade the buffalo sole available in India (it is porous and gradually disintegrates when wet). In Bombay, Sanghavi Shoe Accessories has made a sortie into plastic 'lasts' (shoe shapers), which have the advantage of not expanding or contracting unlike wooden lasts. But exporters also complain of having to import even basic components. Hashim says cardboard shoe boxes have to be imported as local ones don't match world standards. "It's ridiculous having to import boxes," he grumbles. Wallet exporter R. Muralidharan adds that domestic locks, silks and push buttons leave much to be desired.

The big push overseas and subsequent updating of technology have also had little impact on the quality of shoes made at home. Industry men claim that this is due to the area being reserved for the small sector and the fact that competition is limited. Moreover, the industry's design capabilities are poor. Most exporters depend heavily on foreign buyers for designs and patterns. But this could change in course of time: the Government set up a footwear design institute last December in Agra.

Yet another offshoot of the boom could be a scarcity of leather. A recent CLRI survey found a worrisome rise in the number of livestock being slaughtered prematurely. Leather is a by-product of the meat industry, but the demand for meat is on the upswing and indiscriminate killing is compounding the scarcity. Furthermore, says Duraivelan, "Big companies are entering the business, they are prepared to pay a high price for leather and there's a scramble for leather." Ironically, then, the day may not be far off when a country which once exported raw leather will have to depend on imports for its raw materials.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

BOMBAY

Building Row

BOMBAY'S builders are up in arms—and their collective ire is showing. Last month, the Income Tax Department's attempts to auction a flat and an office in Bombay came a cropper after the managing committee of the Maharashtra Chamber of Housing Industry (MCHI) met and decided to boycott the auctions.

The Government has been on a drive to acquire undervalued property worth over Rs 10 lakh, and then to auction them on the open market, following an amendment to the income tax law last October. It has in fact successfully auctioned 5 properties in Madras, but has been stymied in Bombay, a city notorious for the investment of black money in property.

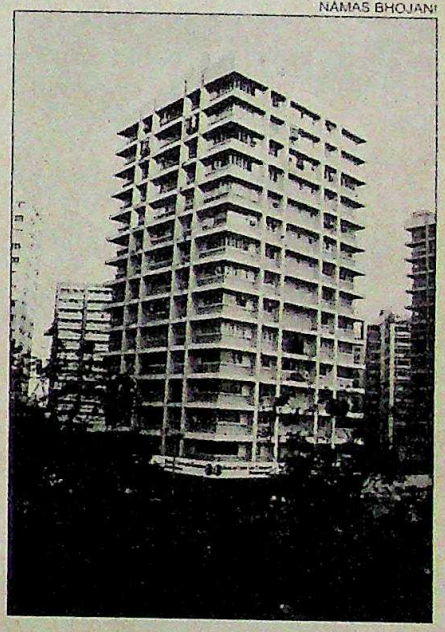
The two properties on the auction block in Bombay were among 23 acquired by the department. However, the affected owners went to court, with the exception of three, two of whose properties were auctioned last month. One, a 1,690-sq ft flat, is situated in the ritzy Napean Sea Road area, while the second, a 2,400-sq ft office, is at Nariman Point. Despite holding two auctions and having bidders like the Punjab National Bank, the flat could not be sold. The bidding stopped at Rs 35 lakh, nearly Rs 7 lakh below the department's "reserved" or floor price. For the Nariman Point office—for which the department had kept an unannounced reserve price of Rs 95.50 lakh—the bidding ended at Rs 75 lakh. This was despite competition among the Bank of India, J.M. Financial and Investment and Rama Leasing. Either the department had wrongly assessed the value of the properties or the auctions were facing stiff resistance from buyers.

"The failure of the auctions demonstrates that the department's premises really do not match the market situation," maintains Niranjan Hiranandani, MCHI joint secretary. "It is wrong to say that builders are against the new law—we are only against the manner in which the rules have been framed." For all that, the powerful builders' group clearly views the new law as a threat to the real estate market. It pulled up a builder who had put in a bid at an auction in Madras and decided to "informally request" members of the chamber not to participate in auctions.

Hiranandani, however, says that the MCHI is only trying to ensure that its members do not opportunistically cash in on other members' properties that may be up for sale. He also predicts that by artificially suppressing the demand for real estate, the new law will seriously affect the market in the long run.

That remains to be seen, but it has certainly cut the number of real estate transactions in downtown Bombay and the more expensive suburbs like Bandra and Juhu by at least half. Many would-be sellers are steering clear of the market, partly because obtaining clearances from the income tax authorities can take up to three months. Still, building activity in the distant suburbs beyond Andheri, where flats sell for under Rs 10 lakh, has got a shot in the arm.

NAMAS BHOJANI



Nariman Point office: auctioned

Tax officials are also quick to point out that the property rate that is declared in transfer documents has virtually doubled since the law was amended. In the Napean Sea Road area, for example, the declared price per square foot has shot up from Rs 1,200 to Rs 2,800. "Buyers are now paying the entire price by cheque," says Mukesh Dadlani, secretary of the Estate Agents Association of India. "Many people do not want to take the risk of transacting even 10 to 15 per cent of the price in black." Clearly, the legal change has put a damper on the use of black money in real estate deals. But whether it can arrest the explosion in property prices in this metropolis is open to question.

—M.RAHMAN

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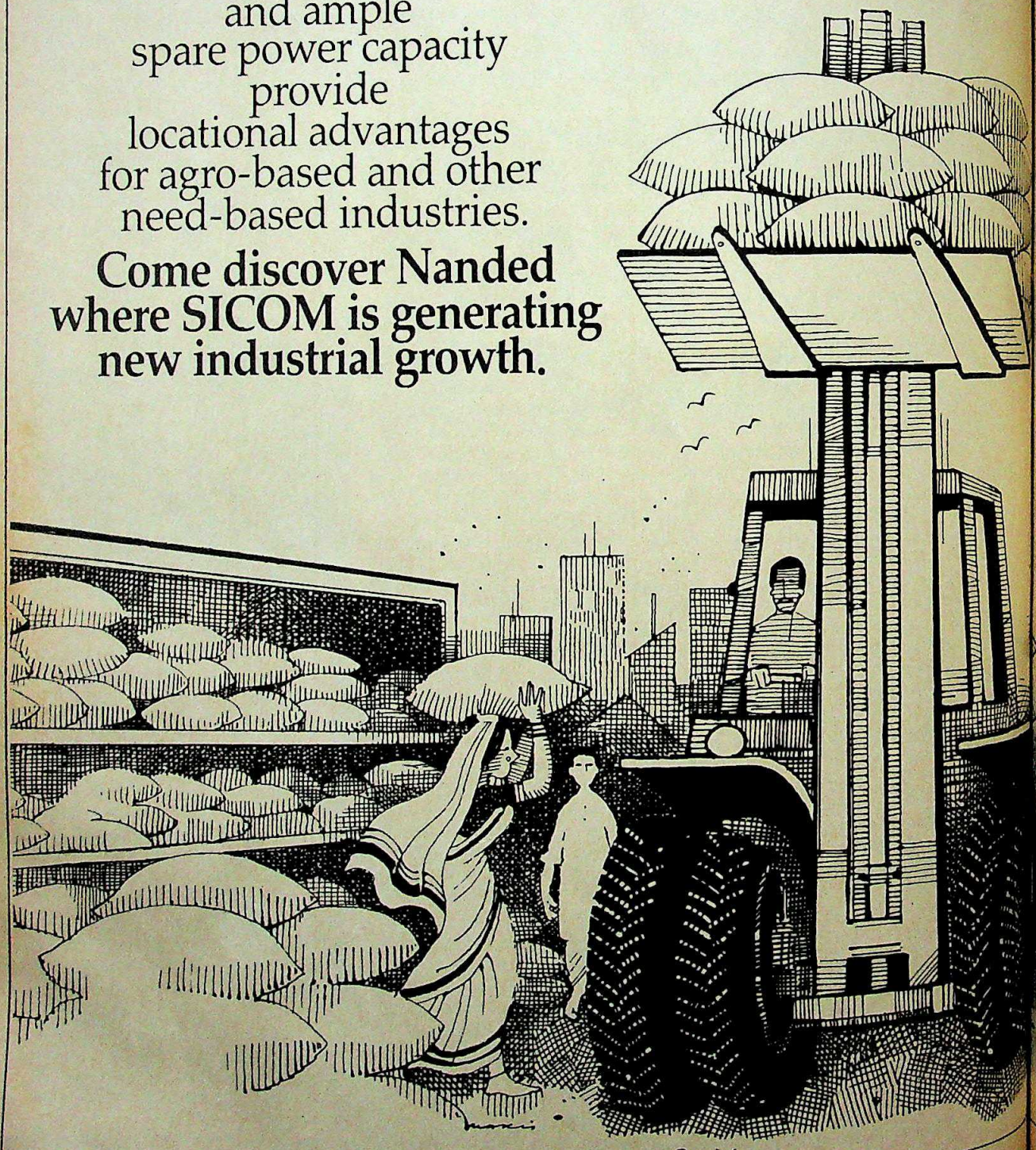

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PROCESSED FOODS

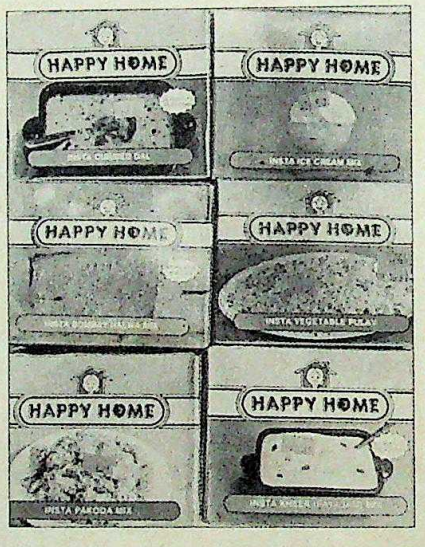
Quick Fix

THE winds of change for the processed foods industry are blowing both hot and cold these days. The iceman cometh, stockings stuffed with frozen goodies. But the heat-and-eat brigade is not too far behind either.

The leaders in the fray include, among others, Tasty Bite Eatables, promoted by Ravi Kiran Aggarwal along with ice cream tycoon Ravi Ghai (Gaylord's, Yankee Doodle); the Pune-based Venkateshwara Hatcheries (Venky's), which promise the choicest chicken cuts; export giant Al Kabeer, which has just forged out into the Indian market; Quick Foods Ltd, with its Happy Home Convenience Foods; All Seasons Foods; and Kothari General Foods (KGF). ITC and other hotel chains are likely to take the plunge very soon. "It is going to be good fun," says Tasty Bite Vice-Chairman and Managing Director Aggarwal. "But there is room for everybody." Adds Al Kabeer General Manager Aspi Dinshaw: "The potential of the market has not been tapped as yet."

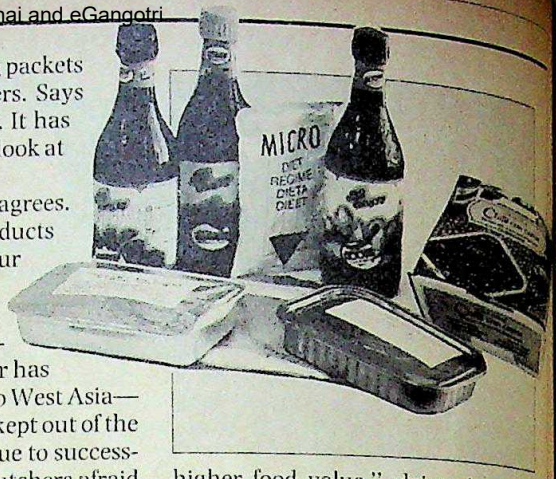
Consumers today want convenience. "There are an estimated 100 million people in our country whose monthly income ranges from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000," says KGF Chairman D.C. Kothari. "There are families in which both the partners go to work so naturally the wife does not have the time or the energy to prepare all the meals. These are the people to whom we can sell semi-cooked foods and soft drinks." And All Seasons' General Manager Sanjiv Makhija adds: "What we are offering them is a whole range of delicacies from Hungarian Goulash to Mexican Chilli Con Carne. Of course, there are also the more mundane *baingan bhartas*." Seasons, which is set to hit the shelves in July, also plans to come out with self-heating packets and a version of TV dinners. Says Makhija: "Nothing frozen. It has hardly any shelf life—and look at the place it takes up."

Dinshaw strongly disagrees. "In the deep freeze our products can last for nine months. Our advantage is that for a perishable item like this you don't have to go shopping every day." Al Kabeer has been in exports—mainly to West Asia—for a long time. But it was kept out of the domestic market largely due to successful lobbying by Bombay butchers afraid that frozen meats would leave them out in the cold. Within four months, Al Kabeer's monthly sales have touched Rs 1.5 lakh and are expected to climb to Rs 5 lakh soon. There is hardly a ceiling to growth: out of Bombay's total consumption of 1,500 tonnes of meat a month, the frozen component is barely 2 per cent.



Venky's "blast frozen" chicken portions have also proved a smash hit according to the company, and a lot of new products—including vegetarian items—are on the cards. Mafco, which has been in the business of frozen meats and vegetables since 1970, is soon to launch chicken cutlets and corn soup.

Also planning a foray into frozen vegetables is Tasty Bite. "Some frozen snacks too," says Aggarwal. Its initial sortie, however, will be in the ready-to-cook items—about 10 soups and a variety of meat preparations. "The chief advantage of ready-to-cook and frozen items is that they have higher food value," claims Aggarwal. "Fresh vegetables have only 92 per cent food value considering the time they take to reach the market. Our processing work is complete within 18 hours of plucking: we can attain a 95-per cent level." Tasty Bite expects a turnover of Rs 15 crore in the first year alone, some 40 per cent of which will come from exports.



Exports are, in fact, an area in which many of the new units are concentrating with All Seasons expecting to touch a 50-per cent level. "People abroad lap up biryanis and other Indian specialities," says Makhija, "but they are priced astronomically. We can sell all we want."

Television, the two-pay cheque family and increasing disposable incomes have, of course, had their role to play in the convenience food boom. But one other reason, which makes exports possible too, is the arrival of technology. "Today, our hygiene and quality-control standards have been approved by countries such as France, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. They fully know that we are not going to start an epidemic out there," says Dinshaw. Among the new companies, Tasty Bite is collaborating with Altech of Japan and APV Parafreeze of the UK and All Seasons has linked up the British Smith and Booth Associates. "Our products will be of world standards," says Aggarwal.

In spite of the huge market, however, it is evident that not everybody will survive. Food Specialities' Maggi made its mark but competition is still hotting up. The winners will be those that make a name for themselves first. In many a boardroom therefore, advertising and product launching is of paramount importance. Copywriters are sharpening their pencils. Product managers are desperate to begin production. The Beef Stroganoff, baked beans and biryani battle is just around the corner.

—PARTHASARATHI SWAMI

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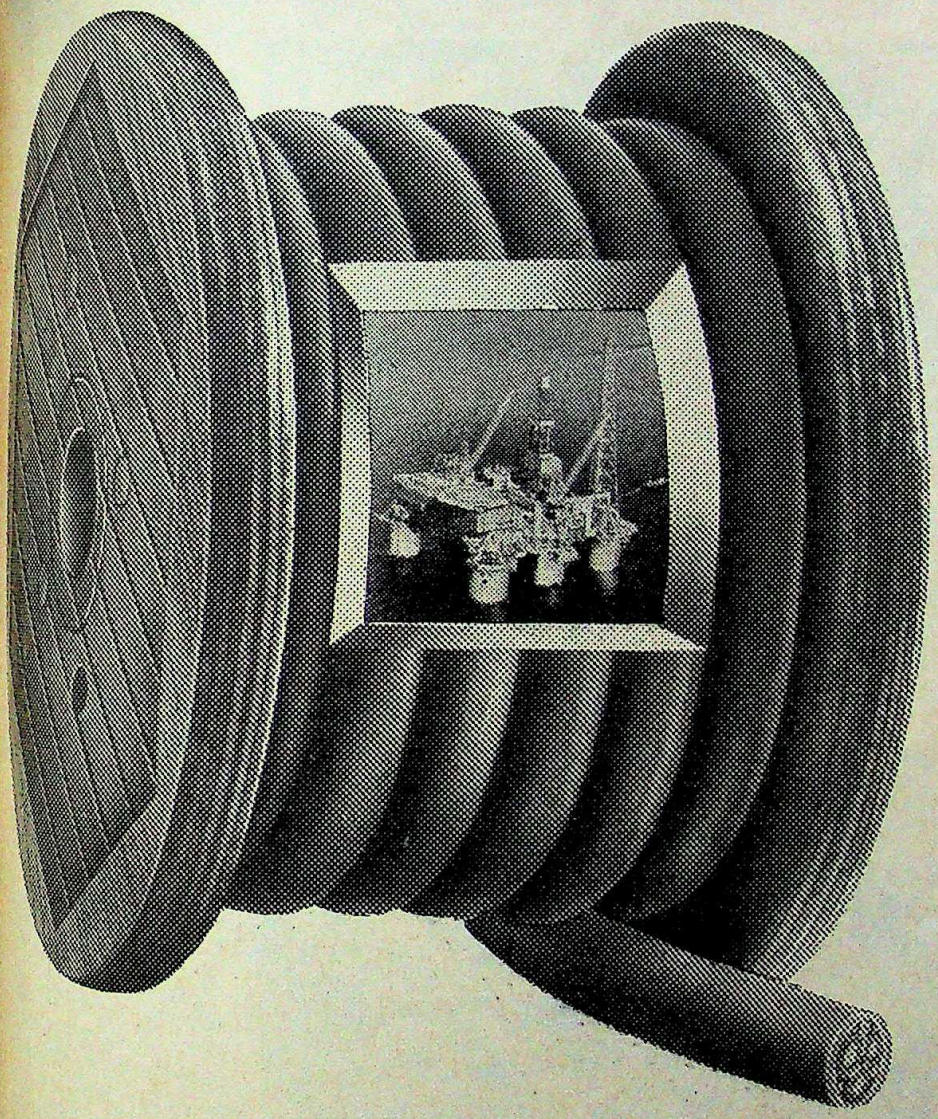

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HOME COMPUTERS

Key Success

PROPPED on his father's knee, four-year-old Samir stares gleefully at the screen. The alphabet flashes past and he keeps pace by pressing buttons on the console. Mission successfully accomplished, the computer rewards him with a "well done" and the chance to take a pot-shot at a passing Martian. Learning has never been so exciting.

Kurush, 14, is hardly ever at home during the evenings. "He was always at his friend's place playing with the computer," says his mother Gushasp. "Now that we have bought one, I am waiting for him to learn and teach me how to use it," she adds.

Daylynn Pinto, 22, who spent Rs 9,000 for the keyboard and the monitor, has already mastered two languages—basic and cobol—in just eight months. "Too many people give it up thinking it is beyond them," he says. "Actually it is all very easy. Given half a chance—and they are getting it now—tomorrow's toddlers will be teaching us new tricks."

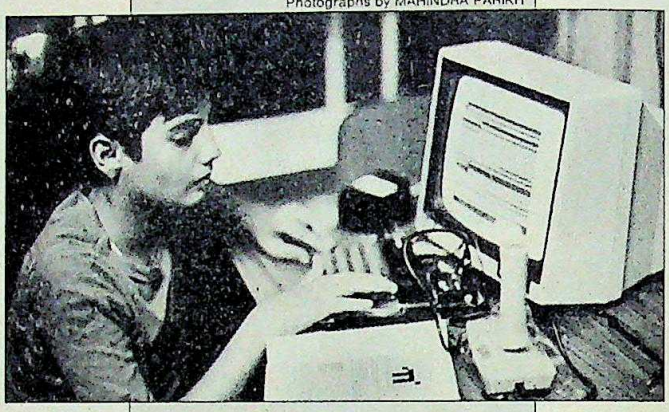
All three belong to the 15,000 families in Bombay which now possess home computers. There are another 15,000 in the rest of the country and the numbers are growing by leaps and bounds. The Assistant Director of the National Centre for the Performing Arts, D.B. Biswas, who recently bought a home computer "mainly for his daughter Indrani who is studying in standard one", confesses: "It is rather scary sometimes. Children seem to be growing up too soon."

In fact, there is a whole new generation today which finds itself at home amidst the bits and the bytes of the new technological toy. School-level interaction on computer topics has become an everyday affair—many Bombay schools have included computer science as part of the curriculum—and over a score of computer clubs have sprung up. Some schools have also set up informal computer users' forums. And in Bangalore, a 16-year-old pre-university student caused headlines when he presented a technical paper at an international conference in Singapore.

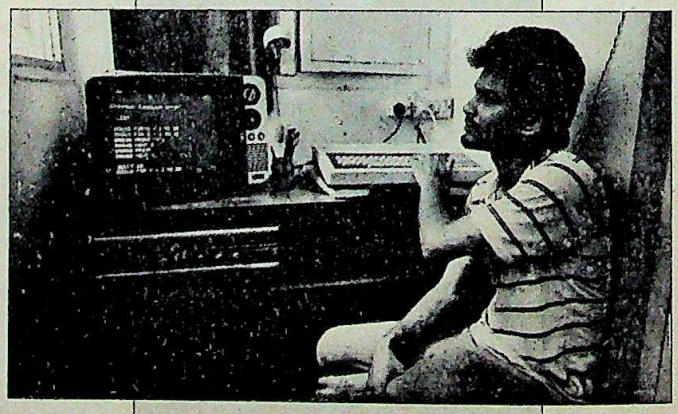
Also bitten by the byte are Ashish Jain (who has an imported Commodore) and his friend Pavan Lulla, who owns an Acorn, also imported. Both, at 16, have just finished their SSC, use their home computers for games and simple programmes and aspire to study computer science.

Kurush Irani: all work and play

Photographs by MAHINDRA PARIKH



There are 30,000 families in India—half of them in Bombay—who own home computers. And their number is growing rapidly.



Daylynn Pinto: byte-bitten

The machine seems to have mesmerised a wide range of people. Says Computer Point's Assistant Vice-President Satish Doshi: "It is not really much of an investment, and every rupee is worth it. Many middle class urban families already possess an ordinary tape-recorder and a colour television. All you need is another Rs 4,500 and a home computer is yours for the taking. Just link them up and you are set."

Computer Point flagged off its dB Spectrum model in September last year and has already notched up sales of 1,000 units a month. A fruitful 1987 might even see them touch the 20,000 mark. Says Doshi: "We have even sold a unit to a *panwalla* in Nagpur who has put it up in his shop and allows his clients to play games for a price. It has proved such a hit that he now wants another." Besides dB Spectrum, two other local firms are assembling home computers—the Semiconductor Complex, which makes SCL Unicorn, and Eiko. But imported sets still constitute the major chunk of the home computer market.

The home computer, however, has its limitations. Says Shachi Kulkarni, a computer programmer: "I hardly do any work on it." This is largely because the home computer is capable of only a modest amount of programming, though there is a range of software packages available for games, education (stretching from multiplication tables and elementary english to trigonometry and geography), a few business applications and graphics.

As Computer Shack Director Farath Kapur says: "The biggest problem is software support. What is the point of buying a computer if there is nothing to do with it? Most of our clients will probably be screaming at us." She also feels that for home computers to really make their presence felt, prices must drop to a more reasonable range of Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,000.

While some agree on the price issue, others deny the lack of software. The Spectrum has more than 50 packages available and more are on the cards. They are ordinary audio-cassettes with the programme taped on. This, inevitably, has given rise to a booming market on Bombay's Lamington Road

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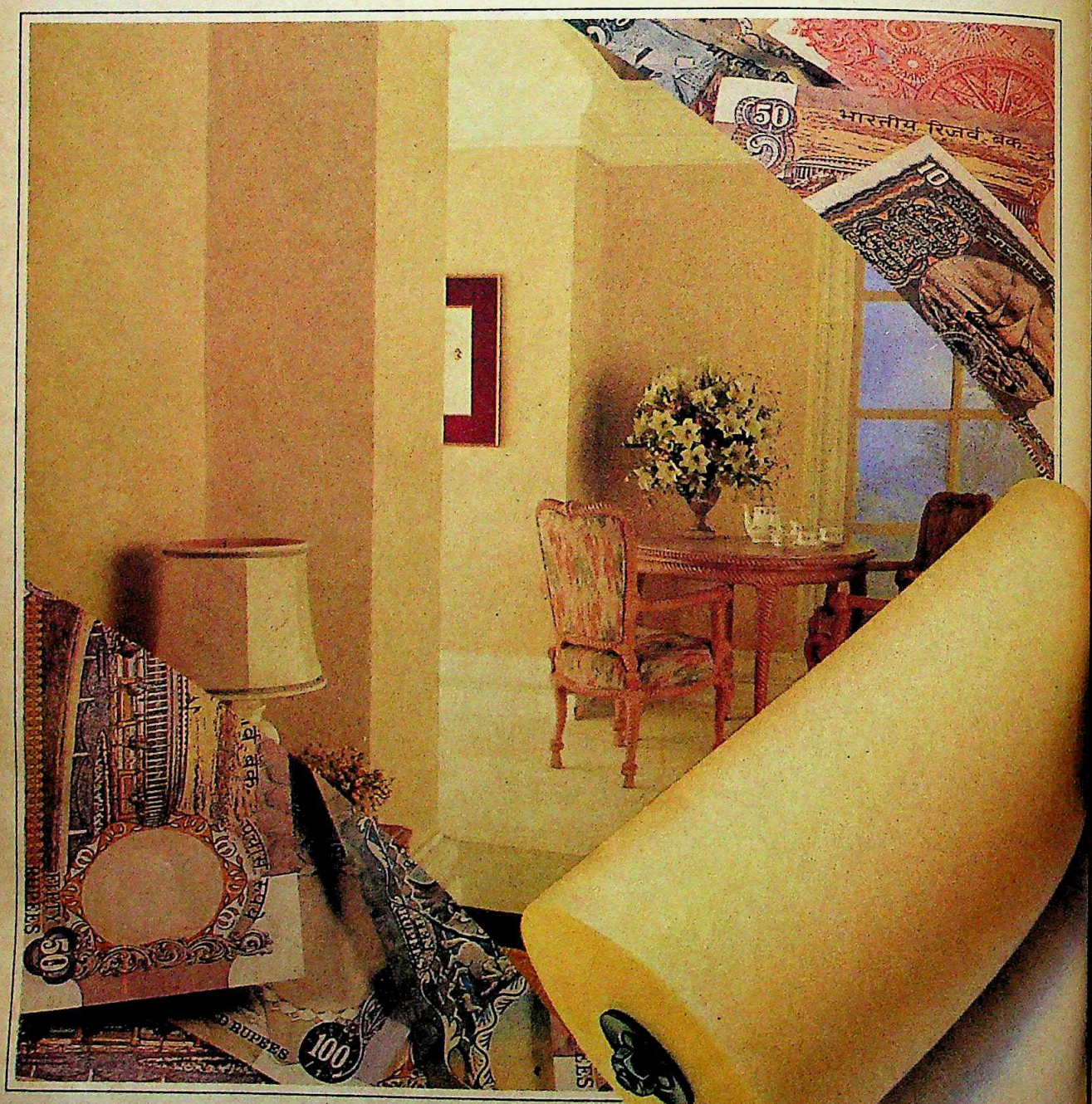
Your painter can tell you the cost of painting your home



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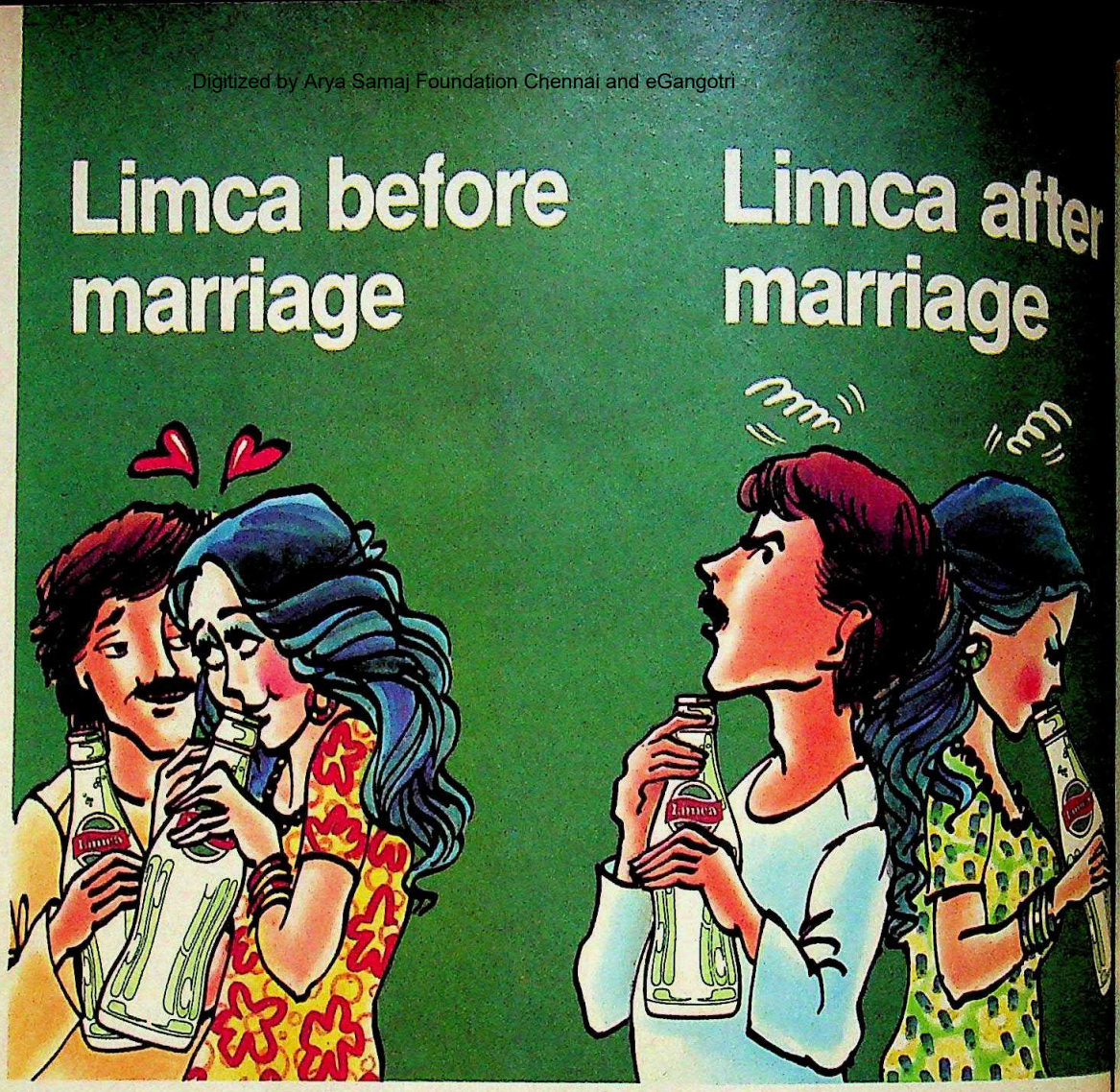

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where pirated versions are available at a scant Rs 25, against the Rs 50 to Rs 100 for the original.

However, the home computer is only a primer for computer literacy. In the West, children outgrow home computers along with teddy bears and thumb sucking. As Daylynn says: "Out there, teenagers are writing the programmes that seem so esoteric out here." But as Kulkarni points out: "Everyone must know about computers. You can't step into tomorrow's world without it." And India's kids are increasingly agreeing with that view.

—PARTHASARATHI SWAMI

PUBLIC UNITS

Unholy Mess

KERALA'S most famous emblem is that of the state Government which shows two black elephants holding aloft their trunks, supporting the Ashoka Chakra on a conch. Referring to the symbol, rebel Marxist leader M.V. Raghavan said in an assembly discussion on state public sector undertakings: "It would be better if we paint the elephants in white."

Raghavan has a point, as a report submitted recently by the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India (CAG) makes tellingly clear. Perhaps the most startling disclosure of them all is the fact that as many as 52 of the 85 state government-owned companies had not finalised their report for 1984-85. Some had not even readied their accounts for as far back as 1979-80—and apparently without any questions whatsoever being asked by the Government.

Such accounts that are available make for a pretty unflattering picture. The accumulated losses from Kerala's 85 public sector companies now total around Rs 130 crore. And losses in 29 of the worst units surveyed by the CAG amount to a staggering Rs 112 crore, an amount nearly three times their paid-up capital of Rs 40 crore.

The chronic losers are many, as a parallel report prepared recently by the State Bureau of Public Enterprises shows. The Transformers and Electricals Kerala Limited, which manufactures heavy electrical equipment, suffered a loss of Rs 6.43 crore in 1984-85. Its accumulated losses thus rose to nearly Rs 19 crore, against the paid-up capital of Rs 5 crore. Kerala Ceramics has lost Rs 7.06 crore, more than three times the share capital of Rs 1.9 crore. And the Kerala State Detergents and Chemicals has lost almost exactly double its share capital of Rs 1.35 crore. Many of the chronic losers have failed to repay government loans, some have even defaulted on the payment of interest.

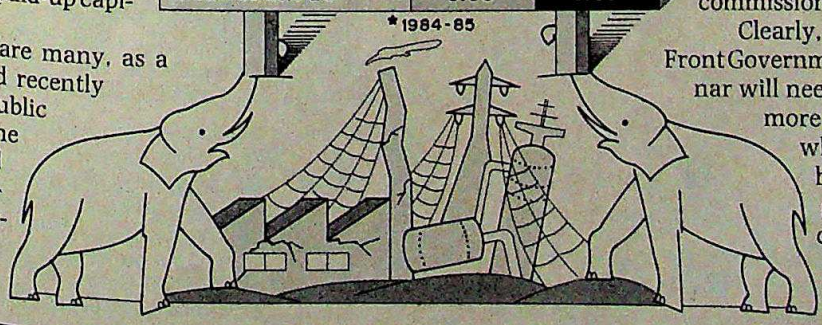
The losses in any given year are sometimes equal to or bigger than the company's total income. Thus, Kerala Garments earned Rs 11.31 lakh in 1983-84 but lost Rs 10.30 lakh. Worse still, the Metropolitan Engineering Company lost Rs 39.90 lakh in 1982 on a total income of Rs 20.03 lakh. On a slightly more modest scale, Keltron Crystals lost Rs 20 lakh in 1984-85, on a total turnover of Rs 65 lakh.

Some of the bigger corporations are in a seemingly irremediable mess. The State Road Transport Corporation, for instance, has a total loss of Rs 112 crore up to March 1984. Altogether, the state has invested Rs 187 crore in the public sector up to the end of 1984-85. Says P.K. Gopalakrishnan, member of the state Planning Board: "The performance of the public sector in Kerala has been disastrous. This explains to a large extent the low productivity, high cost, non-competitive syndrome in the Kerala economy."

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

THE CHRONIC LOSERS*	PAID-UP CAPITAL (Rs crore)	ACCUMULATED LOSS (Rs crore)
Keltron Counters Ltd	2.03	2.93
Keltron Power Devices Ltd	1.67	3.24
The Kerala Ceramics Ltd	1.90	7.06
Kerala Soaps & Oils Ltd	1.85	5.03
Kerala State Detergents & Chemicals Ltd	1.35	2.70
Trivandrum Spinning Mills Ltd	1.85	3.02
Transformers & Electricals Kerala Ltd	5.09	18.88
Keltron Rectifiers Ltd	1.42	2.28
Oil Palm India Ltd	5.09	2.39
Kerala Automobiles Ltd	2.45	0.59
United Electrical Industries Ltd	1.36	1.50
Keltron Crystals Ltd	0.87	0.35
Keltron Electro Ceramics Ltd	0.80	1.36
Travancore Sugars & Chemicals Ltd	0.51	0.04
Keltron Resistors Ltd	0.53	0.83

*1984-85



The CAG report is replete with examples of gross under-utilisation of capacity, lack of inventory control, use of outmoded technology, scant regard for quality control, wasteful expenditure, the absence of organised marketing effort and a host of other deficiencies. Adds Gopalakrishnan: "These companies manufacture items from soap to computers, which can yield substantial profits provided they are managed by professionals instead of fly-by-night operators."

The Government periodically vows to set things right but has done nothing. And perhaps the biggest problem is the tendency to appoint politicians as heads of corporations. As many as 32 corporations are headed by politicians, many of them members of the state Assembly. In one such example, Ravi Kumar, a Congress(I) worker, was made chairman of Meat Products of India Ltd when K. Karunakaran was the chief minister. But Kumar had to resign when serious corruption charges were levelled against him. Another troublesome Congress(I) politician, K.K. Ponnappan, was made the chairman of Foam Matting India Ltd, which manufactures foam-backed coir matting. Ponnappan undertook a round-the-world trip at company expense, and he was beaten up by the company workers who alleged that he was indulging in corrupt practices. The company has been under a lock-out for the past two years.

Even where politicians do not head the corporations, they conspire to cast their malevolent shadow on them. Alleged a young IAS officer, who was removed from a government company recently: "The Kerala Congress threw me out because some members of the board of directors in my company were members of that party and wanted to make money in commissions."

Clearly, the new Left Democratic Front Government headed by E.K. Nayanar will need to come up with much more than mere false promises, which are all that have been heard in the past, if they plan to salvage the state's chronically afflicted public sector units.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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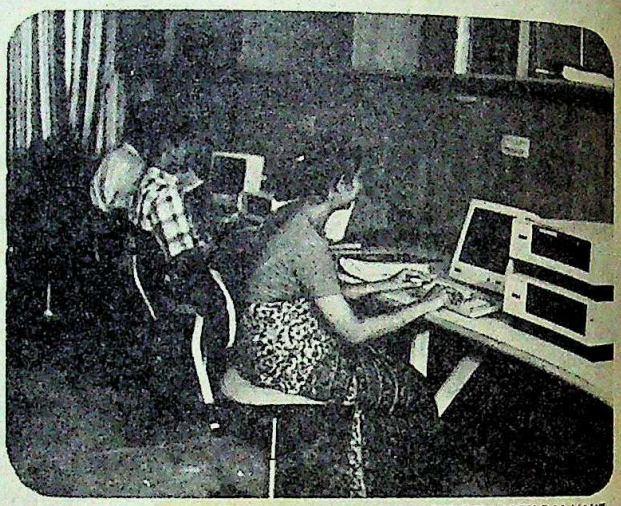
FOR ENTREPRENEURS ON THE GO IT'S MEPZ ALL THE WAY!

ZONE ENTRANCE



PRODUCTION UNIT

What's MEPZ

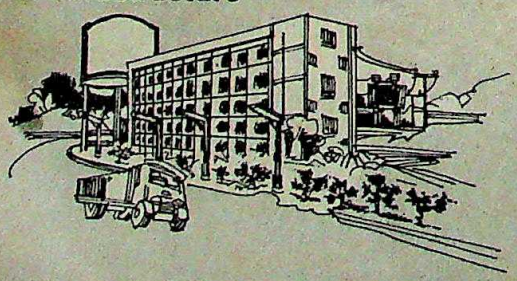
MEPZ -- Madras Export Processing Zone - has been set up by Govt. of India under the Ministry of Commerce. It is manned by people with versatile and flexible approach. The Development Commissioner is in overall charge. MEPZ is located in Madras on the National Highway 45 - just 8 km. from the airport and 24 kms. from Madras harbour.

What's at MEPZ ... Look out for a package of incentives

The Govt. of India and the Govt. of Tamilnadu offer an attractive package of incentives to industrialists in the Zone.

* Tax holiday for five years * Import of capital goods, raw materials etc. - no customs duty and import licence * Capital goods raw materials etc. from rest of the country exempted from central excise duty and sales tax * Foreign investment - 100% equity allowed, full and free repatriation of profits too! * Liberal sanction of foreign exchange * Priority release of cement, steel etc. * 50% subsidy for feasibility study * 10% subsidy on fixed assets for selected categories of industry * Concessional power tariff for the first five years * Special concession for SC & ST entrepreneurs * Seed capital for new technocrats.

Total Infrastructure



Facilities offered - developed plots and built up areas, power, water, manpower and finance to suit individual needs. Transport and telecommunications readily available. A warehouse of 3,000 tons capacity has been set up by MEPZ. A modern township with social amenities is being developed near the Zone.

Streamlined and speedy action took us this far

In just three years, MEPZ has come to be known for fast action. Infrastructural facilities, including 48 built up units of 500 sq. metres each,have been completed. AN EXCLUSIVE GEM AND GOLD JEWELLERY COMPLEX HAS BEEN SET UP. Out of 199 applications received, 104 have already been approved. Exports to the value of Rs.10.59 crores have been made during the past one year. Single window clearance of proposals and prompt follow-up action has made MEPZ a success story already.

In the near future ...

MEPZ is being developed in two phases. After completion, about 350 industrial units are expected to function in the Zone. Employment opportunity for over 70,000 persons.

It's Red Carpet at MEPZ!

MEPZ invites entrepreneurs to come and set up units in the Zone and reap rich benefits. Special concessions await NRIs. Step into the Zone and it's smooth sailing all the way.

MEPZ

Please get in touch with:
Development Commissioner,
Madras Export Processing Zone,
Govt. of India (Ministry of Commerce),
"Rosy Tower", Second Floor,
7, Nungambakkam High Road,
Madras - 600 034.
Phone: 470489 Telex: 41-6945 MEPZ IN

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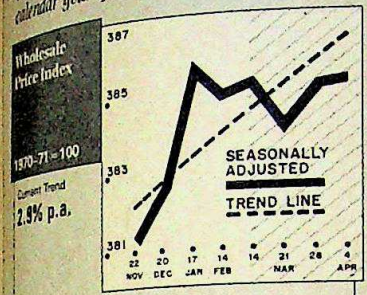
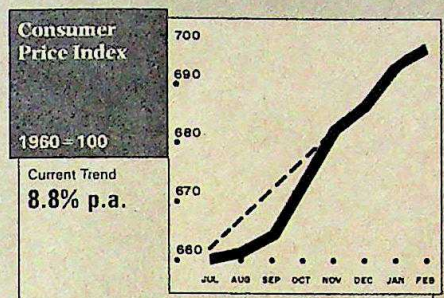
IN SPITE of almost unprecedented growth in money supply, inflation seems to be under control. The situation is improving on the foreign trade front. The large increase in commercial bank credit to the government sector may make it difficult for commercial banks to meet the genuine needs of private industry.

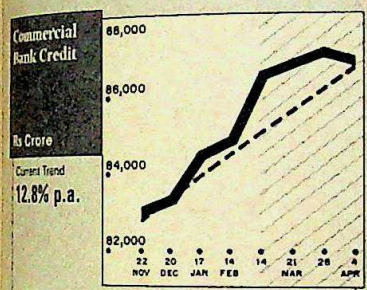
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months (weekly data) or two years (monthly data) figures. The quarters referred to in the text are calendar year quarters.



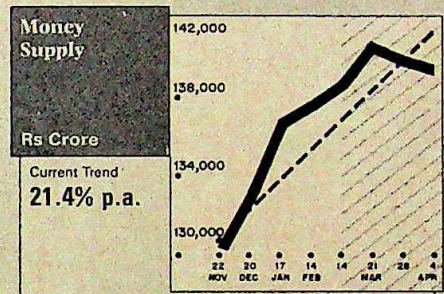
In spite of the cost-push factors engineered by the tax-hikes of the recent budget, there has been a significant deceleration in wholesale prices.



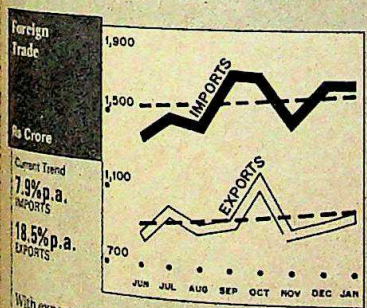
Consumer Prices lag behind wholesale prices. The 8.8 per cent CPI growth rate is a reflection of the WPI growth from July to November '86.



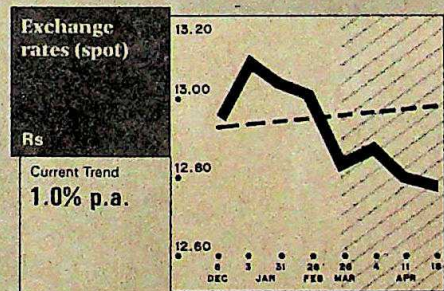
Government borrowing from banks has led to an increase in money supply. Bank credit to the private sector is growing at 12.8 per cent.



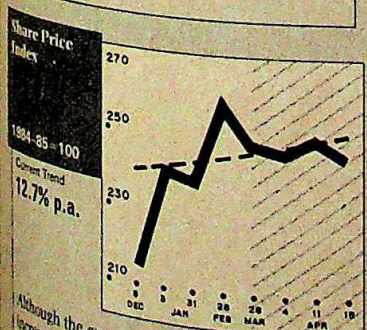
The recent marginal fall in the rate of growth of money supply has been temporary. Current trends indicate a growth of over 21 per cent.



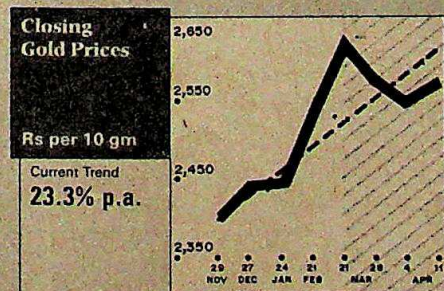
With exports growing at a healthy 18.5 per cent and imports at 7.9 per cent, the trade deficit may be brought under control.



The steady appreciation of the rupee which began in January continues; the exchange rate is stabilising at about Rs 12.8 per US dollar.



Although the current trend shows a moderate increase of 12.7 per cent, the stock-markets have seen pretty gone up for the past two months.



Gold prices have increased sharply in recent months. With the festival season near, the trend is likely to continue unabated for some time.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items in March 1987

	% Growth
Formulations	1178.91
Butter	25.81
Aluminium	16.28
Fish	15.5
Bananas	12.69
Oranges	10.42
Biscuits	10.37
Art Silk & Artificial Yarn	9.79
Chillies	8.44
Cotton Raw	7.09
Linseed	5.76
Rubber	5.51
Groundnut Oilcake	4.99
Coconut Oil	4.63
Onions	4.26
Arhar	4.21
Eggs	3.95
Copra	3.86
Masoor	3.47
Pet Crude & Natural Gas	3.1
Moong	3.02
Linseed Oil	2.62
Mustard Oil	2.58
Vanaspati	2.58
Nylon/Terene & Mixed Cloth	2.17
Wheat	1.94
Phosphatic Fertiliser	1.77
Milk	1.66
Gingelly Oil	1.43
Soda Ash	1.39
Jowar	1.38
Logs Timber Bamboo	1.15
Cotton Seed	1.11
Cotton Yarn	1.02
Ghee	1.0
Polythene Moulding	.98
Nitrogenous Fertilisers	.97
Urad	.82
PVC Compounds	.72
Limestone	.69
Industrial Instruments	.68
Power-Driven Pumps	.68
Pesticides & Insecticides	.68
Atta	.68
Rice	.61
Country Liquor	.58
Electrical Motors	.53

Of the 139 series considered, 67 of them with a total weight of 45.46 had a positive growth and 72 of them with a total weight of 41.15 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1987	1986
Coal		
Thousand Tonnes, March	19,622	18,679
Saleable Steel		
Thousand Tonnes, March	958.3	918.0
Cement		
Thousand Tonnes, March	3,580	3,280
Petroleum Crudes		
Thousand Tonnes, March	2,636	2,894
Petroleum Refinery Products		
Thousand Tonnes, March	4,367	4,085

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It's what makes a trip to Kathmandu one thing. And the Soaltee Surprise quite another.

Soaltee Oberoi

For further details contact SITA, Mercury, Oberoi Hotels or a bonafide travel agent.

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THE MARKETS

Bear Hug

THE share markets don't like political uncertainty, and the precipitous crash of equity values last fortnight, underlined this emphatically. Though the markets had recovered somewhat last fortnight, after weeks of gloom and bear hammering, this phase was short-lived. Many traders shuddered at the prospect of what might happen on the market, if the continuing ban on short selling is removed.

Despite this artificial prop being available, *The Economic Times* share index plunged from 247.5, at the start of April, to as low as 236.9 three weeks later. This, compared with the pre-budget peak of 265 less than two months ago, and the drop of close to 12 per cent in such a short period, left little doubt about the fact that the bulls are no match for the bears just now.

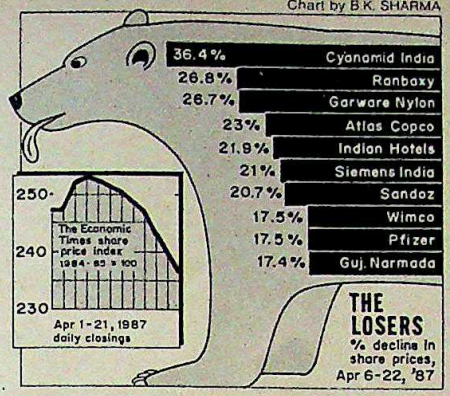
Virtually every scrip lost ground. Perhaps as a response to the news about the pharmaceutical industry having received a set-back in the courts over a price dispute with the Government, several drug shares lost substantial ground—including Ranbaxy and Sandoz. So did companies representing a wide cross-section of industry like Garware Nylon, Atlas Copco, Indian Hotels and Siemens. Escorts, which has announced relatively poor results for 1986, slid to Rs 47.25, well below the year's high of Rs 84. Both the Tata giants also lost ground. Several scrips were at or very close to their lowest points in the year.

Reliance—which is still to announce its results for 1986—dropped to an uncharacteristically modest Rs 176 before the slide was finally halted and a recovery began. But with the Government seemingly eager to prove that it will pursue charges against the company, the future must have several question marks hanging over it.

The mild recovery, late last fortnight, may not indicate that confidence has returned to the market, because this requires political stability. The Government must demonstrate that it has weathered the storm of scandals and controlled the dissension within its ranks. The new rhetoric of socialism and drum-beating about the evil designs of multinationals could not have sounded like a happy tune either.

The big question was whether the momentary recovery late last fortnight amounted to being more than an adjustment hiccup, or whether the market would soon resume its downward swing. Certainly, fresh buyers will become willing to invest at lower price levels, the ban on shortselling should provide encouragement to the bulls to try and have their way for a change, and the economy is not in such poor shape that the market must collapse. Also, what goes down must eventually move up again. But as always, the key issue is, when?

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



ACTIVE STOCKS

	1987 HIGH	1987 LOW	CLOSE 22.4.87	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	35.50	28.00	29.00	3.00 –
Associated Cement	241.50	172.00	172.00	24.00 –
Atlas Copco	150.00	112.00	114.00	34.00 –
Asian Paints	272.50	207.50	247.50	3.50 +
Avery India	169.00	150.00	151.00	8.00 –
Bajaj Auto	4925.00	3950.00	4550.00	200.00 –
Baroda Rayon	250.00	205.00	230.00	6.25 +
Bata India	160.00	122.50	124.75	18.25 –
Bayer	785.00	600.00	747.50	22.50 –
Bharat Forge	75.00	66.00	67.00	7.00 –
Birla Jute	50.75	45.50	46.50	1.50 –
Blow Plast	126.00	92.50	111.00	9.00 –
Bombay Dyeing	75.00	40.50	64.50	4.00 –
Brooke Bond	101.00	77.00	89.50	10.00 –
Ceat Tyres	70.00	48.00	62.50	2.50 +
Century Spinning	810.00	665.00	675.00	40.00 –
Chloride India	148.00	83.00	84.50	11.50 –
Colgate	391.25	327.50	381.00	8.50 +
Eskayef	247.50	171.25	223.75	11.25 –
DCM	39.00	25.00	25.25	2.75 –
Dunlop	77.75	71.25	72.75	1.25 –
Elecon	107.50	86.25	91.25	6.25 –
E.I. Hotels	56.00	42.00	43.00	1.40 –
Escorts	84.00	46.50	47.25	4.75 –
Finolex Cables	182.50	114.00	165.00	5.00 +
Food Specialities	188.50	158.50	159.00	12.00 –
Garware Polyester	97.00	69.50	72.00	9.00 –
G.E. Shipping	22.50	16.00	17.00	0.50 –
Gujarat St. Fertilisers	183.50	120.00	132.00	11.00 –
Gwalia Ind.	95.00	80.00	88.00	1.00 +
Hind. Aluminium	126.00	71.00	104.00	10.00 –
Hind. Cocoa	262.50	223.75	227.50	14.50 –
Hindustan Lever	212.00	165.00	192.50	14.50 –
Hindustan Motors	35.35	22.70	24.00	3.10 –
Hind. Dorr	407.50	295.00	390.00	5.00 +
IEL	61.50	45.00	46.50	5.00 –
Indian Organic	78.00	58.00	58.50	6.50 –
Indian Rayon	76.50	55.00	58.00	3.00 –
Indrol	510.00	252.50	255.00	27.50 –
Ingersoll-Rand	345.00	272.50	340.00	nil
ITC	78.00	41.00	41.50	7.50 –
J.K. Synthetics	93.50	56.50	58.00	12.00 –
Kinetic Engineering	312.50	225.00	250.00	5.00 –
Kirloskar Cummins	95.00	67.00	90.00	2.50 +
KSB Pumps	375.00	220.00	367.50	12.50 +
Larsen & Toubro	100.00	70.00	72.00	7.00 –
Lipton	79.50	60.00	70.50	8.00 –
Lohia Machines	32.00	14.00	15.00	8.00 –
Madura Coats	73.00	66.00	71.00	1.00 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	47.50	38.00	43.50	2.50 –
Motor Industries	400.00	342.50	350.00	15.00 –
National Organic	577.50	465.00	472.50	40.00 –
Nirlon	26.00	15.00	15.50	0.50 –
Orkay Silk Mills	115.00	70.00	70.00	7.00 –
Pelco Electronics	57.25	36.00	37.50	2.25 –
Otis Elevator	202.00	155.00	199.00	nil
Ponds	375.00	320.00	320.00	45.00 –
Premier Auto	30.00	21.00	25.50	2.75 –
Ranbaxy	135.00	90.00	90.00	33.00 –
Raymond	79.00	67.00	68.00	4.00 –
Reckitt & Colman	200.00	162.00	167.00	8.00 –
Reliance Industries	277.00	170.00	180.00	25.00 –
Shriram Fibres	36.00	25.50	25.50	0.50 –
Sandoz	140.00	80.00	81.25	21.25 –
SPIC	53.50	36.50	41.00	0.50 –
Tata Steel	1207.50	982.50	1017.50	42.50 –
Telco	665.00	550.00	570.00	15.00 –
Vulcan Laval	57.50	45.00	50.00	2.50 –
Siemens India	144.50	72.00	75.00	20.00 –
Mukand Iron	80.50	63.50	73.50	3.00 –

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.1316	9.0261
Austria	Schilling	100	100.7247	96.0000
Bahrain	Dinar	1	33.9832	33.9083
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.5230	42.3920
Canada	Dollar	1	9.6952	9.5988
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.8771	1.8587
Egypt	Pound	1	9.5326	9.4977
France	Franc	1	2.1344	2.1299
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6524	1.6364
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0783	0.0699
Iran	Rial	100	18.1032	18.0181
Italy	Lira	100	0.9900	0.9800
Japan	Yen	100	9.15	9.00
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.8096	0.8000
Kuwait	Dinar	1	47.2332	47.1817
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1991	5.1436
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.9998	0.9776
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.5860	0.5660
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.2655	6.2064
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7530	0.7499
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.0339	5.9729
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1008	0.0999
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4500	0.4490
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.0358	2.0156
Switzerland	Franc	1	8.6069	8.5231
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.2350	0.2298
Thailand	Baht	100	50.6000	50.4023
UK	Pound	1	20.9709	20.8008
USA	Dollar	1	12.8700	12.7625
UAE	Dirham	1	3.5099	3.4932
USSR	Rouble	1	20.2098	20.1186
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.0871	7.0372

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 23.4.87.

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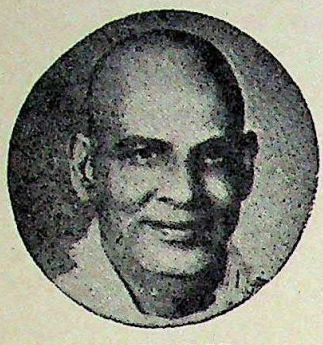
Books On Yoga, Philosophy And Religion.



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TO the rest of the country, he represents the very best there is in the Indian Police Service. His integrity is unquestioned, his devotion to duty unchallengeable and his courage, in the face of impossible odds, legendary. Yet, Punjab's tough-talking and even tougher-acting Director-General of Police, Julio Francis Ribeiro, will leave a controversial trail behind him when he lays down office next month (May 31) after a long and laudable innings as India's most celebrated policeman.

Though Punjab's chief minister and home minister have officially asked him to stay on and complete what he considers "an unfinished task", arrayed against Ribeiro is a virtual army of politicians and bureaucrats, armed with their own kind of ammunition, and ready to gun him down for their own various reasons.

Some of his greatest detractors sit, two floors above him in the Punjab Secretariat, in Barnala's Cabinet. Says Prem Singh Chandumajara, minister of cooperation: "Terrorism has increased since Ribeiro came here. His attitude is the same as that of the police during the days of the British raj. He attacks us even when we try to get innocent people released." The chief Akali grouse: Ribeiro does not let politicians shift cops to the places they want—"which as elected representatives we are entitled to"—and, more serious, of indulging in fake encounters.

Surprisingly, criticism of Ribeiro is not restricted to Akali politicians alone. A senior Congress(I) leader in Chandigarh feels: "He is already more powerful than any other police chief in the country, and if he gets any more powers, then we will be living in a police state. And although the Hindus love him, the Sikhs hate him."

But if Ribeiro has critics in the state, he also has supporters. His biggest admirers are the men in the force. When he came to the state in March last year, the Punjab police was highly demoralised, out-gunned and outmanoeuvred by the terrorists. The people in general had lost faith in the ability of the Punjab police to protect them from the terrorist bullet. But Ribeiro, almost single-handedly, turned the tide of affairs with his celebrated policy of "bullet-for-bullet". And today, although the terrorists are still able to kill with impunity, Ribeiro has managed to instil some confidence in the force and, more important, given the terrorists enough cause to worry.

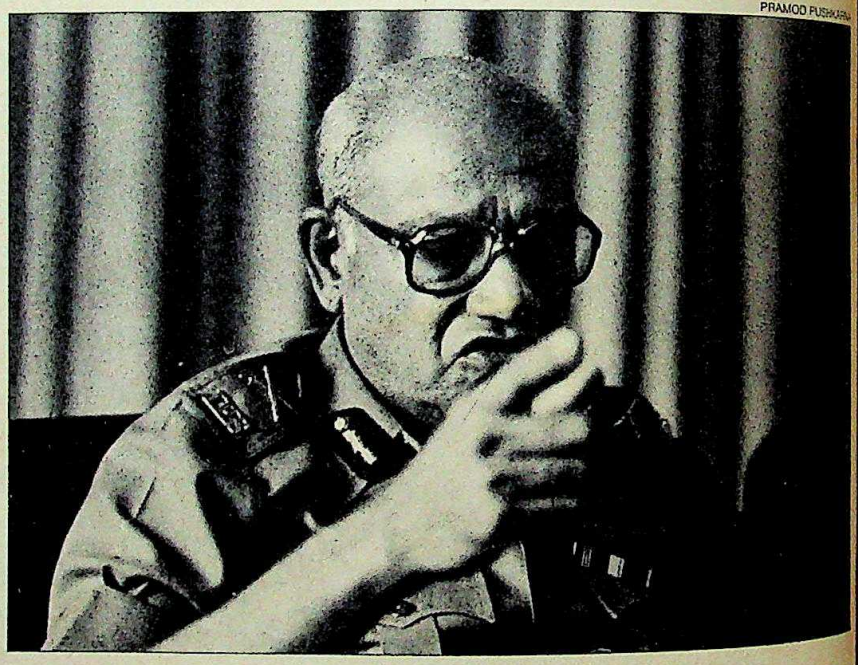
But torn by political irritants, the ceaseless criticism of his honest efforts to fight a war which has no ground rules and the constant moves to check his powers, the battle-weary policeman now wants to retire. Ribeiro spoke to TAVLEEN SINGH *last fortnight. Excerpts:*

Q. *When will you be retiring?*

A. On May 31, I'll reach that magical age in government service—58 years.

Q. *Will you stay on if you get an extension?*

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



A. Barnala has asked me to and so has the home minister. I have told them that I would not like to continue and I've given them the reasons. I just don't think there's any chance of success.

Q. *Why do you say that?*

A. Look, this is like a war we are fighting, it is an abnormal situation. In a normal situation, duality of control is all-right, but in an abnormal situation like this, I should have the powers of an army chief where he posts his colonels and sends whichever battalions he likes to whichever area of operation he wants. Well, I don't have that control.

Q. *By dual control you mean between you and the politicians?*

A. Yes. If I say that Mr A should be at such and such a place, they are able to say no if they don't like it or if their followers don't like it. So even if I feel that someone is the best man (for a particular job), there are other compulsions. So how do I fight this war?

Q. *Has this been happening every time you make an appointment?*

A. Well, there are always questions like why do you want him and why not someone else. I resist to a great extent but they have the right to overrule me. This sort of thing happens in government but I think, in today's context, this does not produce results because officers in the field get two messages. Suppose they get a message from me and also from the politician who has brought them there, then they would like to play it safe.

Q. *Could you give any instances where you have been so overruled?*

A. I would not like to mention names.

Q. *But would you say that there have been important instances where you have been overruled?*

A. Yes.

Q. *This was done by the chief minister?*

A. Well, it may not necessarily be him, who is interested—there could be pressures on him. I'll give you an example. There is a certain sub division which today is one of my worst sub divisions: the officer there was only drinking and collecting money. So I got him shifted. But the (local) jathedar said who are you to move anyone shifted without asking me. And the thing was cancelled straight away. Now look at my position—the local jathedar is seen to be more important than the director-general of police.

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Q. If they said to you that you would be given total charge would you stay on?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you feel when you look back that it has been an unfinished task?

A. Oh yes. In fact we are still fighting, we are in the thick of battle.

Q. When you look back on this one year, do you see it as a success or failure?

A. Neither. It's not a success because the terrorists are still capable of killing and dictating terms to the public and creating terror. It's not a failure because we have got up and fought against them. We are still fighting. And what is more, the terrorists are as bothered about us as we are about them. If they were not bothered about us then I would think that it was a total failure.

Q. Why did the number of people killed by terrorists go up last year compared to 1985?

A. Terrorist killings really began after they took charge of the Golden Temple on January 26 last year. By that time the Bains Committee had already released most of these criminals; some of them were big, some small. Everybody joined the movement once they got into the Golden Temple. Then, there was the euphoria of the return to popular rule so they had all the time in the world to organise themselves. And on March 28, they carried out a mass killing at the Daresi Ground (Ludhiana)—the day I was brought here. After that they continued to kill. I will not accept that because I came here killings have increased. But if the criticism is that if to the extent that I joined hands with them there would be more killings, then I want to know what is the other way of doing it?

Q. There is a view, based on the experience of other countries, that the police option never really works.

A. No terrorism can be fought unless you win the hearts and minds of the people. Much more important than police action is propaganda, which is not being done. For example, see what is happening today. The terrorists have decided to kill people who smoke, drink, wear saris, shave or cut their hair. Can't a massive propaganda drive be launched asking people like to stay in a state like this? If a duly elected government had passed a law like this people would have thrown out that government. And here are these people who are able to do this because the minds and hearts of the general people have not been won. And when I say people, I mean the Sikhs. They have to come to our side. They must know that what these people are doing is wrong, that it is to be condemned. And once they understand that, I am quite sure we will win. Otherwise we can only go on fighting.

Q. What about fake encounters. Even if innocents are not killed, terrorists like Kamaljit Kamba or Durga Singh have been killed in fake encounters. Could they not have been arrested, tried and hanged?

A. (laughs) Who is going to hang them?

Q. Don't we have a judicial system?

A. I think you needn't ask me this question. Not a single person is going to be convicted, not one. They have created so much terror that not one witness will come forward. Not one police officer is willing to question them. Not one prosecutor is willing to prosecute them. I won't go further than that because I'll be charged with contempt. But look, if they are going to pull guns on us we are going to kill them first. We are not going to be killed. This is our stand. Why are people so sympathetic to the killers and not to the victims? I really want to know this?

> **"No terrorism can be fought unless you win the hearts and minds of the people. And when I say people I mean Sikhs. They have to come to our side. They must know that what these people (terrorists) are doing is wrong. Otherwise we can only go on fighting."**

Q. There is the fear that if the police continue to do this, the situation could go out of hand as it happened in Argentina.

A. I don't know. I don't think anything like that is going to happen here. I can guarantee you that.

Q. So you feel that in certain situations the police is forced to kill a man whom they know to be a terrorist?

A. If somebody pulls a gun on us, we are going to kill him first. We are not going to allow any more of our men to be killed. Seventy of my men have already been killed.

Q. So, in your opinion no innocent man has been killed by the police in an encounter?

A. No. But their (the terrorists') definition of innocent is quite different. They believe that if you kill for the panth then you are innocent. That cannot be accepted in a civilised society.

Q. In terms of numbers how many people are you up against now?

A. Hard-core, about 90 people. Mostly Khalistan Commando Force, Khalistan Liberation Force or Babbar Khalsa.

Q. Is the pressure on the police—the fact that so many members of policemen's families have been killed—led to any bitterness among your men?

A. I must say they have taken it very calmly. They know the dimensions of the problem. It certainly has not caused the type of reaction that people may have expected. They have not gone around killing the children of terrorists or their brothers and sisters.

Q. How many police officers have lost their relatives?

A. My IG (PAP), Mangat, lost his son, who was a surgeon. My SP, Amritsar also had his son killed. Then, my DSP at Ludhiana, Rajkumar Bedi, lost his son. Recently one of my head constables, Mohinder Singh, his 70-year-old father and his three brothers were shot.

Q. What about you? Are you ever afraid that you could be killed once you retire?

A. No, I don't bother. I don't give it a second thought. After all, you do your duty. You have to go some time or the other, so why bother.

Q. How much does the involvement of politicians with terrorists hamper your work?

A. What does hamper it is that at the field-level my SHOs and SPs are very often contacted by politicians and they are influenced by these requests as they are worried about their own future.

Q. What about the charge that the Punjab police has been heavily infiltrated by the terrorists?

A. This is just not true...it is Goebbelsian-type propaganda to say this and extremely unfair because most of the Punjab police is Sikh. It is true that a few men were involved and they have already been caught and thrown out.

Q. Now that you have been here for a year do you have any ideas of a solution to the Punjab problem?

A. Yes. If you win the hearts and minds of the people, they (the terrorists) will have to go. They will no longer have a base.

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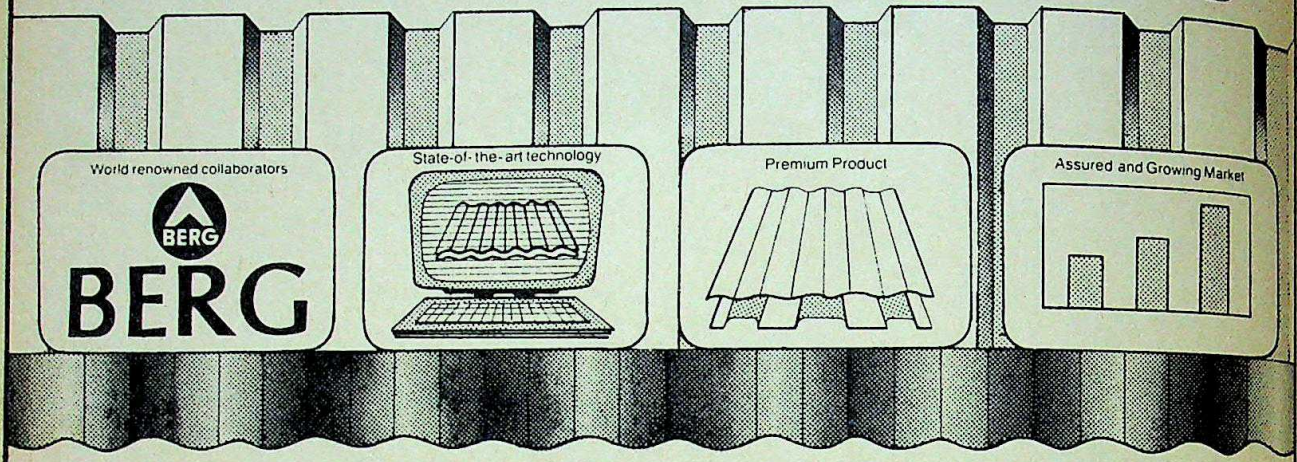
Cost Efficient Galvanised Sheet Technology



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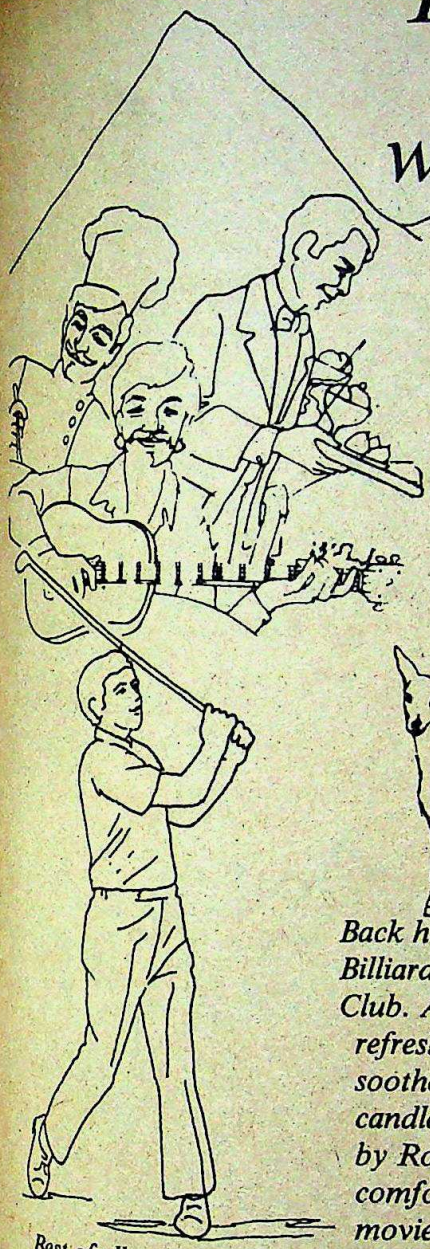

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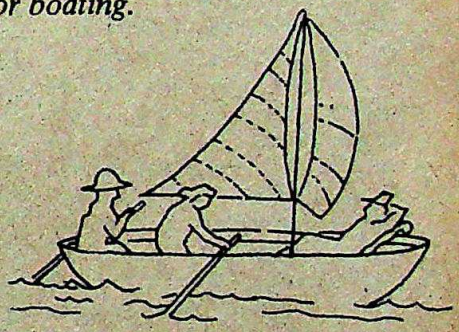

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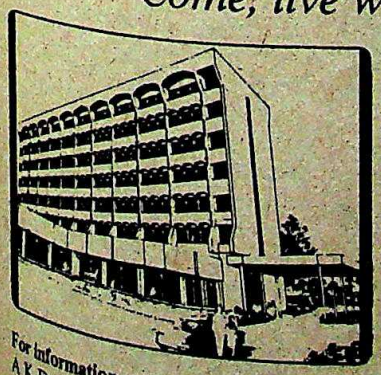

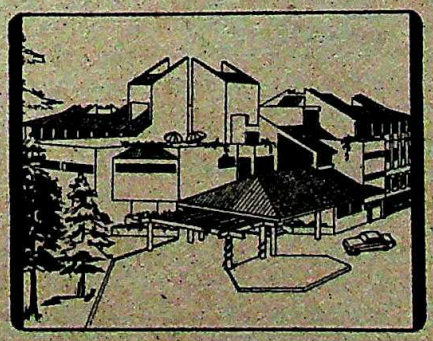

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SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS

Escalating Tension

China's intrusion in the Sumdorong Chu Valley, its protests over the grant of statehood to Arunachal Pradesh...and the hardening of its stance on the border issue, cast strains on the bilateral relationship.

—Annual Report 1986-87, Ministry of Defence.

THE strains were stretched taut as a bow-string last fortnight as a sudden snap caused the Sino-Indian relationship barometer to register an abrupt and alarming increase. The element of *deja vu* was unavoidable. Barely three months ago, India had teetered on the edge of an armed conflict with one of its neighbours over the army's Operation Brasstacks. And now, another exercise—Operation Chequer Board—involving the army's Eastern Command—had exhumed the spectre of a potential conflict with another and far more belligerent neighbour. Playing Chinese chequers with Beijing is a vastly different war game compared to India's Islamabad opponent.

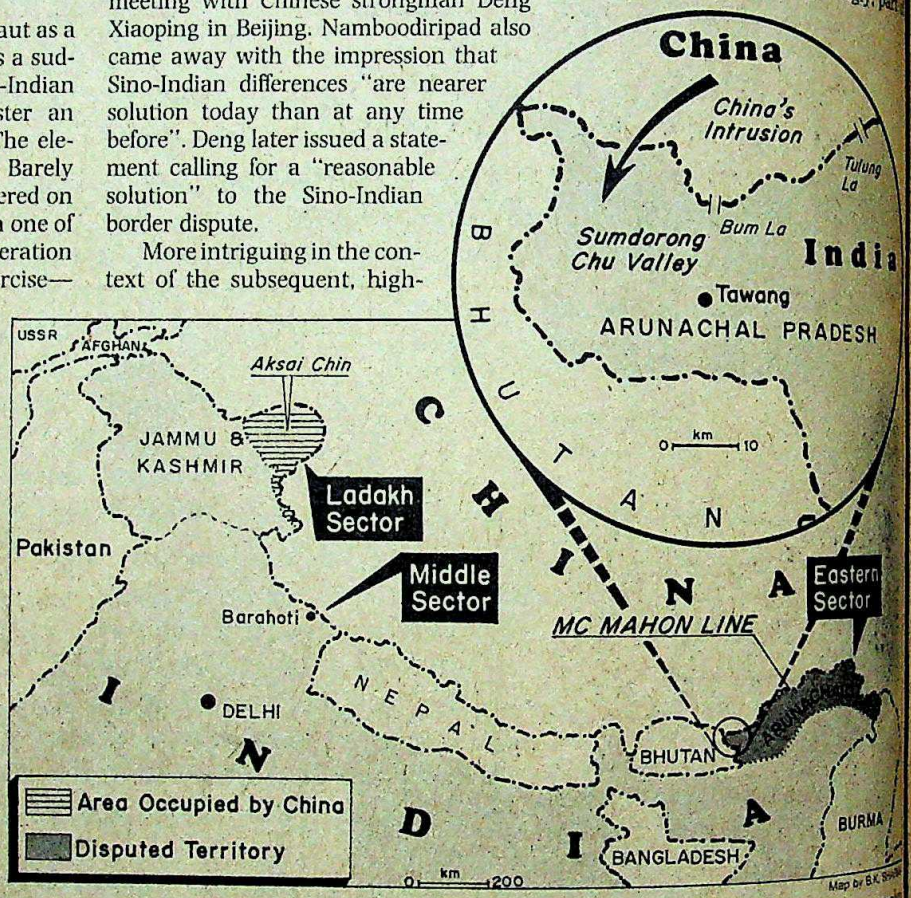
That Beijing was bent on turning the screws on the Indian Government has been evident for some time now. Several senior US government officials who visited New Delhi in the past few months have brought the same message—China, annoyed with what it sees as Indian intransigence on the border issue, is determined "to teach India a lesson". Last fortnight, Beijing decided to speak for itself. A Chinese foreign office spokesman accused India of massing troops along the border, violating Chinese air space, repeatedly crossing the line of actual control and "nibbling at Chinese territory".

The sudden verbal offensive was as intriguing as a Chinese puzzle. Just four days earlier, an official Indian delegation led by Defence Minister K.C. Pant had stopped overnight in Beijing on the way back from the North Korean capital of Pyongyang. The Chinese, understandably, played down the visit—the official banquet for Pant was hosted by Zhu Xun, the minister for geology and mineral resources. However, during the dinner conversation, the Chinese side gave no indication that they were apprehensive about Indian troop movements, nor did they complain about territorial violations. Instead, they repeated the refrain that the border dispute between the two countries should—and could—be settled soon. The same week, CPI(M) General Secretary E.M.S. Namboodiripad had a three-hour meeting with Chinese strongman Deng Xiaoping in Beijing. Namboodiripad also came away with the impression that Sino-Indian differences "are nearer solution today than at any time before". Deng later issued a statement calling for a "reasonable solution" to the Sino-Indian border dispute.

More intriguing in the context of the subsequent, high-pitched protest by Beijing, is the fact that it comes on the eve of the eighth round of border talks between the two countries. The talks will, for the first time, discuss a specific area of dispute—the eastern sector. South Block is well aware that no single issue in recent times has incensed Beijing as much as the granting of statehood to Arunachal Pradesh—a politi[illegible] move on the part of the Rajiv Governm[illegible] undertaken against the express adve[illegible] the Foreign Ministry. It is possible th[illegible] China's sudden outburst is part of a deep[illegible] diplomatic game intended to put Sou[illegible] Block on the defensive during the talks—[illegible] game in which the Americans play th[illegible] role of devil's advocate.

China-watchers in New Delhi as w[illegible] as former foreign secretary Romes[illegible] Bhandari who was, surprisingly, part [illegible] the official K.C. Pant delegation, are al[illegible] convinced that Beijing's game plan is [illegible] pressure New Delhi at a time when [illegible] series of political crises has weakened the [illegible] Rajiv Gandhi Government and ensnare[illegible] it in domestic issues.

Already, the Indian Government [illegible] worried about the neutralising effect th[illegible] current Sino-Soviet rapprochem[illegible] would have on Soviet support in the eve[illegible] of a border clash with China. Moscow ha[illegible] made it clear to New Delhi that its efforts [illegible] improve relations with China are a k[illegible] element in Mikhail Gorbachev's interna[illegible] tional diplomatic offensive and have [illegible] highest priority. "We are aware of th[illegible] problems of provoking Beijing but [illegible] think the entire issue has been somewh[illegible] overplayed. We don't want to get int[illegible]



Pant (left) and Namboodiripad

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tangle with the Chinese and we are sure that they don't want to either," says a senior official in South Block.

But in diplomatic terms, the two sides are already entwined in a tangle resembling a dish of mixed chow mein. Diplomatic and defence sources confirm that there has been an unusual movement of troops on both sides of the border. The Defence Ministry's annual report states that "the Chinese intrusion (into the Sumdorong Chu valley) has forced us to take appropriate defence measures along the Indo-China border". Those measures have been further reinforced by Operation Chequer Board which has added four more divisions and five front-line fighter squadrons from the western sector to the Sino-Indian border, apart from occasional sorties by Indian Air Force Mig-25 surveillance aircraft along the border.

An intelligence brief in the Hong Kong-based *Far Eastern Economic Review*, whose reports on China are more accurate than most, states: "Recent months have seen a sharp rise in military movements along the all-weather road linking Lhasa with Golmud in China's Gansu province. This suggests a stockpiling of supplies thought to include fuel, spares, weapons and ammunition. The sabre-rattling follows New Delhi's granting of full statehood last December to Arunachal Pradesh."

Viewed objectively, the Chinese moves were somewhat predictable. Beijing has always indulged in a carrot-and-stick policy in its dealings with New Delhi ever since the border talks started. Chinese troop movements, the indirect messages about "teaching India a lesson", their forceful reiteration of their claim to the entire area covering Arunachal Pradesh and their intrusion into the Sumdorong Chu Valley has been tempered by the official line that Beijing is as keen on a negotiated settlement of the border as New Delhi. This time, the difference is that Beijing has taken the Arunachal statehood issue as a major affront and is making it clear to New Delhi that it cannot be taken lightly. Beijing has also asserted that there can be no settlement of the border issue unless India is prepared to make territorial concessions. The unspoken message is that the territorial concessions must be in the eastern sector.

In that context, India's moves to reinforce its troops on the border seem a preventive measure. "We are not preparing for a war or trying to provoke one," says a senior army officer in Army Headquarters. "But we are in a much greater state of readiness than we have ever been before." Army sources say that they believe the Chinese will try to occupy additional territory, largely uninhabited wasteland like Sumdorong Chu, once the snows melt next month and the Indian Army's effort to close up on the border is to prevent that.

But that is a provocative situation. Operation Chequer Board was planned as an extension of Operation Brasstacks and is part of General K. Sundarji's strategy to test the preparedness of the army and mobility in the western and eastern sectors. The moving of air force squadrons, army sources say, is part of that exercise. But with border tensions having escalated, it is possible that Operation Chequer Board has been merged into the plan to reinforce the border.

The danger lies in the current over-confidence in Indian defence forces to handle any armed provocation from China. They are now infinitely better equipped in terms of weaponry, special high-altitude clothing and supply lines to forestall a repeat of 1962. The IAF has also total air superiority over the People's Air Force. In that situation, however, the fact that the chain of command and communication in the eastern border area is stretched fairly thin means that the slightest spark could trigger a conflict neither side wants.

Last week, there were indications that South Block has realised precisely that. Official sources say that the army has been told to retaliate only if they have no other choice, and that too only if the other side fires first. On the diplomatic front, in the course of the round of farewell parties for outgoing Chinese ambassador to New Delhi Li Lianqing, Beijing has been told that there is no need for further escalation of tensions and to wait for the Indian response to the Chinese package deal on the border issue offered some time ago. But at the same time, a diversion such as the bogey of an armed conflict with China would also suit the Rajiv Gandhi Government at this particular moment. The danger lies in the bogey boomeranging as it did along another border not so long ago.

—DILIP BOBB

The sudden belligerence in China's posture, experts feel, is aimed to pressure New Delhi at a time when a series of political crises has weakened the Rajiv Gandhi Government.

Indian post at Chinese border

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SRI LANKA

The New Offensive

INSENSATE violence once again ripped through Sri Lanka last fortnight claiming a high number of innocent lives. Besides setting back peace hopes, the violence also heightened the tension and mutual distrust between the island's two main ethnic communities—the Sinhalese and the Tamils—to new dangerous levels and seriously eroded the credibility of India as a mediator on the Sri Lankan question.

THE main Pettah Bus Terminus in the heart of Colombo city is a sea of humanity on any working day after office hours. And although there are Tamil traders and shopkeepers in the vicinity, most of the people normally waiting at the bus terminus to get home are likely to be Sinhalese. A majority of the buses from the terminus are bound for predominantly Sinhala areas like Negambo, Jayala, and Gampaha in the suburbs of the Sri Lankan capital.

As offices started giving over on the evening of Tuesday, April 21, the Pettah Bus Terminus was, as usual, swarming with people. Traffic was inching through. Packed buses were driving out for different destinations. Unobtrusively, amidst the chaos of all the hooting vehicles, four people drove into the area in a Ford Escort van and parked it between the imposing structures of the Bank of Ceylon and the Ceylon Transport Board. Like people on an urgent errand, they quickly got out of the van and busily walked away. It was 5 p.m.

Within minutes, Pettah came to resemble a mass funeral pyre. A powerful 75-kg bomb, which had been kept in the van and obviously timed, exploded. Charred, dismembered, and mutilated bodies lay strewn about everywhere, as in a battlefield. People, vehicles, handcarts, and shops went up in smoke in that blinding fury of fire.

The figures spoke of one of the worst tragedies of ethnic riot-torn Sri Lanka: 109 people, most of them innocent Sinhalese civilians were killed and 285 people were injured, again mostly Sinhalese. Colombo's suspicions immediately centred on the Eelam Revolutionary Organisers (EROS). EROS had claimed credit for the earlier bomb blasts in Colombo, the bomb in the Central Telegraph Office building in May last year and the blast in the Air Lanka plane around the same time, and it was EROS cadre members who were again nabbed in the aborted attempt to bomb the oil installation on the outskirts of Colombo early this year.

Photographs by SHYAM TEKWANI

A Colombo blast victim being laid to rest: gory tragedy

There had been provocation for Tamil militants to hit back at Colombo. In end-March, Sri Lankan Air Force planes had bombed the Jaffna General Hospital and killed 25 patients. Within a day, four fishing boats off the Jaffna coast were also fired at by the navy.

EROS, however, publicly denies responsibility for the blast. Says V. Balakumar, its convener in Madras: "We do not know who is responsible for the bomb blast. We have not done it." But added: "Why are you blaming us for killing innocent Sinhalese civilians, when the Sri Lankan Army, in the last few years, has killed nearly 20,000 innocent Tamil civilians?" Despite Balakumar's claims, however, the most liberal estimates place the Tamil civilians toll at 8,000.

Suspicion on the Tamil militants was strengthened by the fact that the bomb came close on the heels of the Good Friday massacre of 122 bus passengers on the Trincomalee-Habarana route. But in any event the incidents have effectively broken

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whatever fragile hopes there were of a possible settlement of the Sri Lankan Tamil ethnic problem. They gave a very convenient handle to Colombo to back out of the by now famous December 19, 1986, proposals (which envisaged the creation of a Tamil majority northern province and a Tamil majority eastern province by merging out two Sinhala electorates in Amparai district). Although Colombo has not said that it is rescinding, Prime Minister R. Premadasa sent reverberations through South Block last fortnight by telling the Sri Lankan Parliament in strongly-worded terms: "Any friend who asks us to find a political solution will be considered our biggest enemy. Let us safeguard the people and the country first." Premadasa, a Sinhalese hard-liner, said that if India had really expressed its profound grief and sorrow at the deaths of innocent civilians due to terrorist activities "should they not arrest these heartless brutes and murderers and hand them over to us?"

The Sri Lankan Minister for National Security, Lalith Athulathmudali, was, however, more diplomatic. In an interview with INDIA TODAY, he said: "We believe that the LTTE and EROS are intransigent. They are not prepared for talks. Efforts by India and the CS to persuade them to come to the negotiating table and reach a settlement have not succeeded. Not only that, these terrorist groups have now started a new broad-based offensive, killing innocent Sinhala civilians. Hence we have had to get into an active defensive situation."

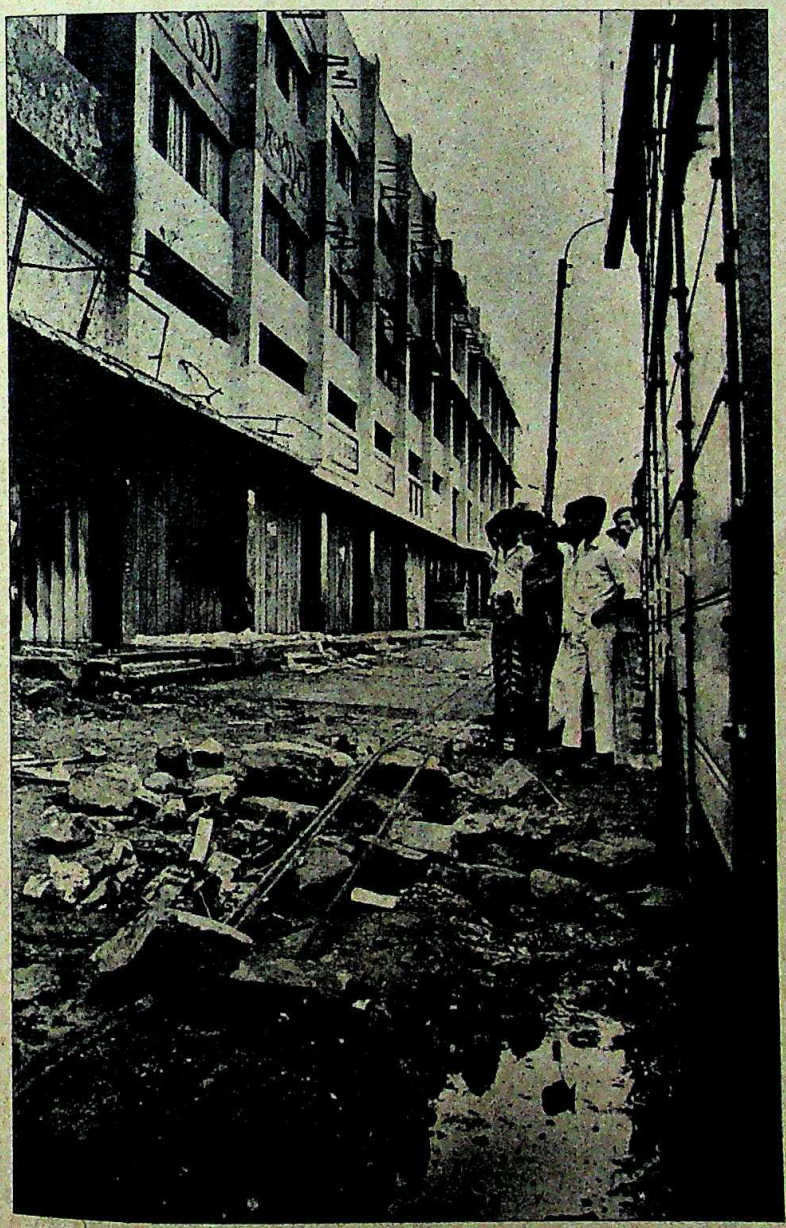
Colombo withdrew the 10-day unilateral "cessation of hostilities" it had declared on the eve of the Sinhala and Tamil new year's day celebrations. Sri Lankan Air Force planes and helicopters last fortnight also began to extensively bomb Jaffna peninsula. Athulathmudali claimed that the army was only bombing selective LTTE and EROS targets, that it was only their hideouts, ordnance factories, and arms stockpiles which were being attacked and that Tamil civilians had been warned to clear out of the vicinity of these militant strongholds.

Sources in Jaffna, however, said that in two days of widespread bombing, 29 innocent Tamil civilians were killed in the peninsula. The headquarters of the Tamil refugees relief organisation was razed to the ground: the office of the *Saturday Review*, the weekly Jaffna English newspaper was damaged by a bomb as was the house of R. Balasubramaniam, former secretary of the now-defunct Jaffna Citizens Committee.

Colombo itself has been gripped by an air of insecurity in the aftermath of the bomb blast. Says Vasudeva Nanayakkara, the leader of the left-wing Nava Sama Samaja Party: "The common man in Colombo now feels unsafe to take a bus or walk on the road. And he thinks the Government is not protecting his life." Observes Lucien Rajakarunanayaka, journalist and columnist for several western and Colombo papers: "The man on the street in Colombo now feels very jittery about the Tamil Tigers. Every Tamil militant is a tiger for him."

Sinhala chauvinists desperately tried to whip up anti-Tamil feelings after the bomb blast. Three Tamil shops were looted in Pettah. But the Government promptly stepped in and imposed curfew to control the situation. A mass funeral of the dead was not allowed. In Welikada prison in Colombo, 700 Sinhalese prisoners tried to attack the 226 Tamils detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. But again, the police promptly intervened. The Tamil inmates were subsequently shifted.

It is this feeling of mutual distrust which seems to have been accentuated by the recent all-round violence in Sri Lanka. Even Tamils, who did not exactly look on with favour upon the activities of the militants, expressed misgivings about the sincerity of the Sri Lankan Government to find a political solution to the ethnic problem. Observed Sybil Kanakasundaram, a prominent resident of Colombo and originally a Jaffna Tamil: "There was a time when we were proud of the militants. But now we have begun to be even ashamed of them. Still, we do not think that the Sri Lankan Government is keen to find a negotiated political settlement to the Tamil problem." According to another prominent member of the Tamil Women's Union in Colombo: "Certainly, these recent incidents of militant violence deserve to be condemned. But they also make a ne-



Spot where the booby-trapped van was left: inhuman

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gotiated settlement all the more imperative, and that the Government does not seem to be interested in finding, though the militants are being made the scapegoats for it. Even if Tamils are not given our traditional homeland, which has become a subject of dispute, we should at least have a safe homeland."

Prominent Tamil residents of Colombo, while deprecating the killings of innocent Sinhalese civilians, say that the argument against violence should cut both ways. Said a Tamil businessman of Colombo: "If it is wrong for the militants to kill innocent Sinhalese civilians, it is also equally wrong for the Sri Lankan Army to kill innocent Tamil civilians. The Colombo Government's present reaction to go all out for the militants is intended to satisfy racist elements. One should remember that terrorists can be wiped out, but not terrorism, so long as the socio-economic factors which cause terrorism are operational."

Even Tamil victims of the bomb blast have a surprisingly soft corner for the militants. Says 44-year-old Thaiyalpaga Tiruvadavoor, a cashier in a snack bar in Pettah, who fractured his right arm in

POLITICAL FALLOUT

Anger Mounts

THE device which exploded in Colombo's busiest bazaar took a much heavier toll than those it actually killed or wounded. It brought anti-government Sinhala anger to exploding point and the real damage, as the future may show, was to the island's traditional social and political structure, and probably its non-alignment. The five days of insensate violence has dramatically transformed an "ethnic conflict" into a major political crisis. Since anti-government Sinhala feeling was accompanied by anti-Indian sentiment, Sri Lanka's relations with its big neighbour—and the mediator in the ethnic issue—may have been irreparably damaged.

Jayewardene (left) and Premadasa: cornered

The reaction of the government parliamentary group, which represents five-sixths of the Assembly's total membership of 168, was revealing. At the meeting, it seemed to take on the mass mood as it passed a two-part resolution urging the Government to continue its military offensive in the Tamil north until "terrorism was wiped out completely". The group also called on Rajiv Gandhi to arrest all Sri Lankan Tamil "terrorists" operating from Indian soil.

The five-sixths majority of the right-wing, pro-West, United National Party (UNP) which came to office ten years ago is illusory. In the aftermath of the recent wave of violence, this stark reality was suddenly exposed. In July 1977, a quirk of the British first-past-the-post system blessed the UNP with 85 per cent of the seats on a national vote of 52 per cent. In October 1982, President Jayewardene won another six-year term fairly comfortably, though by not a much larger percentage. Instead of holding the general elections which were due in 1983, the Government opted for a referendum, an unparalleled move in Sri Lanka's history.

The Government won the referendum by 3.1 million to 2.6 million votes but more interestingly, 8 lakh voters who had participated in the polls just two months earlier did not use their ballots. In August 1983, a week after the vicious anti-Tamil riots, another constitutional amendment (there are now 11 amendments to a nine-year-old constitution) forced the TULF MPs, elected representatives of the Tamil electorates of the north, to quit the body without taking an oath renouncing separatism. The Sri Lankan Parliament thus does not reflect democratic Tamil opinion or a large segment of Sinhala opinion.

More worrying to the UNP perhaps was a petition submitted by several hundred Buddhist monks and students. The petition, which was expunged from Hansard when an opposition MP read it out, demanded the resignation of a regime that could not protect Sinhala civilians or safeguard the Sinhala-Buddhist heritage from "Eelam terrorists". The demonstrators represented what an opposition MP described as the "JVP constituency". The JVP (People's Liberation Front) launched the Sinhala youth insurgency in 1971 which was mercilessly crushed by the army during Bandaranaike's premiership.

But underground, Rohana Wijeweera and his comrades have not been quiet. They have mounted a virulent anti-government, anti-India, pro-Sinhala-Buddhist campaign through miscellaneous front organisations, which has attracted young monks, unemployed Sinhala youth and university students. The worsening economic conditions will spread this discontent. Export prices (tea, rubber and coconut) are down, a drought has hurt production, and tourist income and foreign investment have slumped just when the debt-service ratio is rising. The IMF has given two loans on conditions that will increase inflation and unemployment. In June, Sri Lanka will be pledged US $ 550 million by the aid group, just meeting its defence vote, ten times higher than in 1983.

Raids on army camps by unidentified youths dressed in uniforms who escaped with sub-machine-guns and assault rifles, turned the spotlight on the JVP. Robberies of money and weapons conformed, the CID said, to the pre-1971 insurgency pattern. Far more alarming was the discovery of planned JVP infiltration of the army's lower ranks. Already 37 suspects among army recruits have been cashiered but over 2,000 recent recruits are being "re-screened". At least a thousand have deserted. The armed conflict and militarisation have not only brutalised southern society but struck deep roots in the Sinhala provinces which may produce a mirror image of the fearsome Tamil 'Tigers' among the young lions.

—MERVYN DE SILVA in Colombo

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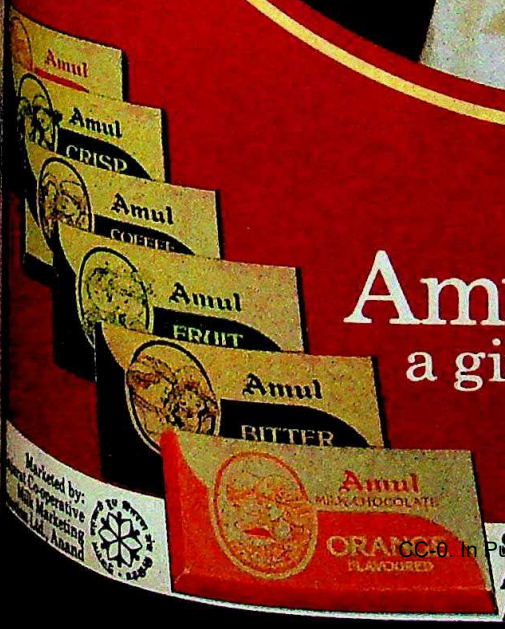

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the blast: "Tamil militants could have planted this bomb to draw the attention of the world to the fact that we Tamils are living as second-class citizens in this country. Today no Tamilian can get a job in southern Sri Lanka."

But among the Sinhalese, the anti-Tamil feeling is now at a dangerous level. Says bomb victim Ranasinghe: "Terrorism has to be wiped out if such violent incidents are not to recur. Tamil terrorists have started killing innocent Sinhalese. How can we tolerate this? And you cannot blame the army for killing Tamil people. If militants attack the army, how can the soldiers be decent to them?" Comments Air Force Warrant Officer G.D.L. Ayupala: "It is the duty of the army to hunt out terrorists who are wanted criminals. If, in the process, a few innocent Tamil civilians get killed, it cannot be helped."

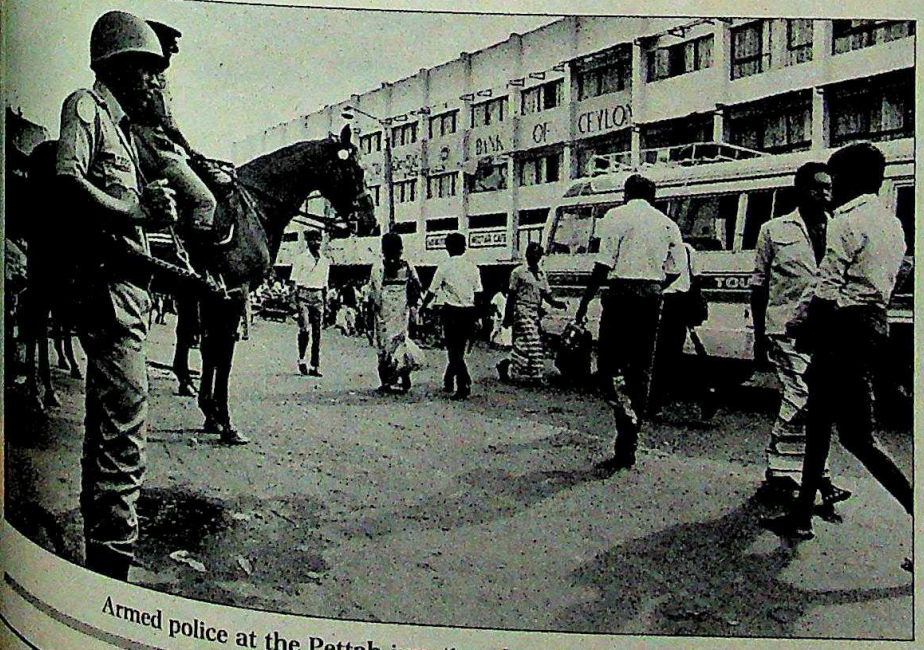
Apart from heightening the mutual distrust between the two ethnic communities, the bomb blast and the Trincomalee massacre have seriously eroded the credibility of India as a mediator on the Sri Lankan question. India is now seen in Sri Lanka as having absolutely no clout with the militants to force them to the negotiating table. Even moderate Tamils say that the December 19 proposals were good enough for India to have made the Tigers see reason and accept them at least as a starting point for negotiations. Observes Dr Neelan Tiruchelvam, former Tamil United Liberation Front member of Parliament: "India has always promised more that it delivered in persuading Tamil militants to come to the settlement. India appears to be lacking in effectiveness in exerting pressure on Tamil groups. And this perception of India's ineffectiveness is dangerous."

Confided a Foreign Ministry official in Delhi: "After protracted negotiations with Colombo, we managed to wrest substantial concessions for the Tamils in the December 19 proposals. It is sad that we could not be firm in selling the package to the militants. We should have either been firm with Colombo and told them that we are fully backing the Tamil militants in their struggle, or we should have told the militants in no uncertain terms that they have to be reasonable and accept a settlement within the framework of a united Sri Lanka and not go on mouthing their unrealistic slogans. It is this dithering which has damaged our reputation internationally."

Now the popular emotion in Colombo runs very strongly against India for shielding Tamil terrorists. Says 32-year-old W. Jagatsreelal, in the gem business, whose brother H.H. Sumanasree died in the blast: "It is the Indian Government which is responsible for all these violent incidents here. We have respect only for Mahatma Gandhi, but no respect for Indira Gandhi or Rajiv Gandhi." The Tamils, on the other hand, feel very strongly that India has let them down and is not able to deal decisively with Colombo. Delhi, therefore, is now in the unenviable position of having been able to please neither the Sri Lankan Government nor the Tamils.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI
in Colombo

Bomb blast victims in a hospital: innocent victims



Armed police at the Pettah junction: keeping the lid on

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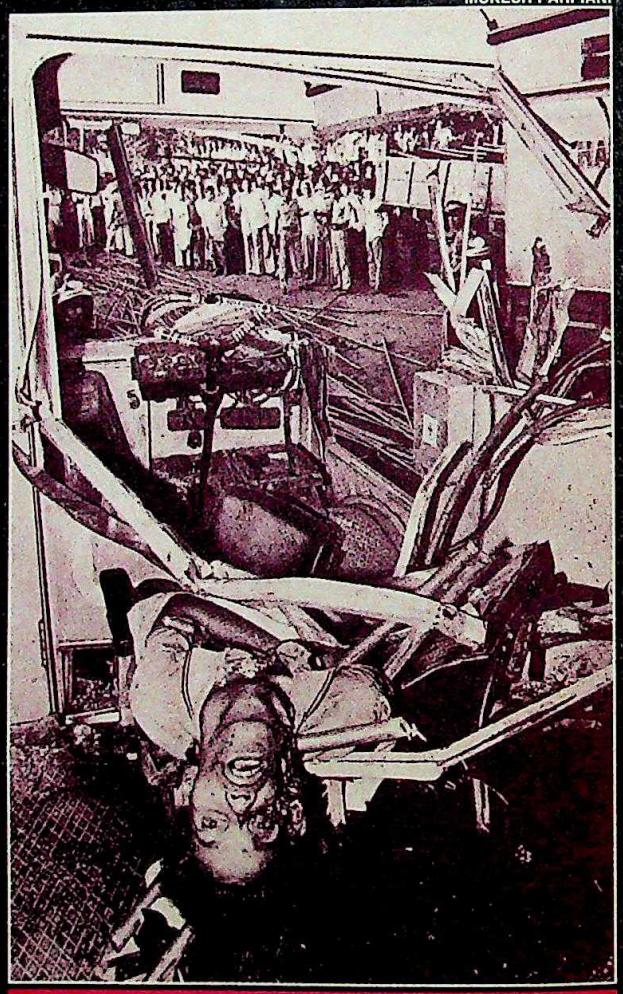
TRAFFIC

DEATH ON THE ROADS

MUKESH PARPIANI



Each accident on the road is a human tragedy: a life ended, a family shattered. Or, if you are lucky, disability for life. Each accident also contributes to the overall statistics, and these tell a frightening tale: fatalities on the roads have become the Number One cause of accidental death in the country. The numbers are equal to a Kanishka crash every third day, and the toll in terms of economic loss is Rs 2,000 crore every year. Principal Correspondent RAJ CHENGAPPA's report on a growing national problem:

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It was like a nightmare. But for R. Kapoor, a Kanpur lawyer, there was no waking up to a reassuring reality. In a daze he pulled himself out of his battered Maruti. In the moonlight he could see his wife, Renu, lying dead on the pavement.

Near her lay their year-old daughter Koppal, her tiny face a bloody mess, her body perforated by glass pieces. And as Kapoor rushed her he saw his son, Mudit, 5, with a deep gash on his forehead. Beside him, his friend's wife and son also lay unconscious. All four of them died at the hospital later.

They had been returning home after a pleasant dinner. Kapoor veered too far to the left to avoid another car and crashed against a small tree. With a sickening crunch a branch smashed through the windshield, cut through the left side and turned the car around. For a simple accident the price seemed too high to pay. And a month later an anguished Kapoor, 32, can only ask: "Why did I have to survive?"

Sudden and gruesome death on the road has become a chilling phenomenon in an increasingly motorised Indian society. Last year alone, 40,000 people were killed in road accidents, up from 24,600 in 1980. "It's equivalent to 123 Kanishka crashes every year, or one every three days," points out Dinesh Mohan, a World Health Organisation (WHO) consultant on traffic engineering.

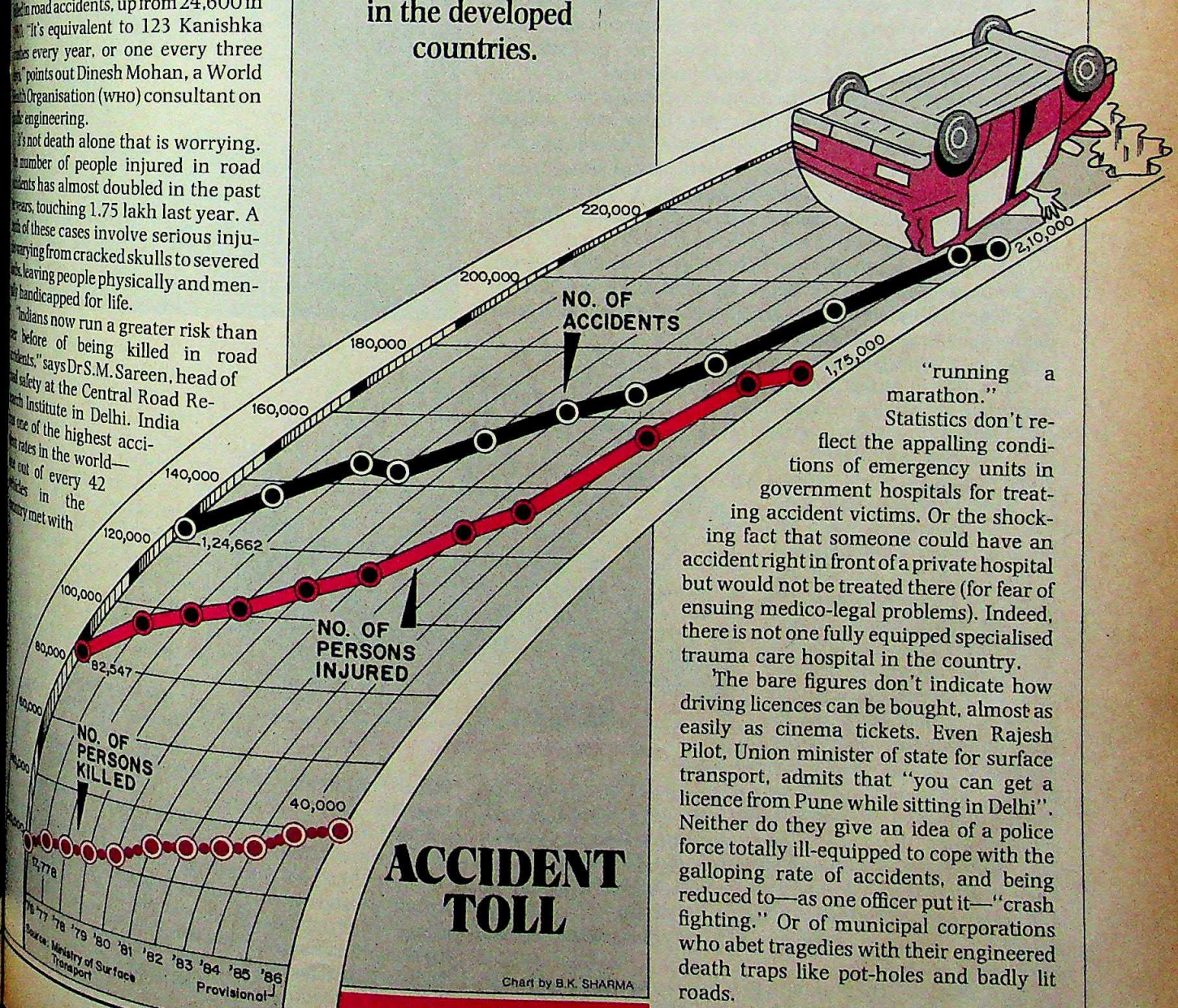
It's not death alone that is worrying. The number of people injured in road accidents has almost doubled in the past 6 years, touching 1.75 lakh last year. A fourth of these cases involve serious injuries, ranging from cracked skulls to severed limbs, leaving people physically and mentally handicapped for life.

"Indians now run a greater risk than ever before of being killed in road accidents," says Dr S.M. Sareen, head of road safety at the Central Road Research Institute in Delhi. India has one of the highest accident rates in the world—one out of every 42 vehicles in the country met with an accident last year. In the United States and Europe, the average is one in every 100 vehicles. Worse, India has a fatality rate 20 times higher than the developed countries.

Road fatalities now lead the list of accidental deaths in the country, way ahead of death by drowning, fire and railway accidents. Studies done by the WHO show that road accidents account for 2.5 per cent of the total deaths recorded in developing countries like India. But in the 5-44 age group it is as high as 10 per cent, and is among the six leading causes of death.

But dry statistics don't speak of the blood and agony of reality. They don't, for instance, talk of how K.R.Sethuraman, a Bangalore office assistant, had to watch his wife being run over by a scooter. Or the sorrow of Sunithi Barua, a Calcutta housewife, who lost her son and daughter on the same day when they were run over by a bus after it hit their motorcycle. And they do not record the sage of Sudha Balachandron, 30, a Bombay doctor, paralysed from waist down after being knocked down by a car, who now finds moving her legs a little like "running a marathon."

India has a fatality rate in road accidents that is 20 times that in the developed countries.



ACCIDENT TOLL

Statistics don't reflect the appalling conditions of emergency units in government hospitals for treating accident victims. Or the shocking fact that someone could have an accident right in front of a private hospital but would not be treated there (for fear of ensuing medico-legal problems). Indeed, there is not one fully equipped specialised trauma care hospital in the country.

The bare figures don't indicate how driving licences can be bought, almost as easily as cinema tickets. Even Rajesh Pilot, Union minister of state for surface transport, admits that "you can get a licence from Pune while sitting in Delhi". Neither do they give an idea of a police force totally ill-equipped to cope with the galloping rate of accidents, and being reduced to—as one officer put it—"crash fighting." Or of municipal corporations who abet tragedies with their engineered death traps like pot-holes and badly lit roads.

The rising death toll doesn't expose

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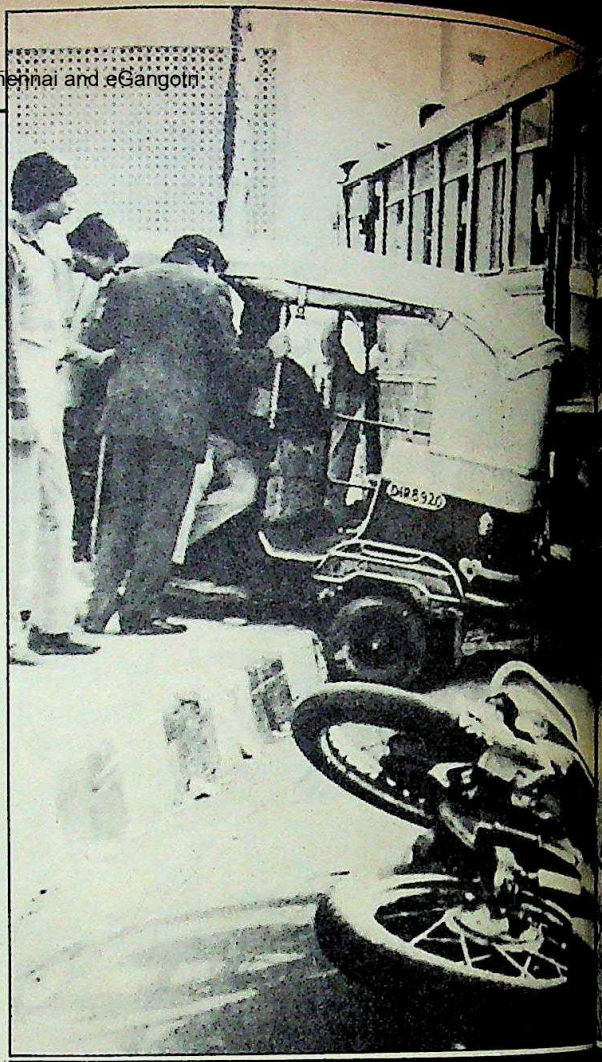
the fact that 90 per cent of the drivers who kill on the road are acquitted by the courts for lack of evidence. Or the long wait of Rajamma Annamalai of Madras, whose husband was run over by a lorry three years ago, with the accident tribunal still not decided on the compensation she is to be paid. Rajamma's case is the rule, not the exception.

The price of road accidents is paid not only by the victims and their relatives, but by the country as a whole. The insurance companies paid out as much as Rs 266 crore towards accident claims in 1985 alone. International traffic experts estimate that in developing countries the loss of production and hospital expenses caused by accidents would be 1 per cent of the gross national product. In India that is over Rs 2,000 crore every year—enough money to make the roads much safer.

"As a nation we should be shocked by the toll," says Ajay Kumar Singh, Bangalore's traffic chief. "Yet we hardly do anything about it." Indeed, as a traffic engineeer complains: "We are legislating death by policy." The introduction of fast cars like the Maruti and the new range of zippy two-wheelers contribute to the rising toll. Their quick acceleration and instant-braking abilities encourage speeding. And, on collision, the Maruti's fragile body usually crumbles like an eggshell. Kapoor, the Kanpur lawyer who lost his entire family in the crash, says: "The left side of my car was ripped by a branch that cut through it like a sword. Cars should not be made so fragile."

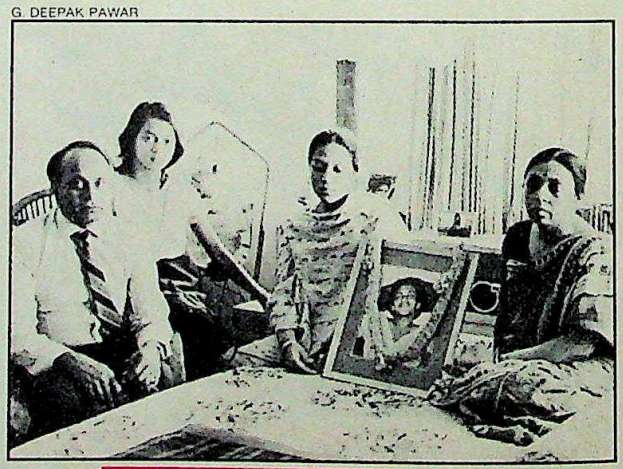
Spurring the death rattle is an unprecedented vehicle explosion, with a quadrupling of numbers in the last decade, to over 10 million now. Vulnerable two-wheelers alone number six million—one million in 1975—while trucks and buses, which cause the most damage, number one million (1975: 0.3 million). Cars number another 1.5 million. The result of having all these contraptions on the roads is anarchy.

Yet complacent traffic planners point to the fact that the accident rate per 1,000 vehicles has declined from 33.9 in 1980 to 25.5 now. What this argument ignores is the fact that all over the world the growth of accidents never keeps pace with vehicle population. In fact, the rate of decrease in Indian accidents is much slower than that recorded in developed countries and many other third world nations.



Bus ploughs into several vehicles after its brakes f

G. DEEPAK PAWAR



► *They were watching* Buniyaad *in Bangalore when the telephone rang. Anima Burman (photo) picked it up and was given the numbing news. Her only son, Rajiv, was lying seriously injured in a city hospital. When she got there she was directed to the mortuary, and on a stone stretcher lay Rajiv, his body wrapped in a white sheet. Three hours earlier he had been run over by a bus while riding his motorcycle, and had died instantly. When her husband Sharad, a deputy inspector general of police, returned home that night from an outstation tour he found a long row of cars lined up on the street outside. Instantly, he knew something was wrong. Four months later, the Burmans and their two daughters are still in a state of shock. And Rajiv's goldfish continue to stare out of their glass bowl at his unchanged room.*

Says Sharad: "There should be a law that parents must die first. When I was lighting his pyre I thought, shouldn't it have been him lighting mine instead?"

Death rides the city roads. Over a third of the accidents occur in the 12 Indian metropolises alone. Delhi, with its broad avenues and sweeping boulevards, leads the death list. Every day four people are killed and 18 others injured on the capital's roads. The numbers have doubled in the last decade.

Ironically, the problem seems to be that Delhi has such good roads. Virtually every other city has clogged traffic inching through crowded lanes, with the average speed a fraction of what exists in Delhi. The number of accidents too is much lower than the capital's.

In Bombay, where a collision occurs every 20 minutes, deaths have come down from 657 in 1985 to 555 last year (though those seriously injured rose from 805 to 946). In Bangalore and Madras too, traffic deaths show signs of having peaked at around 400 deaths a year after rising steeply for a while. And Calcutta of course is the safest city of them all, with slightly fewer deaths than even Bangalore—probably because the city's traffic moves slowest of all.

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y on the street

the Pallavan Transport Corporation is involved in so many fatal accidents that road users have nicknamed it *Pallavan Kollavan* (Tamil for the Pallavan killers).

► *Tears well up in N.K. Balasubramaniam's eyes as he lies flat in his bed, his legs swathed in layers of bandages. "The pain, the pain," he screams, looking at his legs and repeatedly lifting his arms to some distant God asking for relief. He slips into delirium as he talks of how, while walking back with his son last month, a reversing van knocked him down and pinned his legs under its rear wheels for five agonising minutes. But for Balasubramaniam, 60, a retired accounts manager, it could have been eternity before the van moved and he was rushed to hospital, with multiple leg fractures. He still doesn't know whether he will walk again.*

The Transport Ministry likes to list the causes of accidents simply as: "Bad drivers, bad vehicles and bad roads". Of these, studies have shown that bad drivers and human error are responsible for around 80 per cent of the accidents. In a country that is notorious for its slackness at work, everyone on the road seems to drive as if there is no tomorrow. Indeed, the most visible symbol of this is none other than Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who likes to take his imported jeep and Mercedes beyond 100 kmph, causing more than one mishap for escort cars trying desperately to keep pace.

"I've ceased to be a good Christian," says M.K. Oommen, an Indian Airlines officer in Bangalore: "Every day I use more than a dozen swear words." In Calcutta, few cars can be seen without a dent and a police officer says: "Ninety-nine per cent of the people here don't observe rules, and the 1 per cent who do are traffic cops." In Madras, lawyer K.S. Rajagopalan says: "With everyone violating laws I'm tempted to do the same myself."

A Central Road Research Institute survey of 1,200 people found that half of those who had driving licences had no knowledge of the traffic rules. Only 20 per cent of them knew how to overtake correctly. A third had no knowledge of road signs. And—in a rare display of honesty—63 per cent admitted that they did not observe rules on the road.

Fuelling the anarchy on the roads is the corrupt licensing system. In Bombay, touts arrange for a licence without a test at the Road Transport Office, for Rs 250. In Bangalore the going rate is Rs 150. In Calcutta and Delhi it's Rs 300. In Delhi, there is only one vehicle inspector to deal with 500 cases—testing new drivers and certifying vehicle fitness—every day. Driving tests, naturally, are cursory.

The lack of a national registry has complicated matters. If a driver's licence is cancelled in Delhi he can drive down to neighbouring Gurgaon in Haryana and get another without anyone being the wiser. Vehicle fitness tests are a farce. In most countries bi-annual vehicle fitness tests are mandatory. But in India the fitness tests for private vehicles are needed only after 15 years. Though trucks are to be checked annually, a system to execute this simply does not exist. And, of course, this means more corruption.

Also, unlike the rest of the world, drivers are not subjected to medical check-ups before licences are issued. When the National Transportation Planning and Research Centre in Trivandrum checked 173 truck drivers on the Quilon Highway, it found that 90 per cent of them had defective eyesight. In Delhi, when the po-

Pedestrians and two-wheelers are the most vulnerable road users. And buses and trucks are the biggest killers. Oddly enough, zebra crossings account for a high number of fatalities in the cities.

But traffic jams are obviously no solution to death on the road. And as city planners build new roads and streamline traffic, the death curve will rise again. Meanwhile, much of the increase in the national toll has come from smaller towns. In Kanpur, for instance, over 200 people were killed last year. In Nagpur, road deaths have more than doubled to 150 since 1981. In Lucknow, the annual toll is 150—three times the figure five years ago. And in bustling Pune the toll has crossed the 250 mark.

If the cities are dangerous, so are the highways, where a third of the fatalities occur, and where there is neither prompt medical aid nor police help. In the cities themselves, a third of the people killed are pedestrians. Oddly enough, as a study by the Indian Institute of Technology says, 75 per cent of these pedestrians were killed on straight roads, and not at intersections as is widely believed. In fact, zebra crossings are death-traps: 20 per cent of the pedestrians were killed on the markings.

Other pedestrians, two-wheeler riders are the most vulnerable group, with a risk level five times higher than car drivers. And, of course, the big killers in the cities are buses. The Delhi Transport Corporation—with just 5,000 buses—kills more people than all the drivers of Calcutta put together. In Madras,

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lice did a similar check on bus drivers, a large majority were discovered to have bad eyesight. Helpfully, the police provided them with free spectacles. "We have reduced ourselves to just a revenue collection body. We pay little attention to road safety measures," admits S.K.Sagane, Maharashtra's transport commissioner.

► *When S.B. Deol was told that he was to head Delhi's traffic police, colleagues said it was a "prestigious posting". Two months later he doesn't even like to mention what he does at a party: "The moment I tell them, people unleash a long list of complaints and suggestions."*

Deol has the unenviable task of looking after a city which has the highest number of road deaths in the country. And when he does do something about it, people rarely appreciate his efforts. When he started street corner education programmes using loudspeakers, a shopkeeper at Andrews Ganj promptly rang him up and told him to shut the thing off and shift his cop elsewhere. Despite getting his police force to challan over 1,500 people for traffic violations every week, he admits: "People just don't seem to learn." Deol is philosophical: "I'll try to lose the battle as gracefully as possible."

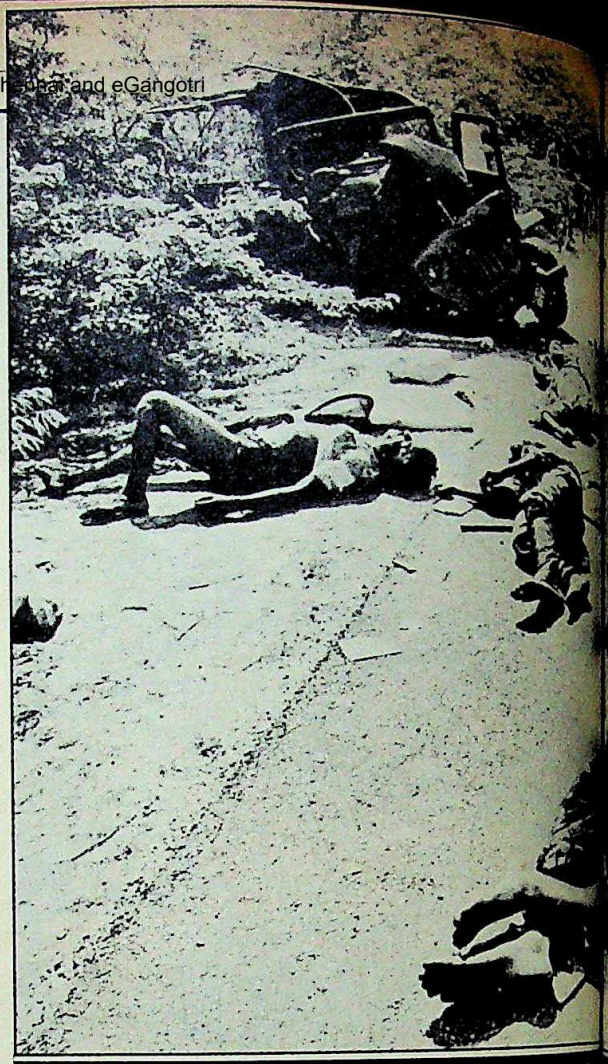
The truth is that, despite their Bharatnatyam antics at the crossroads, traffic police all over the country are a beaten lot. Hamstrung by a lack of staff and overwhelmed by the growth of vehicles on the road, the police have become mere spectators to the chaos on the roads. "What the hell do you expect my constable to do?" asks Bangalore's Ajay Kumar. "We are not consulted on any developments at all. Bus shelters and buildings sprout up without our knowledge. And then we are expected to regulate traffic."

In fact, poor traffic engineering is a major cause of accidents and the police rarely have a say in improving matters. "We are the most visible symbols of authority on the roads when in reality the role we play is limited," says Hasan Gaffoor, Bombay's traffic chief. They are rarely consulted by the municipal corporation over development plans. Only a few cities have started traffic engineering cells, and only now is traffic flow taken into account while sanctioning buildings or developing new areas. But even then most of these regulations are observed in the breach.

Nowhere in the country has the number of traffic policemen kept pace with vehicles. In Delhi, only a quarter of the intersections are manned. In Bombay, the police asked to double the staff, and got a quarter of what they had asked for. In Bangalore, the traffic police strength hasn't increased since 1976. And in Kanpur manned intersections are unheard of.

The irony is that the penalty for violating traffic rules is nominal. In Bombay, the maximum fine levied for violations is a laughable Rs 50. On most occasions people can get away by paying the constable less. In the courts, the penalty for killing a person on the road is a maximum of two years' imprisonment, or fine, or both. And as P.N. Parashar, Kanpur's chief metropolitan magistrate, admits: "We are able to convict in hardly 5 to 10 per cent of the cases." The rest are acquitted or fined around Rs 2,000. As one police officer says: "If you want to murder someone just run over them." Indeed, if the accused pleads guilty he is usually let off with a maximum fine of Rs 5,000. But if he contests the case and loses, the penalty is imprisonment. Under the law, it is better to plead guilty.

A survey found that 80 per cent of drivers don't know how to overtake correctly, and 33 per cent don't know the road signs. Sixty-three per cent also admitted that they don't follow the traffic rules.



■ A highway crash on the busy Grand Trunk Road in w...

The investigation of traffic deaths is usually done in a cursory manner by the police, motor vehicle inspectors and doctors. Few eyewitnesses come forward to give evidence because of the dreaded prospect of repeatedly going to court. The police usually make street offenders, who connected with the case, testify and their evidence is easily demolished by defence lawyers.

Other malpractices abound. Post-mortem and first information reports often have to be paid for under the table in order to avoid delays, and in order to get them tutored. In many cases the police have to be 'kept happy' to stand as witnesses during trial. A Bangalore lawyer complains: "You have to grease everyone's palm: clerk, constable or doctor."

► *His bed is like a cradle, and at 59, Ramanand Hattangadi (photo), a Bombay advocate, can barely move. After a truck smashed into his car six years ago, he has been paralysed from waist down and can move only one hand. He needs help to do simple things like raising himself or turning on his stomach.*

But Hattangadi didn't allow his disability to get him down. Fighting his own case in the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal, he wheeled himself to court 43 times, examining 53 witnesses. Meanwhile, he even got a doctor, who had tried to accept a bribe...

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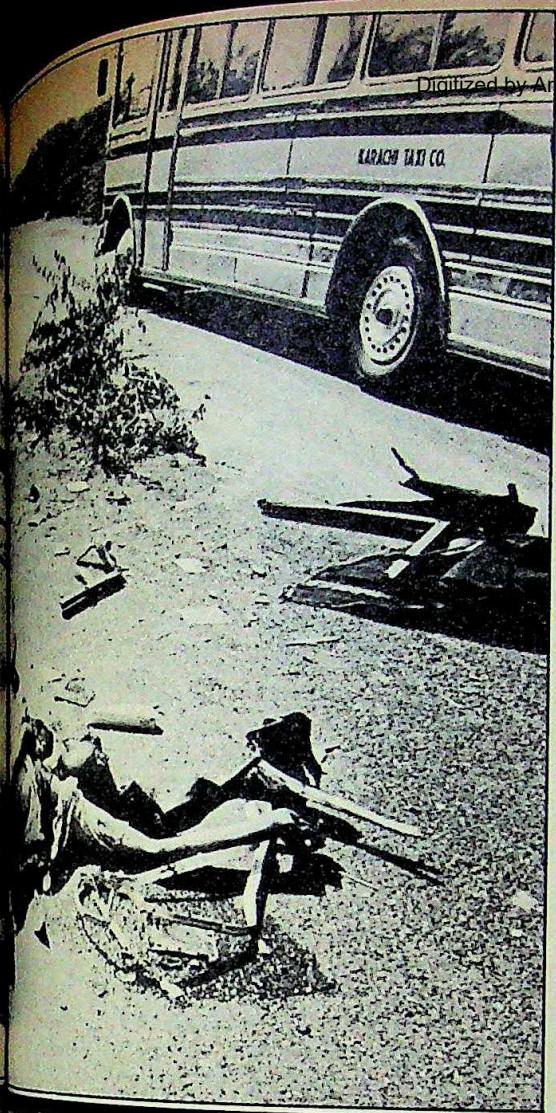


PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

were killed: terrifying rise

water and only one for draining it."

Waking up to the problem, the Government declared two years ago that, irrespective of who was at fault, an accident victim's family would get Rs 15,000 if he died and Rs 7,500 in case he was permanently disabled. This was to help the victim till the compensation case was decided in court, and was to be paid within 45 days of filing the claim. But documents like the post-mortem report or insurance certificate, which the court requires, are never available in time. And the courts take a year to award the claim, negating the very purpose of the new provision.

The backlog of cases has now resulted in ambulance-chasing lawyers cropping up in every city. They get police stations to supply them with details of the day's accidents and rush to the hospital to bag the victim's case. Malpractices abound. Since half the victims are illiterate, lawyers skim off as much as 30 per cent of the compensation that is paid.

Shockingly enough, while insurance companies cough up the money even after prolonged delays, the big defaulters are public transport corporations. These are supposed to maintain a revolving fund to pay up claims, but the Calcutta State Transport Corporation for one doesn't bother. A Calcutta lawyer, Dipak Mukherjee, has over 50 cases where the corporation has not bothered to pay despite court orders. Oddly enough, the court can take no punitive action against the defaulter. It can only direct the district collector to recover the dues using "revenue methods". In most cases the collector is too busy to bother about accident victims' claims.

► *At the entrance of the casualty unit in the Calcutta Medical College lies a dead man covered with a sheet. Around him the floor is littered with accident victims in various stages of agony. Relatives hold up intravenous drip bottles, a dog strolls past unchecked.*

Upstairs, only one of the two operation theatres is functional, and even this lacks the basic facilities. Simple mechanical respirators vital for keeping patients alive are missing, the X-ray unit is often out of order, and the sterilisation equipment is also used for making tea.

Although accidents require a team of specialised surgeons, like orthopaedists, neurologists and plastic surgeons, only general surgeons operate. And people are getting angry. Self-defensive doctors now register cases from behind steel bars to protect themselves from assaults. All this in the largest hospital in the state, treating over 20 accident victims every day.

Accident victims should be taken to hospital as early as possible, within what doctors call the 'golden hour'. But most cities are not equipped with proper ambulance facilities to rush patients across. A study in Delhi showed that only 4 per cent of accident cases were brought to hospital in ambulances. And police brought only 20 per cent of the victims. The rest were bundled into auto-rickshaws or taxis, often causing severe secondary injuries. Says Dr P.N.Tandon, head of the neurosurgery unit at the capital's All India Institute of Medical Sciences: "In transit, reparable lesions become irreparable. Twenty per cent of the deaths can be prevented if there is on-the-spot first aid."

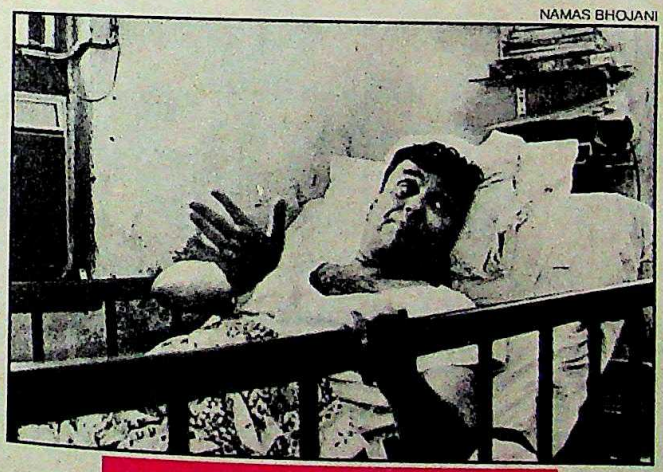
The public hospitals are overburdened because private

...d by the Anti-Corruption ...m. Finally, last May, after ...le spanning six years, the ...n awarded him Rs 26 lakh as ...pensation. But in victory ...ttangadi is hardly trium-...nt. For him the long battle of ...without legs continues.

...f there is anything typical ...n Hattangadi's case it is the ...k wait before justice can be ...k. The past six years have ...n accident claims doubling ...e tribunals, but without ...proportionate increase in ...staff. The Bombay Motor ...dent Tribunal, in which Hattangadi ...ed, is located on the fourth floor of a dilapidated building. It is ...posed to have four courts but, because of lack of space, makes ...with three. Of the 2,000 claims that are filed every year, only ...are settled. Currently there are over 5,000 claims to be ...ed of, some dating back to 1977.

The situation is no better in Calcutta, where at the Alipur ...court room because there is no storage space. The number of ...ed files of claimants are stacked higgledy-piggledy around ...ed before the tribunal has shot up from 498 in 1980 to ...in 1986. There is now a backlog of around 5,000 cases, and ...strate complains: "It's like a tank with two taps for filling

NAMAS BHOJANI



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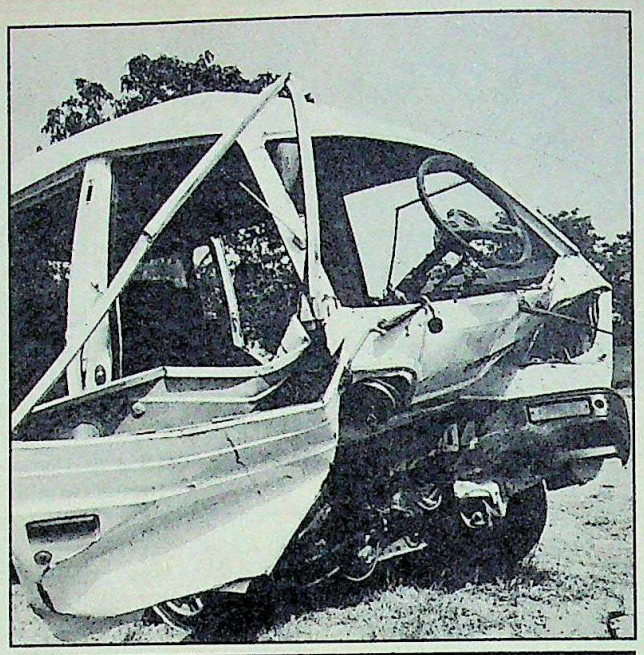
nursing homes will have nothing to do with accident cases. A doctor at a large, swank private hospital in New Delhi explains: "The moment we take a case, it becomes a medico-legal problem. We are forced to attend courts to give evidence, and we just have no time for it." Moreover, they argue setting up a trauma care unit is expensive, as is the treatment.

Government doctors stress the need to set up fully-equipped trauma care hospitals—something that is being planned in Bangalore and Delhi. Almost a third of road accident victims suffer head injuries and need specialised care. But in Kanpur, for instance, such patients have to be rushed to Lucknow, about 80 km away, because there is no neurosurgeon in this city of about two million. Says Dr S. Arumugham, dean of Madras General Hospital: "We must also have wireless equipped ambulances that can administer first aid and treat patients even before they reach the hospital."



A battered Maruti van: the price of speed

Twenty five per cent of all accident victims are two-wheeler riders. And most of them die because they either don't wear helmets, or don't wear them properly. A Delhi study found that while only 24 per cent of helmeted riders sustained critical injuries, the figure was as high as 56 per cent for unhelmeted riders. In 30 per cent of the cases the helmet had come off before impact.

► *On a wintry January evening three months ago, Seema Deb's life was turned upside down. Back home from shopping, she was told that her husband had met with an accident. On reaching the hospital, she saw him groaning in pain, his left leg soaked in blood. "I'm finished," he said when he saw her. Shortly afterwards, his body was brought out covered with a white sheet.*

Deb, 44, a pharmaceutical company owner, had chosen to use his motorcycle instead of his car. He was thrown off his bike while trying to avoid a pot-hole, and a bus rammed into him. His thigh muscles were ripped, the doctors at the hospital were unable to stop the bleeding and Deb died.

The death saw the well-knit family crack up. Seema moved around in a daze for months. Her eldest son, Sambuddha, 20, dropped a year in school. Eventually, Seema pulled herself together and started managing a part of the family business. Now Seema says: "I'm not scared of death anymore."

The Government is finally waking up to the tragedy on the roads. "We are extremely concerned by the rising death toll," says Pilot. Last fortnight his ministry formed a National Road Safety Council to chalk out remedial measures. The minister is also piloting through Parliament a bill that seeks radical changes in the outdated Motor Vehicles Act. And Pilot promises to end the corruption in the road transport offices. "We will make licences as difficult as getting a bail order," he says.

Drivers will be asked to go through tests again if they meet with accidents and a medical fitness test for commercial vehicle drivers is to be introduced. Independent agencies are to be set up to conduct fitness tests for commercial vehicles. And the long-awaited national registry for licences is to be started. On all major highways, the ministry plans to introduce mobile patrols equipped with first aid facilities to attend to accident victims speedily.

But all this is not enough. Vehicles have to be made safer too. Making seat belts compulsory for cars—India is one of the few countries where this is not yet mandatory—will reduce the severity of injury and save lives, as studies abroad have repeatedly shown. Safer windshields that shatter into small pieces under impact should be a feature in all cars. For two-wheelers, both the rider and the pillion need to wear helmets since almost half of those who suffer head injuries are pillion-riders. Studies show that bicycles painted yellow or orange, instead of the traditional black, are more easily visible at night and could avert numerous accidents.

The introduction of new, fast, but fragile cars and zippy motorcycles has encouraged speeding and contributed to the rising toll.

Traffic experts believe that the death toll could be reduced if cities develop a more effective mass transportation system. In crowded Calcutta, Amiya Bandopadhyaya, chief traffic planner, Transport Department, says: "What we need is a greater use of railways to ease congestion."

But improving mass transportation systems is easier said than done. All over the country bus services run at a loss, totalling Rs 1,500 crore in 1985 alone. The seventh plan document suggested introducing electrically powered public transport systems, but the costs are prohibitive. For instance, Bangalore's planned electrified suburban network of trains, spanning 125 km, would cost around Rs 650 crore, or Rs 50 lakh per kilometre. The underground transit system is a costly but effective way out. Calcutta's Metro now costs Rs 50 crore for each kilometre. If Delhi invests in a 40 km underground system, the cost could be around Rs 3,000 crore.

But faced with the mounting loss caused by road accidents and the prospect of utter chaos on the roads, there may ultimately be no option other than the relatively safer mass transit systems. And it wouldn't kill anyone if the Government speeded up its road safety plans.

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The Path to Peace

WHEN I decided to go to Punjab, I wanted to go with a message of peace, love and understanding. And I walked more than 2,000 km carrying that message. But initially, the reaction from the other side, inside the Golden Temple, was not very encouraging. The boys there had said that they would not allow me to enter the temple, and we even got letters to this effect. The Punjab Government, in turn, said it could provide security only up to the gate. But we always felt we were safe because we were on the right path. And ultimately it was the victory of our philosophy. It was a victory of non-violence over violence. We got a tremendous response. So there is a silver lining, and nothing is lost yet.

Among the Sikhs, the feeling is more of hurt than anything else. They have been known for their valour, bravery and dedication to the country. Suddenly, the rest of the country is looking at them with suspicion. This definitely hurts them. We must revive the old image, the old feelings.

We must realise that if the Punjab problem is not solved, similar problems can spread to other states too, as fundamentalism raises its head. Then Punjab will destroy not only itself, but the rest of the country too. I, for one, never met anyone who talked of Khalistan. They believe in the oneness of the country. I met Sikhs in other states too. While the Hindus in Punjab live in fear, the Sikhs outside also live in fear, because anything that happens in Punjab affects them. Also, there are Sikh brothers at the helm of affairs all over India. Though they may say anything outwardly, they are not very happy.

I met a lot of people, people who are very big, and their opinion is as violent as the violence in Punjab. I fear such violent attitudes. It disturbs me when they say that we should be more aggressive and eliminate all violent people in Punjab.

I was really shocked to see the barrier between Hindus and Sikhs, which did not exist before this. Though the people said that there was no such thing, you could feel it. Unfortunately, some newspapers in Punjab are helping to divide Hindus and Sikhs. They forget that a Punjabi mother cries whenever anyone dies—Hindu or Sikh. The fact is that the cruel times have affected the Punjabi people and their nature. Punjabis normally have smiles across their faces, but this time they were like closed flowers.

Inevitably, it is the youngsters who always rebel first. But nobody is born a criminal. It is the environment created by the elders of the country that make youngsters behave like this. This cannot be solved with guns, because the more guns you use, the more guns you create there.

> "If I believed in eliminating violent people, I wouldn't have walked 2,000 km with a message of peace, love and understanding. And ultimately it was the victory of our philosophy. It was a victory of non-violence over violence."

I believe the Punjab problem is an internal problem. There is no point blaming our neighbours or western powers. If we cannot solve the problem, the fault lies with us. If people like us—people from different walks of life, different religions and different states—could create this impact through a via media that avoided confrontation, then we can have a settlement.

A solution can be found if we adopt a fatherly approach, not in the style of government functioning. A fatherly approach means not just submission, because a father can be tough also. But then the son knows that behind the toughness there is affection as well. If this feeling can be created, then a solution can be found.

There are three steps to be taken first. The Jodhpur detainees who have been in prison since Operation Bluestar should be tried and punished, if found guilty. Otherwise, they should be set free. As for the deserters, if they can't be rehabilitated in the armed forces because the army's rules are strict—and I agree with the Government on this—they can be rehabilitated elsewhere. They did something on the spur of the moment, because of religious feelings, and because of this they shouldn't be deprived of their livelihood.

Finally, Madame Gandhi was our leader, and her death was a black day for the nation. There is no way her death can be compensated. But the death of innocent Sikhs should also be a great shock to all of us. No one has the right to take the lives of innocent people. All such deaths after Madame Gandhi's assassination should be condemned. This will be the healing touch—for both the Sikh and Hindu psyches.

If these three steps are taken, the other issues can be solved with mutual understanding. We met Professor Darshan Singh twice. He feels that a lot of injustice has been done. And I was at the receiving end, because I was not a spokesman of any government or organisation. So I must meet the other side too. But the point is, you don't get anywhere with two meetings. They were letting out steam, and this is what happens when you come face to face for the first time. It doesn't mean that you have to resolve all those grievances. But first you must create an atmosphere of faith and trust, with the genuine involvement of the people.

As for the Barnala Government and the various terrorist groups, I don't know who should talk or who is too weak to talk. But whatever the give and take, we should not feel that anyone is going to lose anything. It is the problem of a home, of a country. And as long as it does not harm the unity of the country, we should be able to find a solution.

Personally, it was like a self-cleansing for me. The only thing I learnt is that we must stop fighting each other in the name of religion, region and language. Only then can we tackle the main problem facing the country: poverty.

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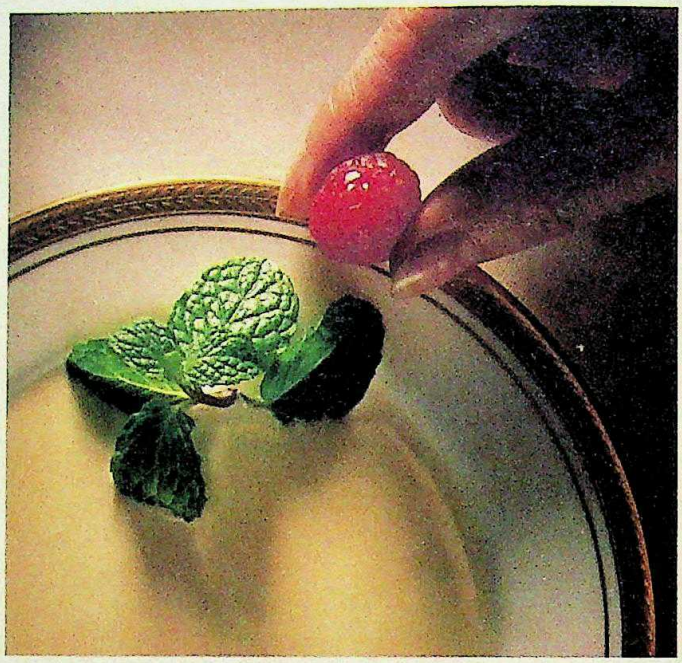

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THE PRESS

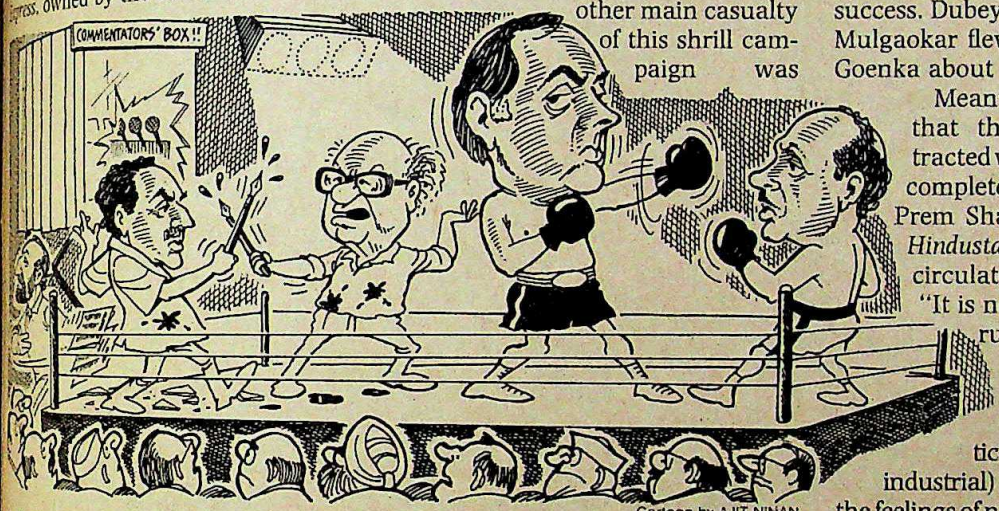
Joining the Battle

WHILE the Government and the Opposition battled it out in Parliament over the Fairfax and Bofors deals, and while Rajiv Gandhi and V.P. Singh squabbled over who was the real Mr Clean, newspaper readers were being treated to an uninhibited side-show which, for a time, threatened to upstage the main event. Slugging it out on the sidelines, in a media version of the wars, were the multi-edition *Indian Express*, owned by the combative Ram Nath Goenka, and the staid *The Times of India*. Ranged in opposite camps were Arun Shourie, executive editor of the *Express* and Girilal Jain, editor of *The Times*.

As usual, they took diametrically different stands. Shourie took up cudgels on behalf of V.P. Singh and Zail Singh. In angry front page articles, he castigated Rajiv Gandhi for victimising one Singh, and belittling the other. Both were exhorted to act. "V.P. Singh must disclose in Parliament all that he has found about this deal.... He must reach out to others like himself who want to reconstruct our polity.... Secondly, the President must act....The President must consult the best jurists in the country as well as leaders of all political parties to determine what must be done in this extraordinary situation."

Responding in kind—on the front page—Jain advised Rajiv Gandhi to remove V.P. Singh from office. He raised the spectre of a conspiracy: "Singh is threatening to bring down the house (the Congress) in the pursuit of his goals just as Mr (Jayaprakash) Narayan did in the mid-'70s....There cannot now be the slightest doubt that Mr V.P. Singh is out to undermine Mr Rajiv Gandhi's position, leaving the prime minister no choice but to remove him from the Government." To bemused readers, it appeared that apart from discussing issues, the two editors were perhaps trying to run the nation by proxy, from their adjacent offices along Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, Delhi's Fleet Street.

Apart from editorial restraint, the other main casualty of this shrill campaign was Suman Dubey, Shourie's boss and editor of the *Indian Express*. Dubey resigned after a front page editorial in the paper accused Rajiv Gandhi of being corrupt. Said the editorial: "No prime minister has confirmed the worst allegations and suspicions about his probity as Mr Rajiv Gandhi has by his conduct since June.... The decision of the prime minister to force V.P. Singh out, removes all doubt. Mr Rajiv Gandhi or someone dear to him—dead or living—has received the kickback. He has forced V.P. Singh out... to shield himself."



Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

All those who know Dubey realised that much of what was being published in the *Express* was not his style. Dubey has a cool, detached, laid-back approach, whereas the *Express* campaign employed verbal bludgeon. Though unhappy with some of the articles published, Dubey told INDIA TODAY: "Everything went through me". But did it have his approval? "That's between me and my employer" said Dubey cryptically.

According to *Express* insiders, Dubey sent in his resignation to Goenka, who was in Bombay, the evening before the *Express* carried the editorial labelling Rajiv as corrupt. Dubey's doubts about the paper's shrill line were evident even earlier. Some days earlier, after the paper carried front page signed articles by Soli Sorabjee and Ram Jethmalani, Dubey went around the office asking editorial colleagues what they thought of it. At least two editors told him that the paper had been invaded by outsiders.

Dubey's resignation surprised Goenka, who immediately despatched his famous *consiglieri* S. Gurumurthy to Delhi to reason with Dubey. Gurumurthy spent two days trying to persuade Dubey to reconsider, as did the paper's editorial adviser (and former editor) S. Mulgaokar, but with little success. Dubey proceeded on leave and Mulgaokar flew to Bombay to consult Goenka about a replacement.

Meanwhile, the first charge that the two newspapers attracted was that they had become completely partisan. Commented Prem Shankar Jha, editor of *The Hindustan Times*, Delhi's largest circulated English newspaper: "It is not the job of the press to run such campaigns, because the press then ceases to be a watchdog and becomes a participant in the political (or industrial) battle." Jha only echoed the feelings of numerous other journalists who felt that Shourie and Jain had jumped out of the press-box and joined the political adversaries slugging it out in the arena. Ironically, Jha himself resigned a few days later following differences over editorial policy with owner K.K. Birla. He was the second editor of a major national daily to quit in the same week.

The strong stands taken by Shourie and Jain left their readers a little confused. Only a few months ago, Shourie had accused Zail Singh of playing politics by withholding assent to the Postal Censorship Bill. Jain's turn-around was as dramatic: earlier, he had termed Rajiv as naive, immature and unfit to rule.

Other senior journalists feel that Jain sees himself as a Rajguru to the political system, but Jain dismisses this charge out of hand: "I don't want to be a Rajguru or adviser to anyone. It is my business to think for the country." What turned him into a Rajiv supporter? "Because the country is in peril. I have never subordinated patriotism to journalism," said Jain, indirectly suggesting that others were doing just that.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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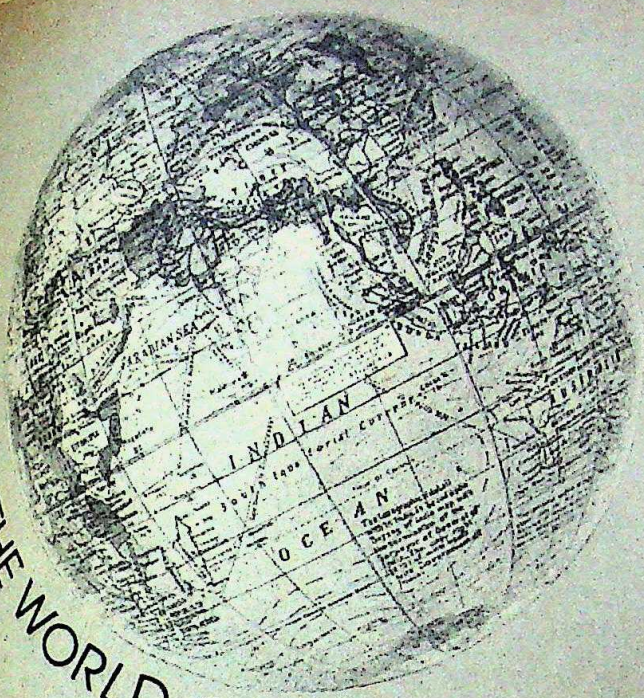
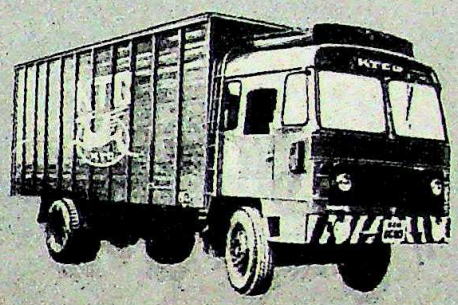


AROUND THE WORLD ONCE IN 3 HOURS



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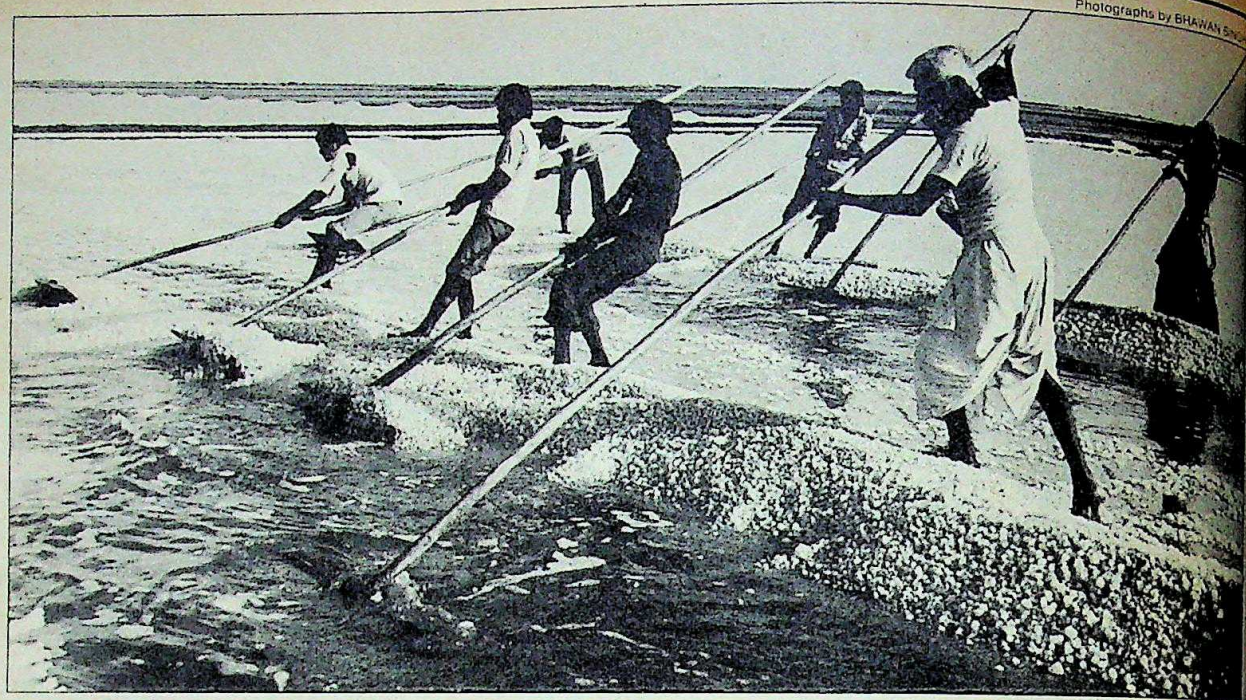

Panning salt in the little Rann of Kutch: back-breaking work

SALT PRODUCTION

The Pans of Misery

THE 2,000 square miles that comprise the Little Rann of Kutch in Gujarat is a vast expanse of arid land. There is nothing to break the monotony, just a hard crust of black clay stretching up to the horizon. Centuries ago, the Little Rann was part of the sea until an earthquake turned the sea bed into a sprawling desert. About 40 feet below the crust, however, is a lake of brine, concentrated enough to produce salt, on which the economy of the area has kept afloat.

The salt producers of the Little Rann were once proud symbols of Gujarat's highly successful cooperative system, able to earn thousands of rupees for their half-yearly toil. Today, the wheel has turned, transforming them into embarrassing symbols of its limitations.

The irony is that the economics of salt production make it an ideal venture for village cooperatives. The water is brought to the surface by diesel pumps and spread out in salt pans. Each pan produces about 400 tonnes of salt and with an average family unit of five working on two pans, it means a production of 800 tonnes in the normal six-month season. But the rate of purchase is measly: 800 tonnes of salt at retail stage (60 paise per kg) would be worth Rs 4.8 lakh: instead, workers are paid as little as Rs 16,000 (2 paise per kg). According to estimates of salt cooperatives in Kharaghoda, a local centre, after deducting expenses, each member of a family of five earns less than Rs 75 per month. This, after putting in an average of 10 hours a day, seven days a week.

The tragedy is common enough. The workers are exploited by avaricious traders for whom the financial benefits are enormous. Salt extraction needs an investment of a few thousand rupees by the workers. The major expenditure goes into the pump set, diesel and engine oil. Since the poor workers lack the capital and because not every well that is dug produces brine, the traders flock to the area as soon as the salt season starts and buy the salt even before it is produced—at their own price, of course.

The palatial houses of salt merchants in Surendranagar eloquently underline the high profit margins in the one-sided trade. Though the buying rate of salt from the workers averages to around Rs 20 per tonne, it is sold on the open market at a cost of Rs 400 per tonne. Taking into account the additional cost of transportation at about Rs 90 per tonne, the traders make a profit of around 300 per cent. And since the salt is made and sold in the form of crystals, there are no overheads incurred in processing the salt either.

So exploitative is the situation that workers have now reached the point where they actually have to spend more than what they earn. Ramsinh Bhimani spent over Rs 5,000 digging for brine, and struck lucky only on the thirteenth well. After six months of toil, Bhimani sold the salt to traders at the rate of Rs 25 per tonne—or 2.5 paise per kg. With the price of common salt in the retail market about 60 paise per kg, the substantial profits are obviously being appropriated by the traders.

Says Devkaran Patadia, who had just sold one tonne of salt at the measly price of Rs 21: "When we leave the desert after the season is over, we will only have our clothes left to carry back with us." Despite the existence of salt cooperatives, the workers have no marketing infrastructure. Neither do they have the financial liquidity to hire trucks to transport the salt to railway lines or to store it in godowns till wagons are allotted. Hamstrung by ignorance, they are unable to fight the traders in any way. Technically, the Minimum Wages Act cannot be enforced because being shareholders of salt cooperatives, they are looked upon as owners.

The traders display not the slightest qualm at the condition of the workers.

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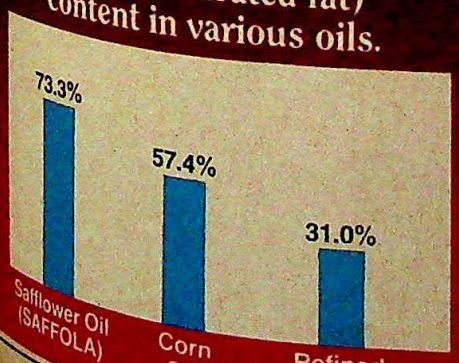

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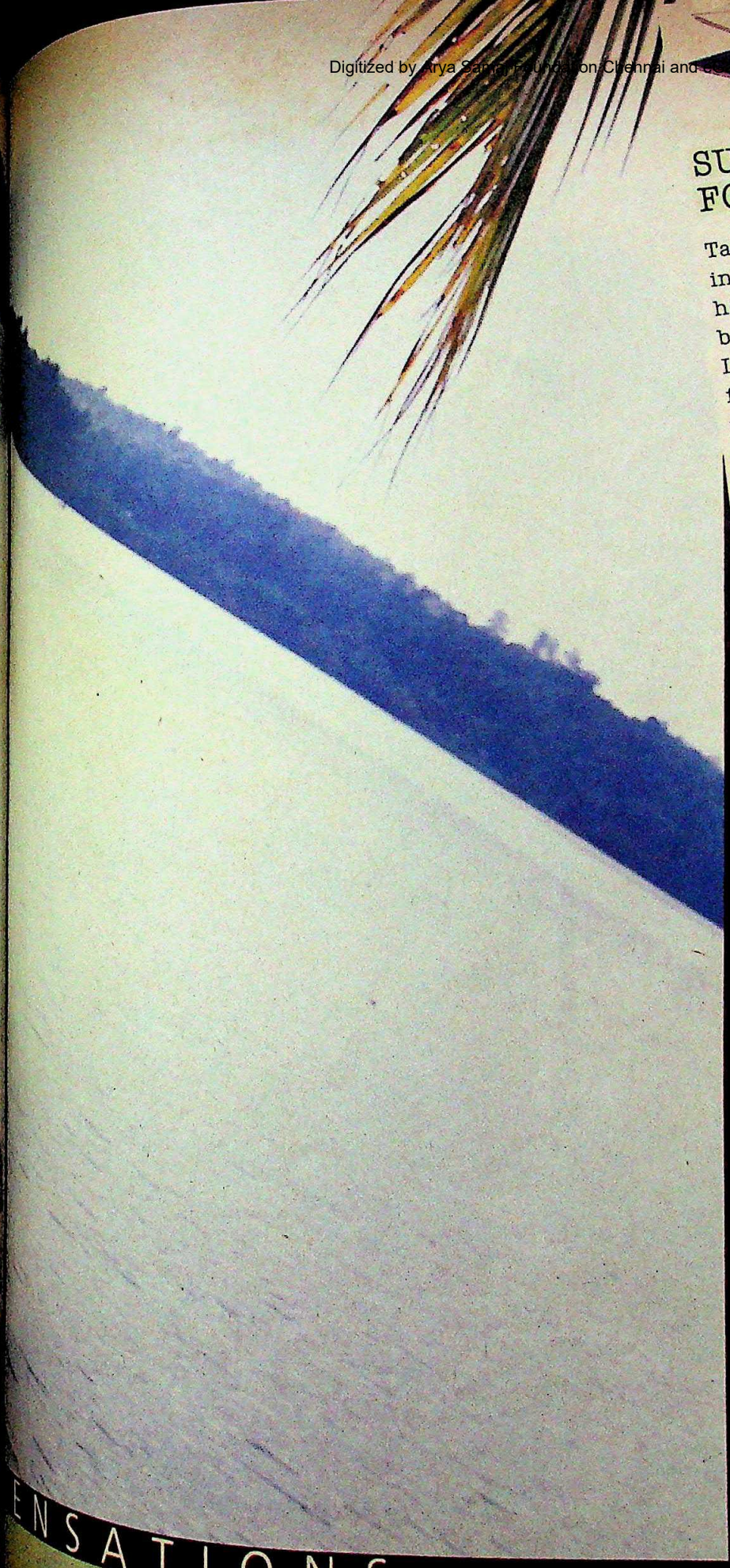

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"66.66% gave excellent and 33.33% gave good results with complete disappearance of dandruff in all cases and nearly cent per cent stoppage of fall of hair...So, success rate with Keo-Karpin Hair Vitalizer may be stated to be cent per cent."

Indian Medical Gazette 118 223 (1984)

"I use it because it did stop his hair loss."

The proven scientific way to prevent hair loss.

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CLARION C-DM-H-2

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Extracted salt being dumped in a heap: sheer exploitation

by Dinesh Patel, a trader from Patdi in Surendranagar district, retorts: "How can anyone expect us to be bothered about the plight of the workers? We know that they are living an inhuman existence but the trading community is concerned only about business."

The workers suffer the constant threat of financial ruination in case the traders get together and decide not to purchase salt. The main salt trader in the area, Ramkrishna Murari Aggarwal, says that he is doing the workers a favour by advancing them money as the banks will not touch them. He adds that paying remunerative prices will not help as "the workers will squander it away".

Despite the exploitation they are forced to endure, the salt workers continue to live and work in the Little Rann year after year. They feel they are fated to live and die in the desert. "What else can we do?" asks Dhiru Siva, who has been working in the pans for the past eight years: "There are no jobs available."

Gujarat provides over 60 per cent of the country's annual salt production of 100 lakh tonnes, making it by far the largest producer in India. Its net sales provide a salt cess of Rs 80 lakh to the state Government and Rs 122 lakh to the Central Government every year. Principally, this amount is supposed to be spent on improving the industry and the lives of the people who work in it. That nothing of the kind has been achieved is indicative of the insensitive attitude of the state Government. Admits Surendranagar Collector Kailash Nathan: "No systematic planning has ever been done at the district level on how the salt cess should be fruitfully used. It should primarily be used to improve the living conditions of the salt workers and lift them out of a degrading existence."

On March 12, a group of workers re-enacted the Dandi March in Ahmedabad when they marched from Sabarmati Ashram to the Circuit House to hand over a memorandum to Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary. Among the marchers was Bhupat Desai, who had also taken part in the 1930 salt satyagraha. But this time, he did so knowing that there was very little hope of success. He was facing a far more formidable enemy—his own countrymen.

—RAMESH MENON
in the Little Rann of Kutch

A couple at work: bound together in the salt trap

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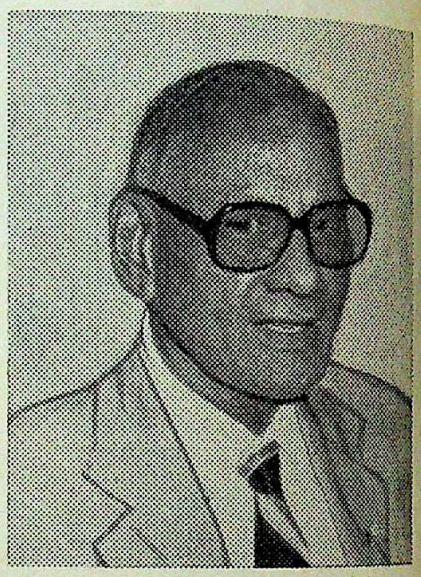

Mr K V Srinivasan, Chairman

Speech delivered by Mr K V Srinivasan, Chairman, presiding over the Thirtyseventh Annual General Meeting of the Company held on Tuesday the 31st March 1987.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

I have the pleasure and privilege of welcoming you all to our Annual General Meeting.

2. May I assure you that the Board and I share with you fully your disappointment in the results for the year 1985-86, especially after the promising start and the extremely satisfactory manner in which the Standard-2000 production was progressing. There is no doubt that had it not been for the unfortunate happenings, our original production targets would have certainly been met, which would have resulted in very satisfactory fiscal results.

3. Hardened fighters that we are, we have not succumbed to these pressures. I am delighted to inform you that the five cars which were picked up at random by the VRDE from our assembly line, as part of the testing procedure stipulated by the Government of India, have all passed the mandatory fuel efficiency tests which were conducted in Ahmednagar between the 17th and 29th of March'87.

4. What does this prove? (1) That at no point of time has Standard Motors indulged in any fraud to obtain the fuel efficiency certificate. (2) The confidence and faith which every employee of Standard Motors has in the product as well as the programme of indigenisation chalked out by the Company, a confidence which has been recently, very uniquely expressed by the guarantees which were readily given to the bank, an act which has perhaps no precedent in Indian industrial relations.

5. With these inherent strengths we face the future with confidence and I can assure you that no stone will be left unturned to put the Company back in a sound financial position. In this task, I look forward to the continued support of all the executives, staff, workers and the Union, the suppliers, financial institutions, bankers, customers, the State and the Central Governments, a support which has never been lacking in the past, for which we are always grateful.

NOTE: This does not purport to be the record of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

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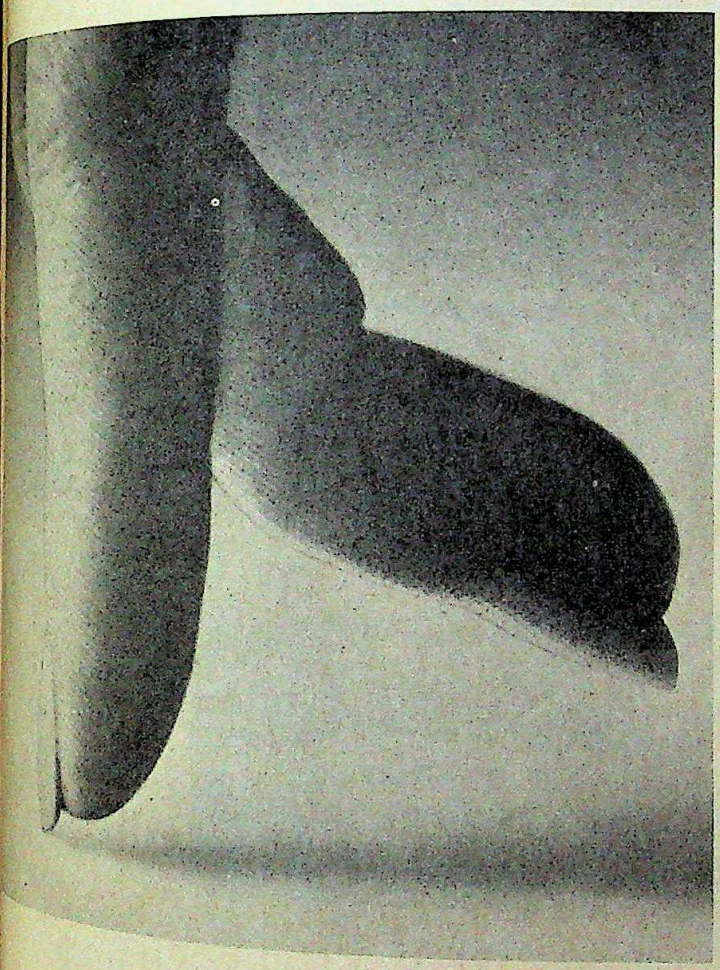
CHANCES ARE WE HAVE TOUCHED YOUR LIFE

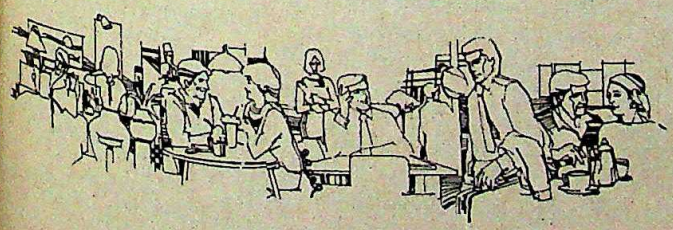


AND CHANCES ARE, YOU'RE STILL UNAWARE.

Chances are we are in touch with you. Every moment. In the house you live in. The car you travel in. Or the train you take. The utensils you cook in or the plate you use. Or in the bulb that gives you light. All these daily necessities require—in some form or the other—steel, cement, metals, chemicals, petrochemicals, glass, aluminium...which cannot be produced without refractories. In any industrial process where high temperatures are required, we are vital and the higher the temperature, the better we feel!

TATA Refractories—a new name with decades of expertise in quality refractories—plays a significant role in the industrial growth of the country; even when you touch a flower, you touch us unknowingly. Because we contribute towards the production of fertilizers too! TATA Refractories—touching the life of the common man, someone like you, silently.

Working our way into your life, silently.



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AHMEDABAD

The Endless Wait

SUGRABIBI GHORI, 35, sits patiently in one corner of a congested ward in an Ahmedabad municipal hospital. Each day, patients and hospital staff pass her by without so much as a glance. For them, the motionless woman has become a sight as familiar as a hospital bed. For her, the daily vigil at the bedside of her husband, Kasam Ghori, 49, has also become something of a meaningless ritual. Yet, the grubby corner in an Ahmedabad hospital seems to wear a near-religious aura. It has become a private shrine to Hope. Endless Hope. Each day, she appears by his bedside hoping that today will be the day when he awakens. Sugrabibi's husband has been in a coma for 13 years.

She still vividly remembers that bright summer morning in March 1974, when Kasam bid her and their four children goodbye before rushing off to the fire brigade headquarters, where he worked as a fireman. Little did the family realise that their closely knit world, dominated by the energetic, jovial Kasam, was destined to be reduced to a never-ending nightmare.

Later that day, a major fire broke out in the Devki Nandan Market in Ahmedabad. Kasam was acknowledged as one of the best fire-fighters in the force, and true to his reputation he did not hesitate to rush into the blazing inferno. But the building was over a century old and the entire structure collapsed. A heavy wooden beam struck Kasam on the head. At the end of the ordeal, he was pulled out of the rubble and was his usual self, joking and laughing in spite of the excruciating pain that was shooting through his left arm. His colleagues cheered him as he was being wheeled into the operation theatre at the V.S. Hospital to get his arm operated. However, little did they realise that he would not regain consciousness again.

On the operation table, Kasam suffered a cardiac arrest, but was revived by doctors. After the operation, anxious relatives waited by his bedside for the effect of anaesthesia to wear off. But it did not. Sugrabibi was terrified. For three full days she dared not go near his bed. He was to wake up a few hours after the operation. But hours stretched into unending days, weeks, months, years—and now it has been over 13 years. However, even today, Sugrabibi remains hopeful that one day her husband will wake up and walk home with her.

The doctors, nurses and ward boys silently sympathise with her for they have seen her everyday tirelessly tending her husband as few would do in such circumstances. There seems to be such an inexplicable bond between them. She feeds him milk and fruit juices intravenously, makes his bed, changes his clothes and waits on him. Sugrabibi even intravenously feeds him some tea early in the morning—a practice that was established ever since they were married. "He used to love tea," she reminisces. Though he has been lying supine all these years, he does not have a single bed sore—proof of her dedication. Every few hours, she powders him and changes his posture. "I will not leave his bedside," she says, choking on the words.

Down the years, her tears have dried up. Her tragedy does not make her weep and she does not indulge in self pity. She knows that if she stops the intravenous feeding, he will die a painless death. But, he has a right to live, she says, and stresses that she would never desert him even if it took another decade of her life living in a hospital ward. Back in her tiny one-room kitchen house in Jamalpur, which is full of his memories, live three of their five children struggling to run the house.

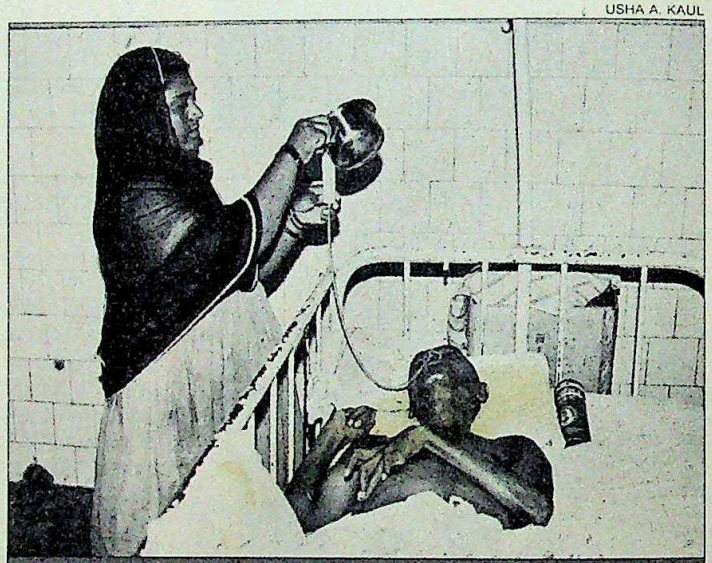
So much has happened ever since Kasam went into a coma. Siraj, now 13, makes at least one trip to the hospital daily. He has never been able to talk to his father and this hurts him the most. He is not sure of whether his father will ever recover and feels that one of the greatest joys of life is to walk down the road with his father as all his friends do. He does not study as hard as he should, but Sugrabibi never berates him. "I can't," she says, underlining that Siraj lost out not only on what it meant to have a father, but also on having the attention of a mother as she had been in hospital ever since he was born. Other things happened too—which would have been great joyous moments for Kasam. Two daughters, Ruksana, 22, and Salma, 20, have been married and two months ago, Kasam, without his knowledge, has become a grandfather.

In many ways, the life of the entire family revolves around his hospital bed. At least twice a month, Salma travels to Ahmedabad from Himmatnagar, 80 km away, where she presently lives with her husband. She comes just to see her father.

Aashiana Bano, 15, the third daughter has dropped out of school after studying till the seventh standard as someone had to cook and run the house with the mother in the hospital.

For them, time seems paralysed.

USHA A. KAUL



Sugrabibi feeds Kasam: tenacity and toil

For Sugrabibi, the daily vigil by her husband's bedside has become something of a meaningless ritual. But there is always eternal hope.

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GOOD TASTE IS ALWAYS THE CONNOISSEUR'S HALLMARK

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IPS

Historic Win

IF glasses clinked and moustaches twirled upwards in the Indian Police Service (IPS) last fortnight, it was understandable. They had won a crucial match with the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) to decide "who is the boss". This time the issue at stake was whether the home secretary—the head of the department which includes the police force—was superior to the police chief and thereby authorised to write his annual confidential report.

Having lost the first game in the Punjab and Haryana High Court, the police made a come-back in the second game when the division bench of the same court ruled in their favour. Finally last fortnight, the match was clinched when the Supreme Court dismissed a special leave petition by the State of Haryana to rule that the home secretary was not empowered to write the confidential report of the inspector general of police. "The secretary of the Home Department is the head of the Home Department...but merely because he has to conduct the business, on behalf of the Government, of the police department, he does not thereby become the head of the police department," the judgement read, and specified that the rules of the All India Service Act clearly indicated that confidential reports can only be written by an authority superior to the official concerned—in this case the inspector general of police. According to the court: "The immediate authority superior to the inspector general of police is the minister in charge of the police department." As such, the judges ruled, only the minister could write the confidential report of the police chief and not the home secretary, who may, however, assist the minister in doing so.

Wadhwa: parting gift

The judgement was received as a landmark for the larger issues it invoked. In clarifying that the home secretary could not be considered the head of the police department just because he was responsible for home affairs, the court was de facto placing the two posts at par. The judgement was read as an endorsement for the police chief to bypass the home secretary and take orders from the minister.

The IPS Central Association called the judgement "historic". Said Gautam Kaul, spokesman for the association: "The judgement recognises the special place which the police department has in the administration of the state. The police will now be accountable directly to the people for all its acts of omission and commission." However, the irrepressible Punjab police chief, Julio Ribeiro, seemed not to care. "As far as I'm concerned I don't care who writes what. I think the best judge is the public—you cannot fool them."

The reaction on the other side of the fence was muted. IAS officers were reluctant to comment. Said Uttar Pradesh Home Secretary Mata Prasad: "It is for us to follow the government rules, whatever they may be." Others were not willing to speak, though IAS feathers were ruffled.

For P.C. Wadhwa, former inspector general of police and respondent in this case, the verdict was a personal victory. Wadhwa fought through the three courts for seven long years against the State of Haryana before the Supreme Court vindicated his stand—a year after he has retired.

The court has also quashed adverse remarks written by the then Haryana home secretary L.D. Kataria in Wadhwa's confidential report in 1980. "The blot on my career stands washed off," beamed a relieved Wadhwa, adding that the judgement was important as "the police, like the judiciary, must be free from bureaucratic influences". The impact, he said, would be felt more in the smaller states, which have a personalised administration.

This is not the first legal victory for Wadhwa. Four times he has moved the judiciary against the service. Three times he has fought legal battles for the police. All seven times he has won. Last fortnight's judgement seems to be his parting salvo on behalf of the IPS. With the state home minister now responsible for both their reports, the new ruling promises to ease much of this tension.

—TANIA MIDHA

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LATE NIGHT FILMS

Midnight Feast

MOST people can't decide which is worse: staying up half the night watching an award-winning film on TV. Or going to sleep and missing it altogether. Ever since Doordarshan decided to assert its adulthood late, late in the night, viewers have been struck with a Hamlet-like dilemma: to see or not to see. Breakfast television was about as exciting as cornflakes, but late night television was something else: it held excitement, mystery, sex, all the pleasures of an after-dinner liqueur. As one viewer said: "At last we can see some of the world's best cinema. Thank you Doordarshan."

The gratitude seemed in order. Twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays Doordarshan set about proving that it was old enough to stay up late. At the very adult hour of 11.30 p.m. came *Arth*, *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, *Ghattashraddha*, *Bhoomika*, films that were manna to the soap-opera numbed viewers. Said Additional Director-General Shiv Sharma: "The nation is maturing, shouldn't we?" Doordarshan had promised that it would screen film classics, and thrilled TV critic Anil Dharker wrote: "What a treasure-house of the world's cinema lies before us, untouched, waiting to be discovered."

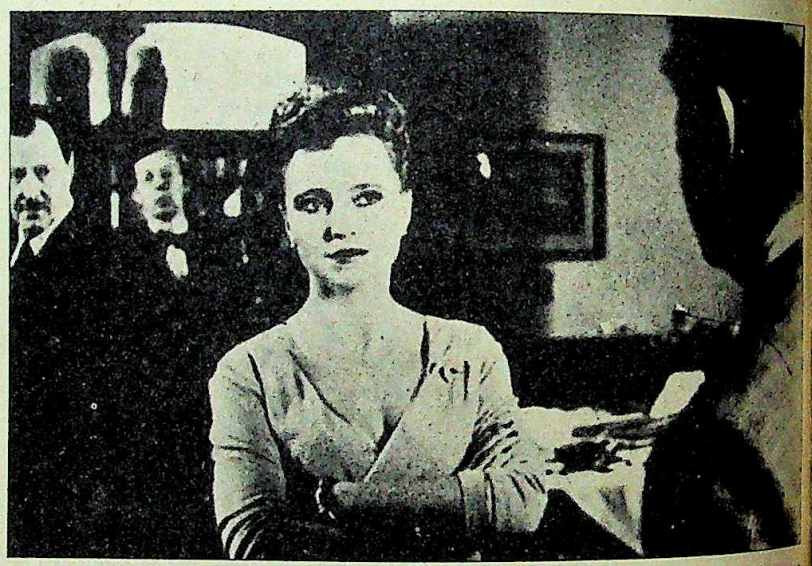
But as it turned out Doordarshan's late-night largesse was not entirely appreciated. The morning after, mothers were too tired to pack their kids off to school. Others fired off letters to newspapers saying that late night viewing had them too exhausted to do anything. "I would have watched every one of these films but not at 11.30," said Iqbal Singh, 35, a garment exporter, "I'm a working man." In Parliament, MPs nodded off to sleep complaining that their night life had been ruined by TV to be rewarded by Rajiv Gandhi's pat reply that they were most welcome to switch it off.

Meanwhile, hundreds of demonstrators surfaced outside Doordarshan Bhawan protesting that this time television had gone too far and showing too much sex would pollute their moral fibre. Presidents of the Mahila and Yuva Janata Morcha were arrested when they led another protest march shouting "Stop cheap films". Instead of the hero Doordarshan thought it would become, it was cast in the role of a villain.

Those who were happy about the films were unhappy about the quality of the prints, and Doordarshan's post-censorship censorship as in the love-scenes of *Arth* and in *Maria Braun* where they never actually show Maria killing her black lover as in the uncensored version. "But banning them is not the answer," said Asha Kapoor, 30, a Delhi housewife, "why should anyone stop true cinema buffs from enjoying these films. We are not kids licking lollipops. Dammit you always have the option not to see." For others, Doordarshan's promise of classics seemed to be simply a promise of whatever films it can get, given its clout abroad and its willingness to dip into its bank balance. But as a viewer said: "Even if they show festival leftovers, it'll still be half a loaf worth watching."

Cities that had not been included in this adult revolution—only six have so far—sulked like children left out of a midnight feast. *The Tribune*'s office in Chandigarh was bombarded with angry phone calls and in other towns, viewers threatened to gherao Doordarshan offices if they were not included in late night transmission. Either way it seemed Doordarshan couldn't win. According to Sharma the Insat goes off at 11 p.m. making it impossible to beam the late night film all over the country. However, centres that have microwave links with Delhi are likely to be invited soon to the show which will include *Yeh Nazdeekiyan*, *Giddh*, *Ek Pal*, *The Iceman Cometh* and *Triple Cross* in the next month. "We never said adult films," said Shiv Sharma reacting to the uproar, "the press did. We simply mean adult perceptions at an adult hour." Doordarshan, it seems, has grown up while the Indian public still has to.

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA



Scenes from *Arth*, *Marriage of Maria Braun*: adult themes

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Your father wanted you to be a lawye
But music was your life.
Whereinafter you said goodbye to the
Companies Act. And delved into the
Beatles. And the Stones.

Much had passed since then.
Madonna entered your life. Along wit
Cyndi Lauper. Prince. Lionel Richie.
And Stevie Wonder.
Tonight, you played the starring role
in 'Grease.' Then, after the show was ove
you sat in your dressing-room.
There was a soft knock on the door.
It was Dad. "You were great," he said,
as he hugged you.

From McDowell

CONTAINS NO FRUIT JUICE OR FRUIT PULP.

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"I think I'll have a Thril," you said.

Enterprise D/McD/15 A

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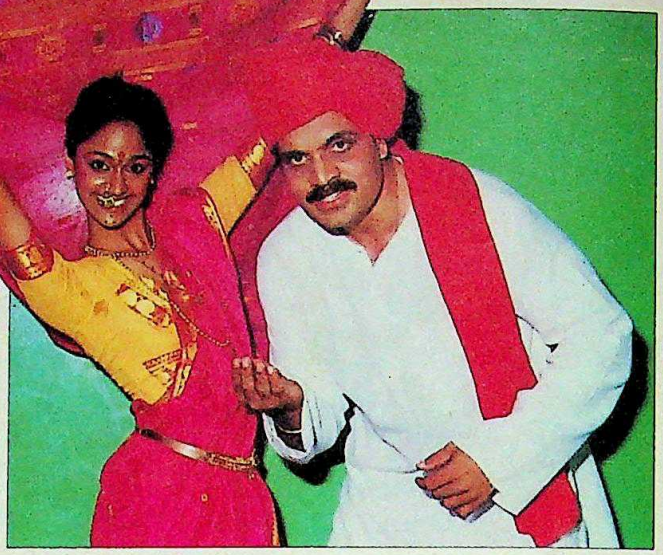
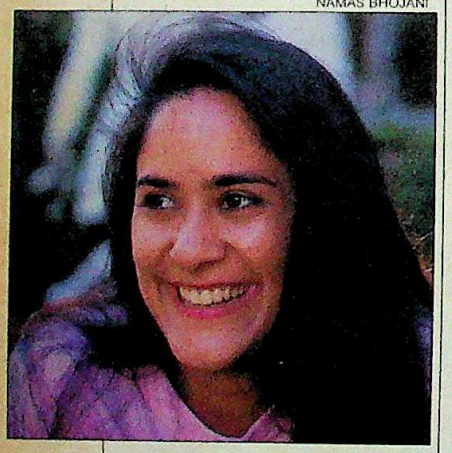
◆ *Bottoms Up*, yes, but a different one each time. And that is what must be pulling in the audience—to watch Bombay's rib-ticklingly topical musical revue, *Bottoms Up*, and pushing it up the popularity charts. In the fastest century in the field of English theatre in India—100 shows in just 15 months.

Behind each bottom is writer, director and co-producer **Bharat Dabholkar**. The entire show is a satirical commentary on day to day events and topics. And success is largely because there is a new butt for the jokes each time. Says Dabholkar: "It's not 100 shows of one *Bottoms Up*. It's one show of 100 *Bottoms Up*."

NAMAS BHOJANI



Dabholkar with co-star Rao



Sakina: tempting role

◆ It was the old order giving way to the new. When mama Madhur Jaffrey tried for a Broadway role and didn't get it, she asked her daughter to have a stab at it. **Sakina Jaffrey**, 23, was more successful. And with Ismail Merchant waiting in the wings, with a plum role in his latest production, the perfect take off for the fledgling is assured.

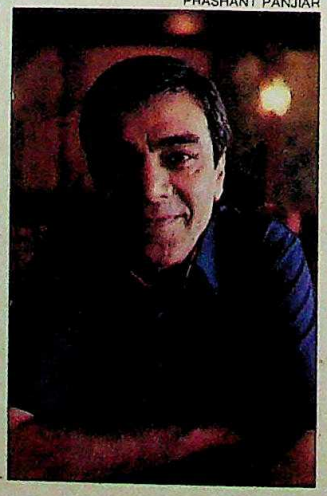
Jaffrey makes her debut in *The Perfect Murder*—an adaptation of H.R.F. Keating's novel with Naseeruddin Shah in the lead role of Inspector Ghote. As the simple sleuth looks for clues, Jaffrey, playing the slinky siren, tries to seduce him down the primrose path—though, with her degree in Chinese, she would make a far more perfect Suzie Wong. She concurs: "The irony of it all is that I speak fluent Chinese, but my Hindi is, well, not exactly great."

◆ With his yen for rice, getting the Japan Prize was only a matter of time. So to Science and Technology Foundation of Japan the riceman cometh—**Dr Gurdev S. Khush**, leader of the International Rice Research Institute team that developed the high-yielding rice variety IR36—to receive his 50 million yen (Rs 42 lakh) award, which he shares with his predecessor, Dr Beachell.

Picking up the grains of rice, a trifle late, Punjab Agricultural University—Dr Khush's alma mater—awarded him an honorary D. Sc. degree three days after the Japanese. He plans to use part of the prize money to institute scholarships for needy students at his alma mater and one for Filipino students. The rest: "I want to use for educating my own four children."

Mohyeddin: filming India

PRASHANT PANJIAR



Dr. Khush: prestigious award

◆ East of Eton can only be Doon. The playing fields of Doon have been the kindergarten for Indian politicians. And now, a half-hour documentary on this little Eden for Adams nestling in the Doon Valley, is being produced by the suave and ebullient **Zia Mohyeddin**, for Britain's Independent Television. East of *Eton*, the producer promises, will capture Dosco culture, past and present, for all those nostalgic about the days of the empire.

Mohyeddin, who left Lahore for London 34 years ago and is still remembered for his portrayal of Dr Aziz in the West End production of *A Passage to India*, was in Delhi last fortnight, to capture on film three aspects of Indian culture—Odissi dance, the folk music of Rajasthan as well as the martial arts of Kerala. The idea, he pointed out, was "to revive the masks from mere museum pieces and transform them into living legends—for the West needs something of this kind."

SIGNPOST

■ **Died:** Music Director **Shankar**, 65, of cardiac arrest in Bombay. The surviving half of the music duo Shankar-Jaikishen, which ruled the waves of Hindi film music in the '50s and '60s, Shankar was well known for his dextrous blending of elements of Indian and western music. Apart from that he enjoyed the reputation of a very accomplished classical musician and tabla player as well.

The partners composed some of the finest music of the period, immensely popular even today. They began their long reign in scoring music in 1947 with Raj Kapoor's *Barsaat* and went on to bring on a thousand sighs with their music in *Aah*, ran wild in *Jungle*, *Awara* and *Shree 420*, and gladdened audience hearts in *Mera Naam Joker*. After Jaikishen's death, however, Shankar slowed down somewhat, though he continued composing music for films until his death. And while he composed solo, he still retained the famous Shankar-Jaikishen banner. Among his most successful solo films scores was the music for the film *Sanyasi*.

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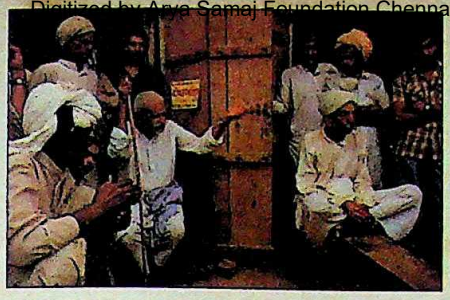
A Risky Gambit

The Centre's sudden move last fortnight to dismiss the Surjit Singh Barnala government and bring the state under President's rule is a political gamble fraught with myriad dangers. An analysis of the Centre's gameplan and the implications.

COVER STORY 30



The Besieged Fortress

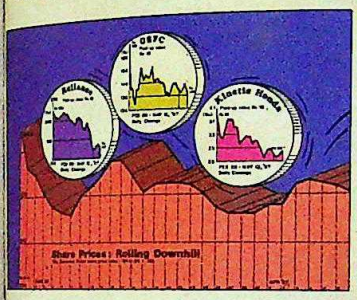
The Assembly election in Haryana, scheduled to be held next month, promises to decide the fate of both Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress(I). With Devi Lal galvanising the opposition parties into action, the battle lines are clearly drawn.

SPECIAL FEATURE 70

A Brash New Culture

The advent of the peppy Maruti has brought out the latent desire for automotive expression in a country used to making do. It has also spawned a new culture that has taken unusual forms and changed driving habits and Indian roads for ever.

LIFESTYLE 96



Heading for Trouble

The stock-market crash and the dramatic drop in Reliance's profits symbolised the problems of industry. With falling industrial production, and serious marketing or profitability problems, Indian business seemed on a downward slope.

SPECIAL REPORT 102

An Indian Summer

This summer, Indians are discovering the world. With package tours making a holiday abroad cheaper in many cases than one in the country, over half a million Indian tourists are heading towards Europe, the US and the Far East. A report.

TOURISM 134

Bringing Down the Curtain

As Doordarshan's most popular serial, *Buniyaad*, entered its final phase, the atmosphere on the sets resembled the break-up of a large joint family. Not one member of the cast has been left unaffected by the experience, including director Ramesh Sippy.

TELEVISION 152

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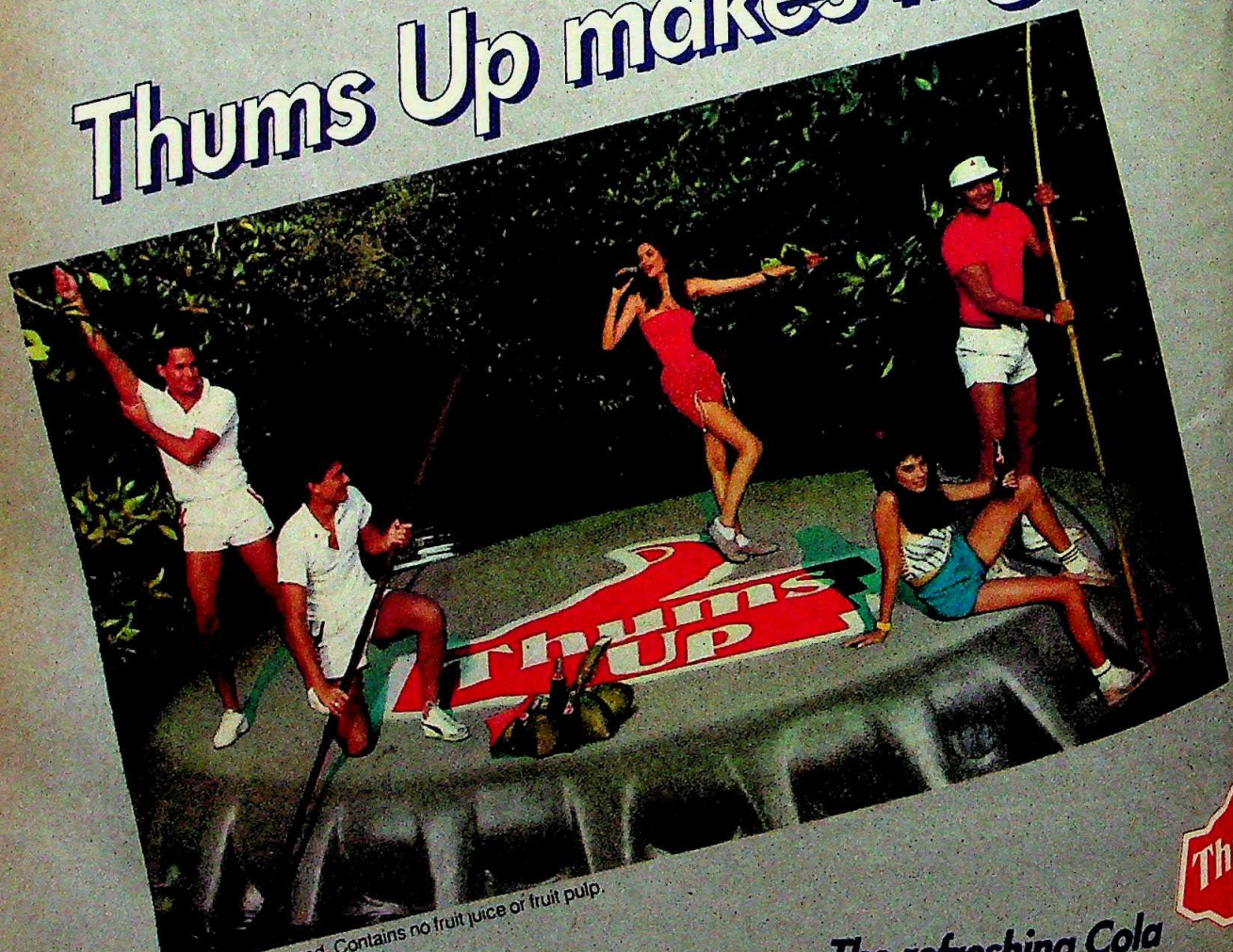

Artificially flavoured. Contains no fruit juice or fruit pulp.

The refreshing Cola

Thums Up

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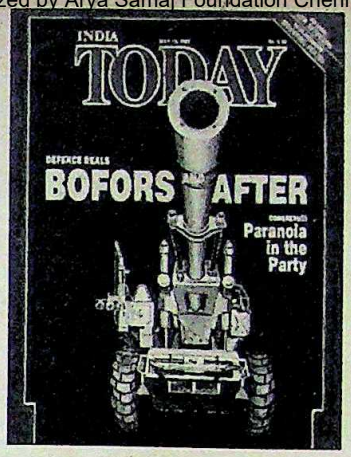

ATTENTION ARMS

Kudos for your cover story on defence deals ("Bofors and After", May 15), in which you have tried to uncover all the indisputably shady details of the Bofors deal and their implications. Rajiv Gandhi has now developed the knack of kicking up one row after another, which continue to damage his already battered reputation. It is only because we do not have a strong, credible opposition that he is still the prime minister.

New Delhi — SUSHIL MEHTANI

■ Your cover story presented adequate evidence that much dust has been raised on the defence arms deal. It is natural for defence agents to make some commission on these deals. But if the good of the country is sacrificed by such capitalistic tendencies, then it becomes cause for concern.

Calcutta — DR PRAHLAD GHOSH

KILLING FIELDS

The tragic stories of unfortunate victims made the article on traffic accidents all the more lucid ("Death on the Roads", May 15). The dilapidated state of the streets and the breaking of speed limits at night by drunken drivers of heavy vehicles are at the root of this problem. But above all, road hogs are responsible for accidents. Only harsh sentences on guilty drivers will stop the roads from becoming pools of blood.

Patna — ASHUTOSH GUPTA

CEREBRAL CONCERN

The plight of Sugrabibi and her family in Ahmedabad has been well brought out ("The Endless Wait", May 15). Cerebral damage remains an area where medical science has been unable to achieve much. However, tea, fruit juice and milk are never fed intravenously. These are given via the 'Ryles tube', which is passed through the nose to the stomach, as shown in your photograph.

Delhi — DR R. GUPTA

FUN FARE

With regard to your piece on late night films on television, ("Midnight Feast", May 15) we are obliged to Doordarshan for providing us the opportunity to view such acclaimed films, especially at a time when we have nothing else to distract us. And those who object to the moral standards of these adult films would do well to heed the prime minister's suggestion to switch off their sets.

Meerut — SARVESHWAR CHATURVEDI

VOX POPULI

Your cover story ("The Taming of V.P. Singh", April 30) is a sad commentary on the power games our politicians play and how the rules have degenerated into skull-duggery. There is no denying that Rajiv Gandhi has shown who the boss is but he has, in the process, also unwittingly proved who the real Mr Clean is.

Amritsar — R.C. KHANNA

■ Vox populi Singh—that is the most appropriate verbal tribute to that messiah of honesty. He may pass into political oblivion but a whole generation is proud of him. You presented a candid picture of the political jumble from which Singh has emerged untainted.

Bangalore — SAMEEN

■ V.P. Singh's triumphant retreat from the Union Cabinet has, far from subduing this illustrious politician, boosted his public image as an upright and unyielding leader. His ouster demonstrates the sad truth that honesty never pays in the ruling party.

Vadodara — AMIT DHOLAKIA

■ The cartoon was simply superb. Mr Clean and his government have lost their only white sheep in the set-up.

Ahmedabad — V. RANGANATHAN

■ Your cartoon, which shows an analogy between the Catholic Pope being the shepherd of his flock and Rajiv Gandhi being the shepherd of his "black" sheep, is an insult to the Catholics of this country.

Bangalore — DR ALOMA LOBO

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■ It became clear that V.P. Singh's days in the Union Cabinet were numbered when he was shifted from finance to defence. He was too clean for even 'Mr Clean's liking. What crime did he commit when he hired Fairfax to look into unaccounted wealth of Indians abroad? If there was nothing to hide, why did Congressmen make such a hullabaloo when he ordered an inquiry into the defence deal? Far from being 'overambitious' and 'scheming', he was too simple, honest and principled to be a politician.

Bokaro — SMITA R. GUREJA

UNCONVINCING STAND

In your interview with Amitabh Bachchan ("I have been tainted for life", April 30), the superstar-turned-politician's famous baritone had a clear sycophantic pitch. By saying: "I'll leave politics if he (Rajiv) ever did," he has shown what a superficial view of democracy he seems to hold.

Muzaffarpur — MANISH KASHYAP

■ The interview with Amitabh Bachchan has brought out much more than meets the eye. Though the questions were forthright and probing, Amitabh's answers leave the reader to draw his own conclusions.

New Delhi — SHANKAR

■ In the light of the recent political scandals, Amitabh Bachchan has certainly come under a dark cloud. His replies to your probing queries are unconvincing and hardly to the point. Denying involvement in murky affairs comes easily to today's film stars. Amitabh has learnt the art of 'whitewashing' himself only too well.

New Delhi — C.S. NAGESH KUMAR

POLITICAL PLOY

Your forceful editorial ("Diversionary Tactics", April 30) rightly points to the penchant of the Central Government for appointing commissions that fail to reveal anything. The appointment of the Thakkar Commission to inquire into the Fairfax episode is the latest political ploy used by the Government to buy time till the controversies die down.

Ahmedabad — M.V. RAVINDRAN

■ The Commission of Inquiry Act is being misused by the Government to delay disclosures on issues on which it stands with its back to the wall. Such commissions do not complete their work on time and are a complete waste of public money. And the recent amendment, which empowers the Government to withhold a report if it is 'in the public interest', makes such commissions absolutely meaningless.

Bangalore — P. VENKATESH

MUSIC MAESTRO

Your story on the enterprising Gulshan Arora ("A Supersuccess Story", April 30) shows that he has definitely left the established giants of the industry far behind not only in presenting new products, but also with regard to popular oldies. Despite this, however, connoisseurs like us appreciate the old artistes, whereas Arora's new 'version recordings' kill the original and immortal voices.

Calcutta — DHRUBA MAITRA

OLD ANTIDOTE

In your article on Leucoderma ("Cuban Cure", April 30) the antidote that is being referred is described as "an extract of placenta". We wish to inform you that Placentrex, a placental extract, has been manufactured and marketed by us for the past 15 years in India. Indian doctors contacted by us are aware of this antidote. An article in this connection appeared in *Jugantar*, a Bengali daily, on January 24, 1985. In this light, your claims of the new 'Cuban cure' and 'wonder drug' are somewhat misplaced.

Calcutta — K.P. MUNDHRA, *marketing manager, Albert David Ltd*

HOUSING HARDSHIP

Your report on Bombay's living problems ("White-Collar Slum Dwellers", April 30) should enlighten the educated unemployed who see Bombay only as an El Dorado. The exodus of the working class into this dream city may seem inevitable indeed, but this article might just convince them of the hardships of finding any decent kind of accommodation.

Pune — RAJNIKANT KAVOORI

■ Your special feature focuses on a significant problem. Indeed, it's impossible to get a flat in the major cities unless one has black money. The only way out of this predicament is for the Government to provide some facilities to these slum colonies.

Motihari, Bihar — ANIMESH KUMAR

ENGAGING EPIC

Despite all the criticism about Ramanand Sagar's TV serial Ramayan ("Divine Sensation", April 30), picturising mythology is no easy task and judging from the quality of the serial, it deserves praise. Though Hindi serials are often unwelcome down south, Ramayan is very popular, perhaps because the epic is well-known and delightfully portrayed.

New Delhi — T.M. SUNDARARAMAN

TREASURE TROVE

Your report on the Hardayal Municipal Library is timely ("History Lesson", April 30), as it focuses attention on the imperative need to preserve this treasury of rare manuscripts and publications. The library needs financial assistance from all sources and its maintenance cannot be left to the scarce funds of the municipal corporation.

New Delhi — BRAHM D. GUPTA

STYLISH SUMMARY

Your new column on the fortnight that was ("The Ides of April", April 30), to summarise the main events is a welcome idea. The literary style was unusual. Purveying the events, one is left wondering how many Caesars are going to be knifed by how many Brutuses?

Bangalore — T.S. SHANKARAN

REALISTIC HUMOUR

The three-month prison sentence for *Ananda Vikatan* Editor S. Balasubramaniam, for publishing a cartoon ("Arresting Affair", April 30) was unfair and an assault on the freedom of the press. Cartoons that try to portray real life should not be punished because they go beyond being just funny.

Dharwad — VISHWESHWAR BHAT

ALARMING ISSUE

The mixed Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue ("Communal Confrontation", April 30) should not be allowed to linger on. The show of strength in Delhi and Ayodhya by both communities is sufficient indication of a devastating confrontation. The Centre should learn a lesson from Punjab and take the initiative to solve the problem since the state Government does not seem to have the ability to find an amicable solution.

Meerut — MASOOD AKHTAR

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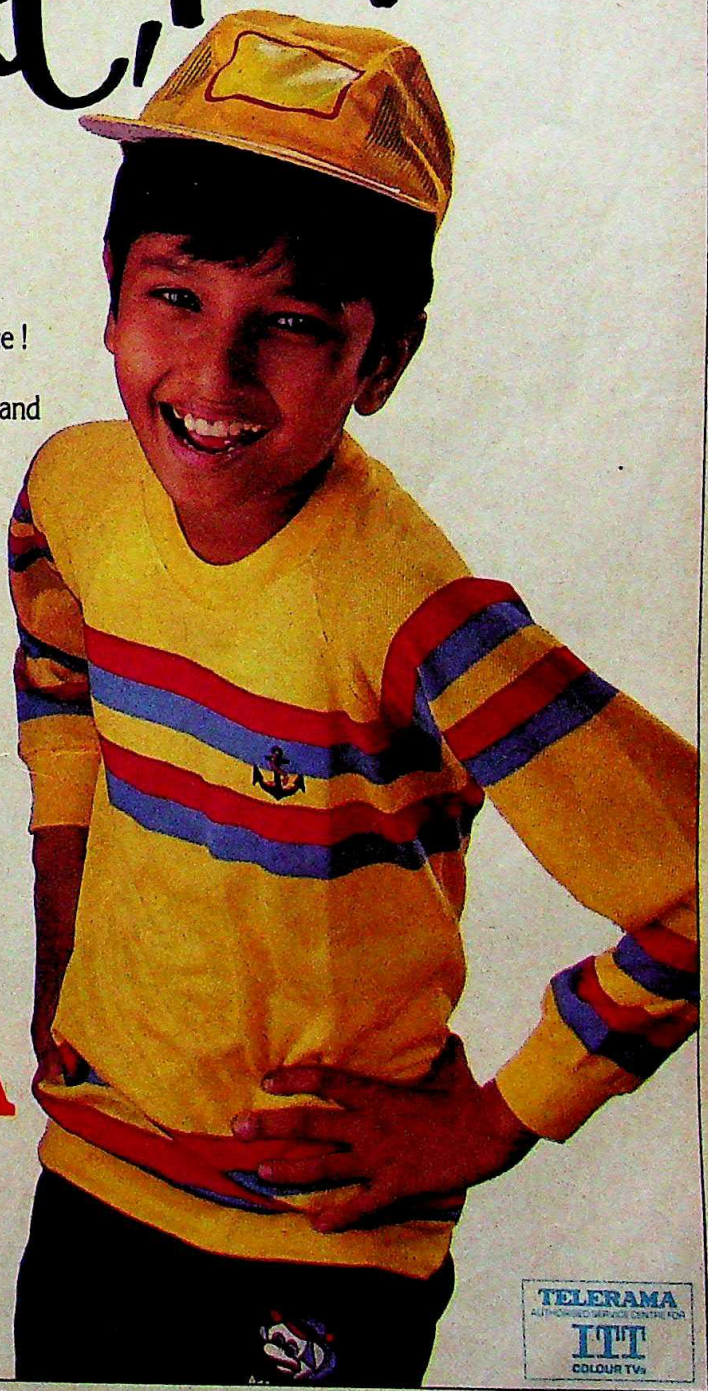

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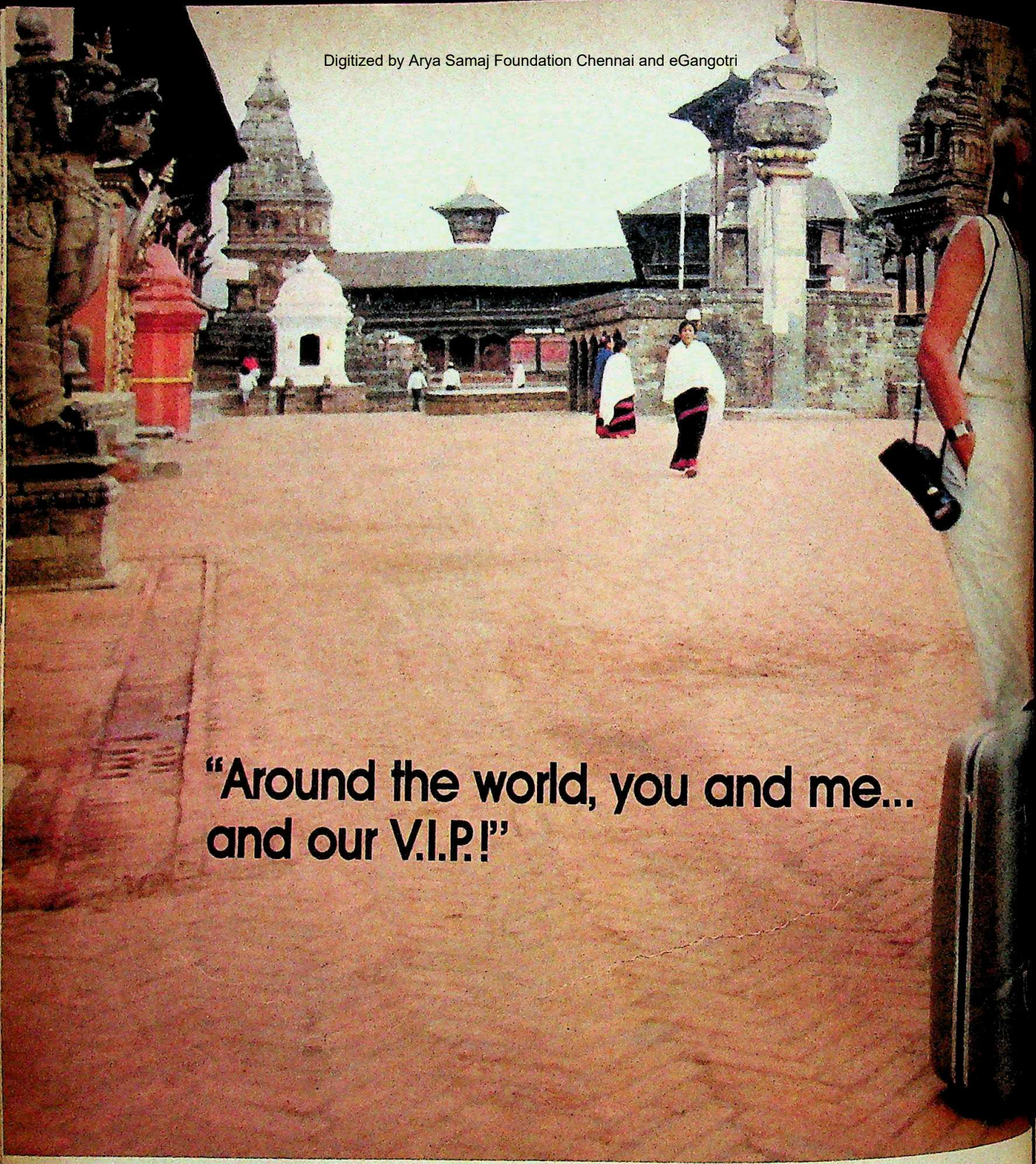

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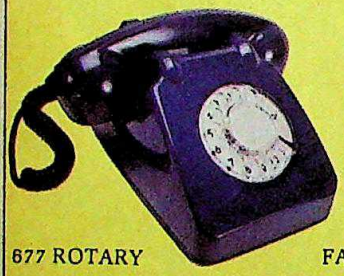

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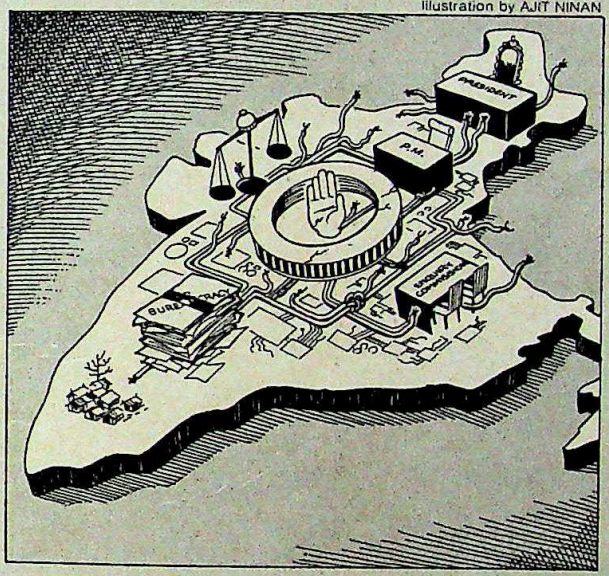
Disintegrated Circuits

THE steady decline of national institutions has been a recurring tune played by the more pessimistic observers of the Indian scene. And the events of the recent weeks can only have served to buttress this depressing theme. Whether it is the President, prime minister, other constitutional functionaries or even non-governmental institutions like the press, there suddenly seem to be no standards of behaviour, no norms of conduct, no conventions that are followed as hallowed precedents. In such circumstances, the institutions of state must themselves come under great strain, and the complex web of checks and balances that makes for a working democracy begins to look like a disintegrated circuit.

At the highest level, both the President and the prime minister have embarked on courses of action that test the Constitution. The amazing interpretation from Rashtrapati Bhavan—that the President can dismiss a prime minister who enjoys an overwhelming majority in the Lok Sabha—is of a piece with Rajiv Gandhi allowing his personal predilections to come in the way of discharging his constitutional duty of keeping the President informed of events. Inevitably, this has ended up now with both the President and the prime minister taking rigid positions on their respective powers and responsibilities. No one knows as yet what effect this will ultimately have on the Constitution itself, on future relations between the head of state and head of government, and indeed on the Congress(I)'s choice of its next presidential candidate.

Illustration by AJIT NINAN



A short distance away from this degrading action, Parliament sees endless pandemonium and repeated walkouts, with a 'no confidence' motion against even the speaker of the Lok Sabha—for only the second time in over 35 years. The treasury benches can do little other than thump their desks, while no one in the Congress(I) seems to find anything amiss in speaker after speaker from the party roundly criticising in Parliament the actions of V.P. Singh as a leading light of the Congress(I) Government. As for the Opposition, it is as guilty as the ruling party in failing to attend crucial debates, so that a vital piece of legislation (on mail censorship) is voted with just 20 MPs in the House. In a fundamental sense, Parliament is quite simply non-functional.

The rot goes deeper. In the states, for instance, cabinet ministers are publicly named for their links with terrorists, or engage in public duels with police chiefs. Yet the show goes on, as though little is amiss. There is a diminishing faith in the Government's investigating agencies: raids never seem to be ordered against those currently in favour, and where investigations have been carried out there is no follow-up action. The investigating agencies are either doing hatchet jobs against those out of favour, or have their top-rung officials summarily removed from office when they take their jobs too seriously.

Fortunately, there is no more talk of fostering a committed bureaucracy, and it has been some time since the last protest resignation from the Supreme Court because of a supersession took place. Nevertheless, judicial appointments do not seem beyond question, even as the entire system of dispensing justice creaks under the weight of a backlog of cases and of corruption. As for commissions of inquiry, no one seems to take them seriously any more. Their reports are either not published, or when published do not find wide acceptance. In the bureaucracy, people are dismissed at whim, or given extensions of service despite a clear-cut decision not to allow extensions. The exceptions to this rule start in the Prime Minister's Secretariat, and now extend into the army, where a sudden spree of extensions to senior generals must have upset the most structured of organisations.

The press has rightly come under fire for its own failings, with editors becoming increasingly partisan and taking sides, or switching sides with an ease that would do credit to the *aya Rams* and *gaya Rams* of politics. For good measure, a spate of editors' resignations throws up the question once again of who in the media really enjoys the freedom of the journalistic pen.

This list can go on. The political parties—supposedly standard-bearers of democracy—have no internal democracy of their own and are by and large unable to hold organisational elections. Credibility in the system as a whole has been eroded to the point where the public is prepared to believe that people in positions of power or influence have illegal Swiss bank accounts and can, as a result, be blackmailed from abroad. After all the talk of a cleansing of public life, this must come as the biggest shock of all.

The reasons for the spreading malaise lie in disparate factors, and partly in the unusual events of the past few months. But the real test of any system is in unusual times, and there can be little disputing the fact that several people in public life have not lived up to the responsibilities of their office. Two years ago, Rajiv Gandhi had himself referred to the decline of national institutions, and said that nurturing them would be one of his priorities. He could take credit for some actions on this score, but he has also personally contributed to the problem. If a solution were to be sought, it can only lie with the people who are charged with upholding conventions, setting themselves high standards of behaviour and rebuilding, step by systematic step, a crumbling faith in institutions that may themselves crumble if strained any further.

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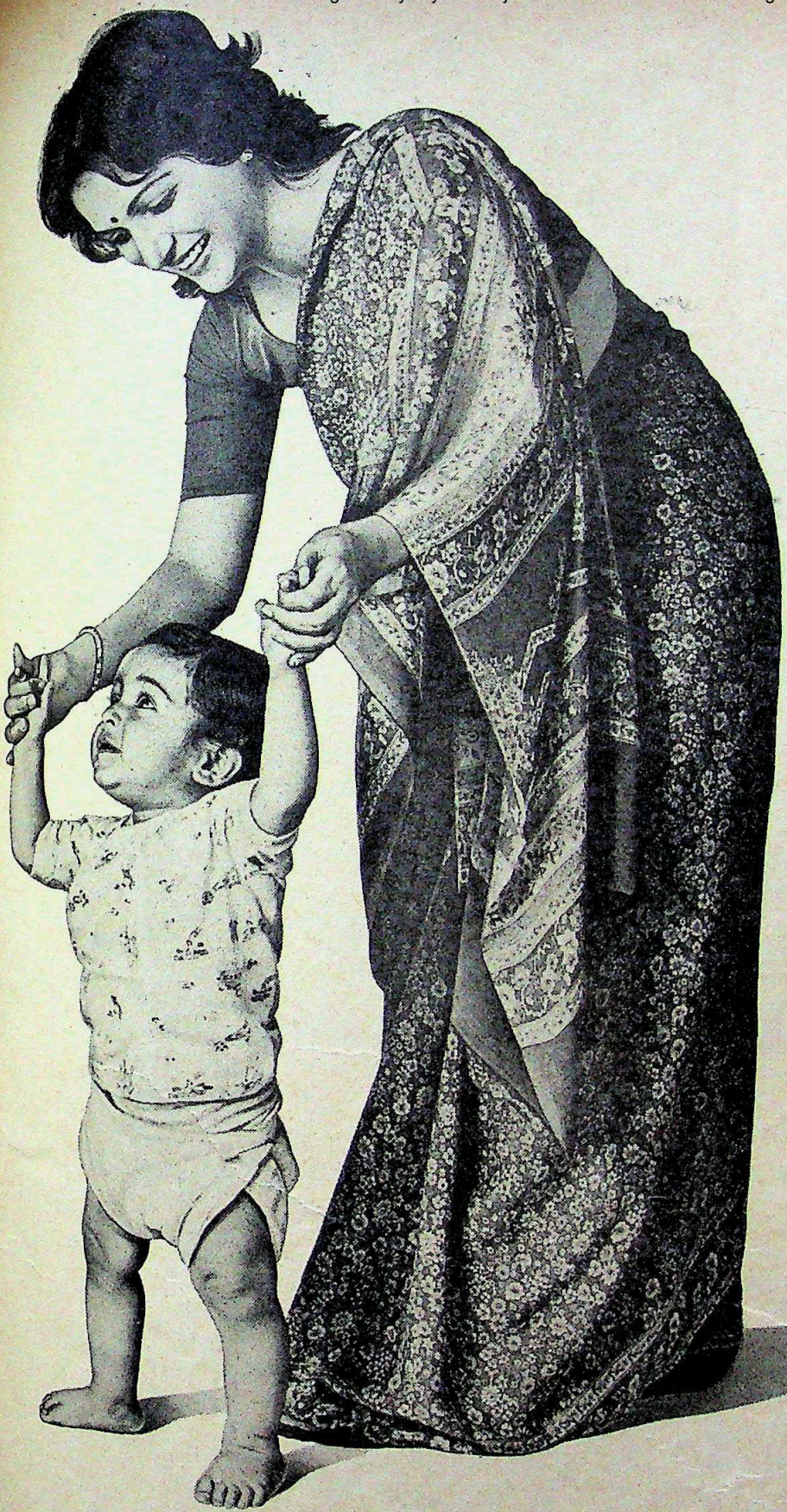

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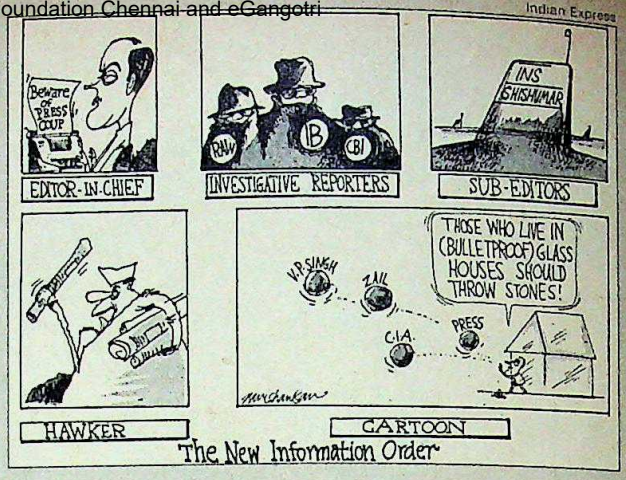

- *No one comes above Parliament. All are creatures of the Constitution.*
  ■ RAJIV GANDHI quoted in *Indian Express*

- *V.P. Singh is not honest enough.... Why should he be afraid of resigning from the Congress(I) and telling about the misdeeds and corruption of the Rajiv Government?* ■ CHANDRA SHEKHAR, Janata Party president, in *Indian Express*

- *He (V.P. Singh) is nothing but a CIA agent.... You people in the media have built him up. But he is nothing. Absolutely nothing!*
  ■ KALPNATH RAI in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

- *I will hit back in this fight. I am not a spineless person.... I've been driven into a corner.* ■ V.P. SINGH at a meeting of the Uttar Pradesh Congress(I) Executive

- *They (Bansi Lal and Bhajan Lal) are selected chief ministers, not elected chief ministers. Both are puppets of Rajiv Gandhi.* ■ DEVI LAL in *Sunday Mail*

- *I don't know what purpose they (Gorkha militants) would serve by procuring arms and training themselves up in the jungles like mad men.*
  ■ SUBHAS GHISING in *Sunday*

- *Rajiv Gandhi is in the same position as I am.... He cannot get the terrorists to the table. If the terrorists don't listen to India and the Central Government, then India has no leverage.* ■ J.R. JAYEWARDENE in *The Hindustan Times*

- *To suggest that the present events are part of a single design is absurd. There may be a succession of petty controversies. but who has the brains to orchestrate such disparate factors?* ■ PREM SHANKAR JHA in *The Sunday Observer*

- *Time is now opportune for the Janata Party to emerge as a national alternative.* ■ Resolution at the national-level Janata Party meeting in Bangalore

- *He (Dinesh Singh) has always been a job-seeker. He played that most despicable role in bringing down the Janata regime.... He will do anything for a job.* ■ RAM JETHMALANI in *Probe India*

- *Pakistan is not a global power.... If you think that Pakistan is going for a nuclear bomb, you must ask yourself, why?*
  ■ DR HUMAYUN KHAN, Pakistan ambassador, in *The Times of India*

- *I know I can't last forever. I think of death at least once a day.*
  ■ REKHA in *Cine Blitz*

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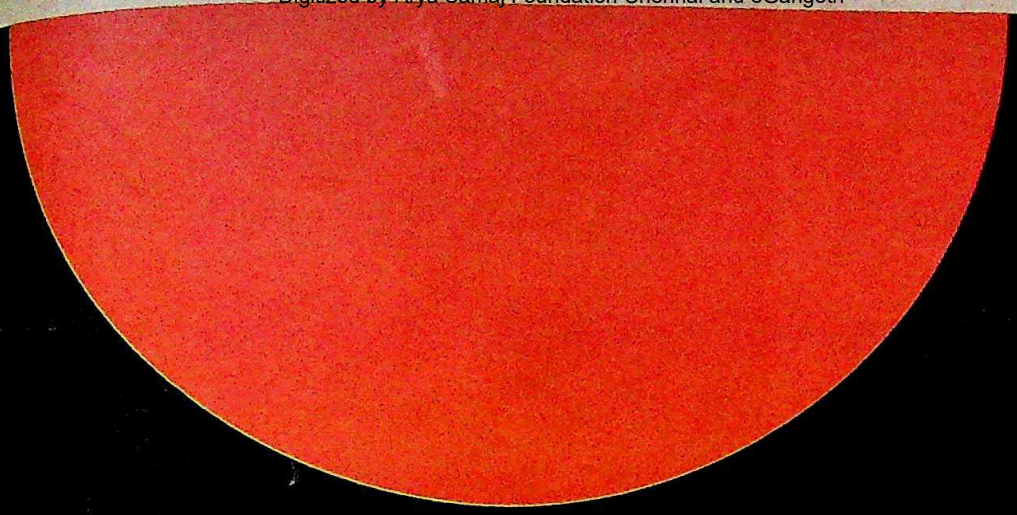

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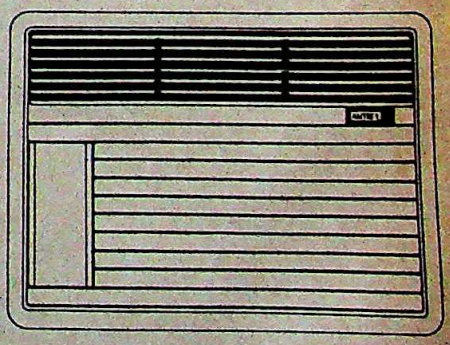

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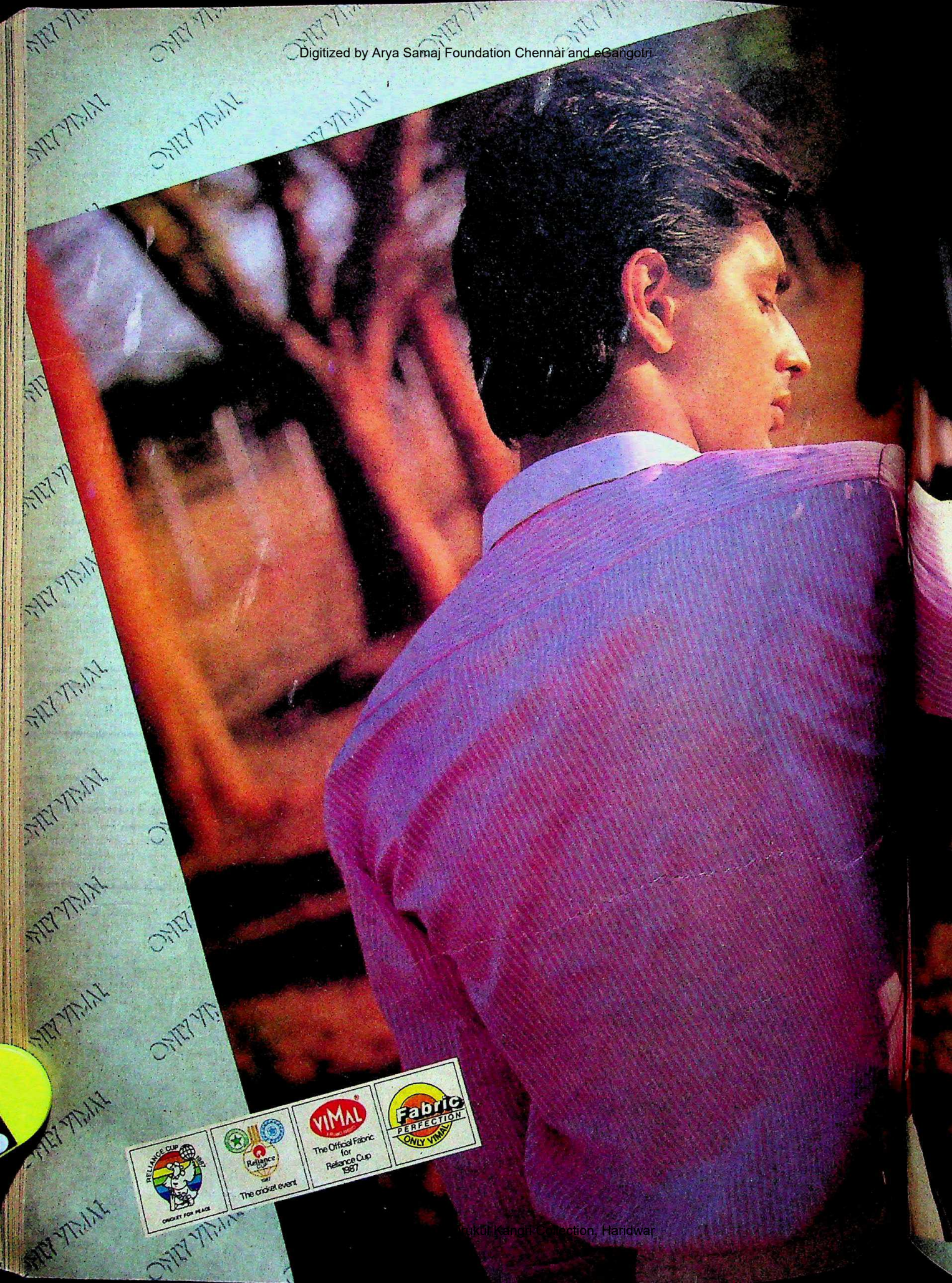

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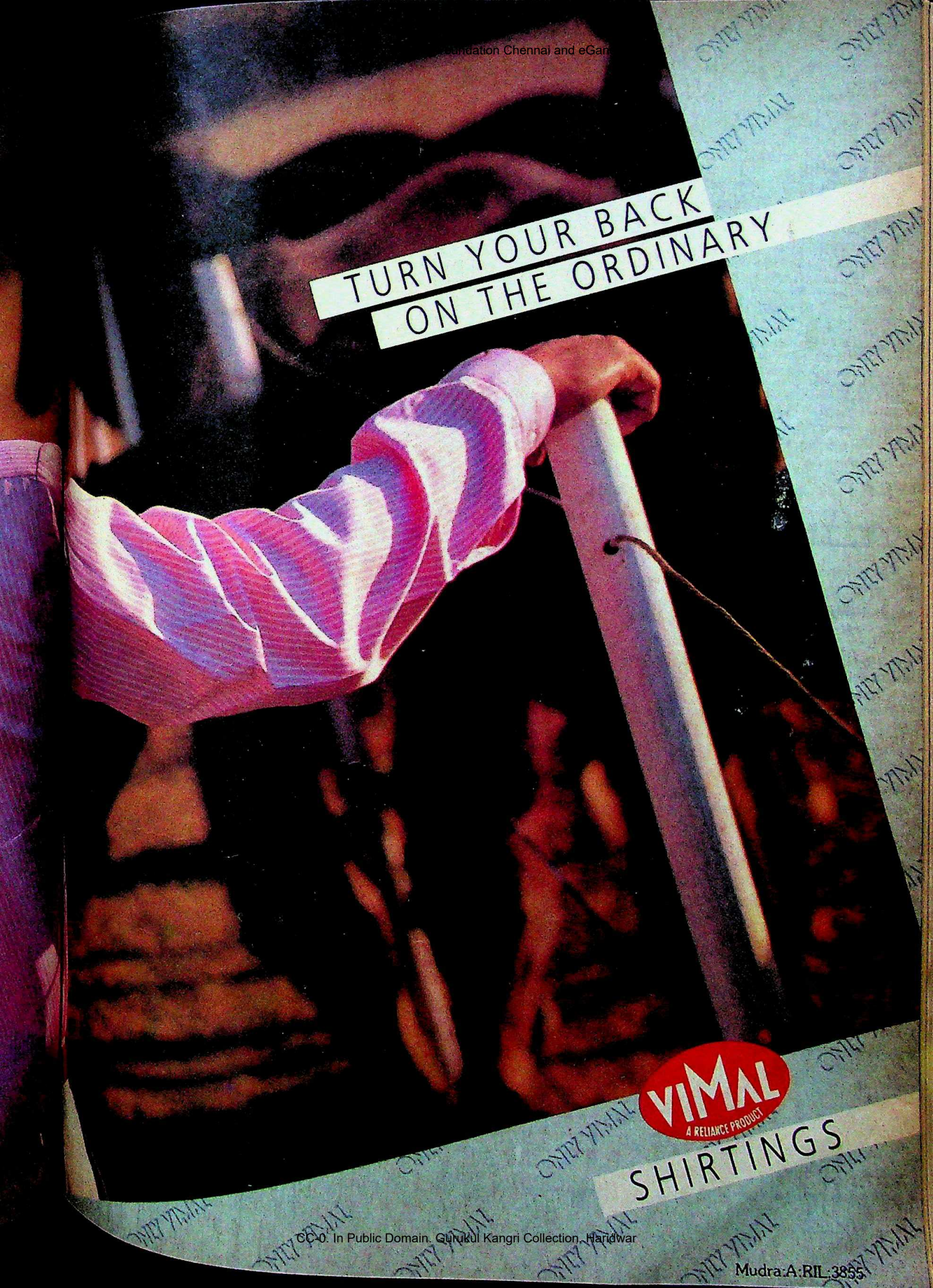

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CHOKING POINT

■ People will go to any length to make a quick buck—and to then secure it. But the case of an assistant section officer of the Hyderabad Education Department beats all previous records.

It turned out there was a bus conductor whose young brother had developed an aversion to school. Hoping to save his sibling from the stigma of failing, he requested the section officer for a certificate ensuring his brother's promotion to the next class.

After haggling a while, they decided on Rs 200 to account for the extraordinary request. The money changed hands and the official gleefully walked away. But he soon discovered—to his horror—two suspicious strangers trailing him. In sheer panic, he popped the incriminating Rs 100 and Rs 50 notes into his mouth.

Then ensued an undignified scuffle, with his followers—who turned out to be anti-corruption officials—almost choking him in trying to retrieve their evidence. Finally, the section officer had to undergo a stomach wash at a nearby hospital. And it was only after the contents of his stomach were forensically examined and the tests proved positive for currency that the persevering officials nabbed their man.

PAPER CHASE

■ Any self-respecting student, has a trick or two up his sleeve to beat the exam system. If flattering teachers isn't enough to gain an inkling of the all-important question papers, then buying the papers outright isn't far behind. But such dark deeds are usually carried out in some back alley of the college, where money surreptitiously changes hands.

But recently, two worried Ghaziabad students found none of these established methods worked. As their exam date loomed nearer, they couldn't even find any professors loitering around in their college to plead their case. In a last desperate bid, they decided they'd meet the challenge head on.

Entering the exam hall in an unusually composed

state, both sat down to tackle their Hindi paper. They revealed their grand ploy only at the end. When the invigilating professor asked for the answer books, he found hard cash attached on to two. The one with Rs 10 requested the examiner to award him 50 marks, and the other with Rs 5 pleaded for any marks at all! Needless to say, the professor awarded no marks to either.

DUTY FREE

■ Old customs die hard! Especially at the new Indira Gandhi International Airport, where passengers quake as fierce customs officials make their lives miserable. But not always do the customs officials get away with their bone-chilling efficiency in catching victims.

Last fortnight, old roles were reversed in the cat-and-mouse game. At 1.30 a.m.—

a time when pandemonium reigns supreme and the airport is buzzing with scores of harried passengers—one gentleman found all his money missing. Panic-striken, he ran screaming to the nearest policeman.

Unwittingly, he had revived old antagonisms. Both the customs officials and airport police have had daggers drawn since a sub-inspector was caught trying to smuggle gold biscuits and a customs inspector was charged with robbing a passenger. Now, all hell broke loose. The indignant customs officials struck work and raised raucous slogans when the cops started questioning their integrity.

Meanwhile, the old victims grabbed the novel opportunity. Hundreds of passengers—bags filled with goodies—merrily strolled out, while their erstwhile persecutors were engaged in stalking their own kind.

HIGH JINKS

■ Give a man an inch, and he'll take a mile. That adage can turn out to be embarrassingly true where one's countrymen are concerned, as the country's own international airline found recently.

Recently, Air-India decided to introduce free alcoholic drinks on the economy class on its Singapore-Bombay flight AI 415. Little did it realise just how enthusiastically its high-flying passengers would take to the free 'trip'. After the first round of complimentary drinks had been served, some cheerfully surprised travellers invaded the kitchen, en masse, and descending on the liquor trolley, triumphantly bore away cans of beer and bottles of scotch and gin.

This unprecedented hijack took the pursers and air

hostesses completely by surprise. The intoxicated merrymakers even took over their role, smilingly serving the booze in plastic glasses held out by eagerly reaching hands. Many drinks later, a mini-melee was in progress, with the lady passengers getting the brunt of it all. As far as the airline is concerned, it is now having second thoughts about its hospitality.

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DON'T FORGET TO NOMINATE YOUR LIC POLICY

Everything was well planned and meticulous in Piyush Mukherjee's life. Like his LIC Policy. To leave-behind a solid sustenance in case he was suddenly no more.

And, when that happened, there was one little thing Piyush had forgotten. To nominate his wife in his Policy. Before the claim was settled, Piyush's wife had to undergo a lot of consequential formalities and procedural delays. To avoid such irritants, **NOMINATE.**

Do remember life insurance is a long term contract.

Naturally, during the contract period there may be many changes in the life and lifestyle of a person. One may get married and has to provide for the security of the growing family. In that event one may like to change the nomination from the previous nominee viz., father, mother or sister to one's spouse.

As family responsibilities grow, one may have to mortgage the policy to secure loan from financial institutions for building a house of one's own. In that event, the nomination becomes invalid and, after the mortgage loan is repaid, when the policy is reassigned the nomination is not automatically re-instated. One has to make fresh nomination. This is a MUST to avoid hassles during the claim settlement stage.

Incidently, if age is not admitted at the time of submitting the proposal, one should ensure that age is admitted. For this purpose, please send an acceptable proof of age to the branch in which the policy is serviced.

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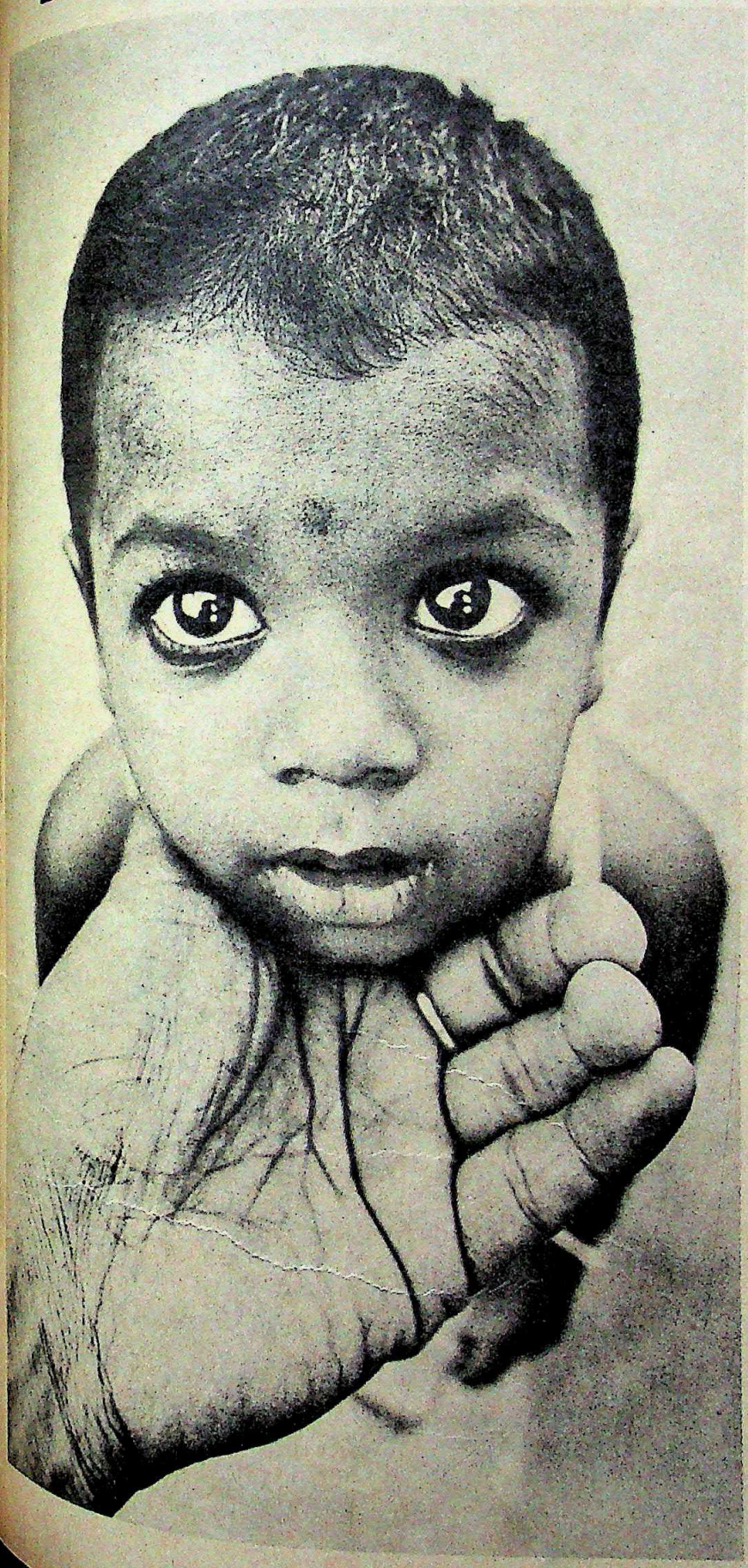
A child's needs are small. It takes so little to change a life.



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Rs. 200/- to adopt a child for complete care by us.

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Odd Reluctance

● Mani Shankar Aiyar, in his heyday as the man in the prime minister's office who looked after the media, used to refer to the news agencies as the 'kept press'. If the Press Trust of India's (PTI) recent behaviour on the Bofors issue is anything to go by, Aiyar may well have been right in

what he used to say.

PTI did not bother to send a correspondent to Stockholm to cover the Bofors arms deal issue, one of the biggest stories of the year. When it did eventually send someone there, it was a science correspondent—and his brief was that he should cover environmental issues.

But a reporter is a reporter, and he began filing on Bofors. In his despatches, he quoted Swedish government officials as confirming the radio charge that payments had been made into Swiss bank accounts, and that the payments were small but significant. He also quoted the Indian Ambassador in Stockholm, Bhupatray Oza, as saying that the radio had 'thin evidence' (but not no evidence at all). Another despatch mentioned that the report on the inquiry by the Swedish Audit Bureau would be made available on May 29.

● None of this has been reported in India by anyone. Yet PTI has studiously killed these despatches, and not put them out on its news service.

Low Key Role

● Amitabh Bachchan, who was slated to play a high visibility role as chairman of the committee to celebrate Nehru's birthday and India's 40th year of independence, has told the prime minister he would prefer to bow out. The reason: the press and public were beginning to ask questions about what qualifications the superstar MP had for the post and to hint darkly that this was but one more example of Rajiv Gandhi doing special favours for his buddies. Bachchan, however, does not consider the chairmanship anything special and confided in friends that his role would have been no more than laying foundation-stones and attending opening ceremonies—a public relations job—and attracting publicity due to his name. But in the current atmosphere and the attendant

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

criticism about the "prime minister and his friends" Bachchan has decided to play an increasingly low key role in public life in order to deflect further criticism about his association with Rajiv.

Close Call

● Minister of Tourism Mufti Mohammed Syed recently invited the Foreign Correspondents' Association members to lunch at the Ashok Hotel. He clearly expected a cheerful, informal gathering where he would have to answer the odd, friendly question between mouthfuls of

tandoori chicken. When his advance staff party arrived to find plans afoot for a formal press conference, they tried to nip things in the bud by producing colourful brochures and tourist arrival lists. But, the press meet began as scheduled. All went rather well till a Pakistani journalist asked the minister why his countrymen found it impossible to obtain visas to go to Kashmir. Being a Kashmiri himself, Syed clearly felt this was one question he could field easily. Pat came his reply: "Would you allow us to go to Azad Kashmir?" But the Pakistani journalist persisted in his questions, forcing the minister to refer several times to Azad Kashmir without realising that his bureaucrats were beginning to squirm uncomfortably as tension started building in the air. Finally, a member of the press corps came to his rescue by asking if it was correct for a minister of the Indian Government to refer to Pakistan occupied Kashmir as Azad Kashmir. "Ah", laughed Syed, "Yes, of course. I didn't really mean Azad Kashmir."

No Bonus

● The Bofors deal with Sweden, which has come under a cloud recently, was supposed to have been clinched with an added bonus for India. It was to include the delivery of two Swedish neutron devices which are used in sophisticated armaments research. According to highly placed sources, the late Swedish premier Olof Palme had provided an assurance to the Government of India that Sweden would deliver the goods. This decision was to hold notwithstanding the pressure that his country might face in the delivery of such devices to a country like India which has not signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. But when the Bofors deal was later finalised, Indian officials noticed that it failed to include the neutron devices. When questions were asked, the

Swedish Government informed the Indians that it had decided against supply of the devices because it would be unable to face the international outcry that would inevitably follow.

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1987 good reasons to see Thailand this year.

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Among the kaleidoscope of festivities planned for 1987 you should try to catch some of these:

Feb. 13-15. Chiang Mai Flower Festival. A million blooms, a thousand smiles. One of the unforgettable moments of your life.

April 13. Songkran Festival. A nationwide water festival celebrating the Thai Lunar New Year.

May 9-10. Bun Bang Fai Festival. "Bang!" indeed. Held in northeast Thailand, a fireworks show like no other you've ever seen.

Oct. 16. Royal Barge Procession. An armada of brilliant colours, pageantry and rare splendour not to be missed.

Nov. 5. Loy Krathong. Celebrated nationwide, this is Thailand's loveliest festival.

Nov. 14-15. The Elephant Round-Up. Come to Surin in northeast Thailand for this extraordinary display.

Nov. 22. Bangkok Marathon. A major sporting event commemorating His Majesty the King's 60th Birthday Anniversary.

Dec. 15. Light and Sound Presentation. A glittering occasion to be held at the Royal Grand Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

These are only a small selection of the truly stunning special events that mark 1987 as Visit Thailand Year.

Make your holiday plans now. And make sure you fly on Thailand's own airline, Thai International. Where the exotic sensations that are Thailand start from the moment you step on board.

Thai

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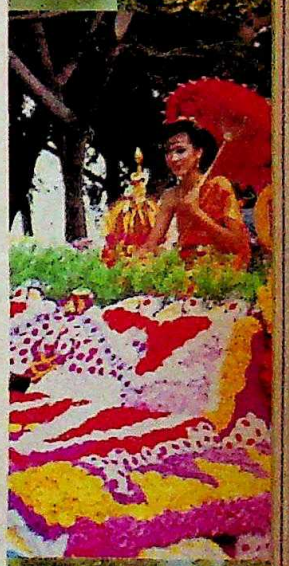

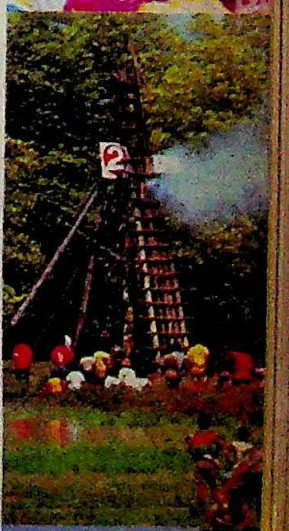

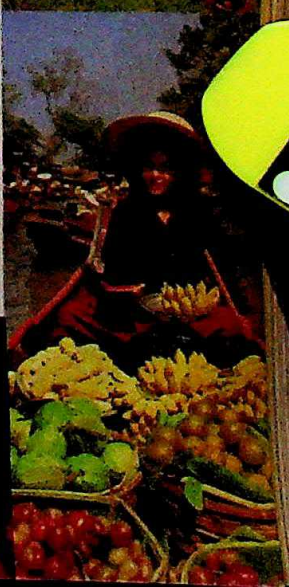

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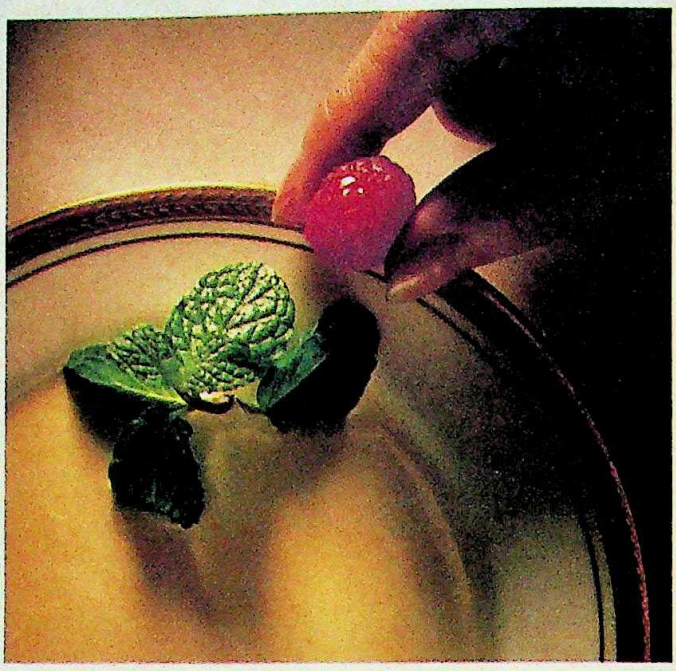

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The Edge of Irony

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Barnala's Government was carelessly thrown to the wolves.

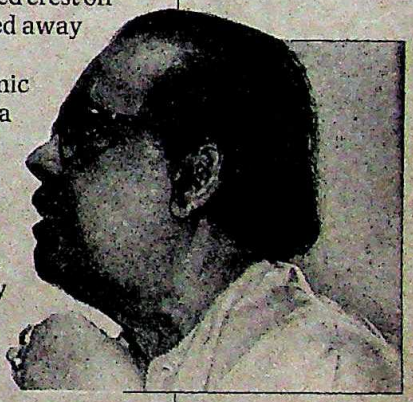
THE pointed edge of irony chiselled the fortnight that was into daunting shapes and size. On the opening day of the most momentous session of Parliament in a decade, the President—and indirectly the Rajiv Gandhi Government—had singled out Surjit Singh Barnala and his Akali Government for fulsome praise. On the day the Parliament session ended, that same Barnala Government had, without warning, been flung to waiting wolves, the chief minister's grim battle against impossible odds carelessly ignored and the future of a tormented state once again etched in dangerous silhouette.

The ironies were unending. The turbulence and uncertainty caused by the imposition of President's Rule in Punjab succeeded in totally obscuring the fact that a 25th state—Goa—had been added to the Indian union. The ruling party, already weakened by the cats-cradle of contradictions in its policies, saw the forced resignation of the third Cabinet minister in less than two months as Ghani Khan Choudhury was derailed over the granting of undue favours to an obscure Bombay firm while he was railway minister. In Rashtrapati Bhavan, the President and the prime minister fed each other birthday sweets even as it became obvious that the gloves were off in their punishing constitutional combat. On the economic battlefront, the same stock market that had ridden an unprecedented crest on the Rajiv Gandhi wave, plunged to alarming lows as investors shied away and key corporate sectors took a financial beating.

RAVI CHOPRA

The gloves were off in the constitutional combat between Rajiv and Zail.

And, as if in reflection of the uncertain political and economic weather, as many as 13 states and two Union territories were hit by a crippling drought that placed an added and potentially ominous strain on the Indian landscape. In the wider context, the real significance of the fortnight lay in the direction the public weather-wane seemed to be veering towards. A forceful element of cynicism has undoubtedly found permanent place in the public mind. The ruling party's veneer of credibility has been gradually stripped away, exposing the underside of reality. It is a dangerous moment for a government already weakened by its own impulsiveness. Gullibility can no longer be taken for granted and not many people, including those in the ruling party, believe that the change in Punjab was unrelated to the coming elections in Haryana.



Ghani Khan became the third Cabinet minister to resign in less than two months.

Haryana itself presented a prism of paradoxes as the political forces girded for the approaching electoral battle. President's Rule in Punjab is just one indication that, for the next few weeks, the Centre's every move will be locked in step with one of the smallest yet sudddenly the most important state in the country.

MGR's new bills have reached ludicrous lengths.

The ironies of politics, however, had their loudest echo in Tamil Nadu where the ruling party is led by a former film star, M.G.Ramachandran. The state Government introduced a bill in the Assembly that seeks to ban all films remotely critical of ministers or members of the Legislative Assembly, including the speaker. The AIADMK then proceeded to take the issue to more ludicrous lengths by the introduction of yet another bill that will censor all film posters that paint politicians in less than angelic colours. Though Tamil Nadu has the distinction of adopting rather unique postures on such issues, it was also yet another indication that the uneasy political atmosphere at the Centre was becoming dangerously contagious.

—DILIP BOBB

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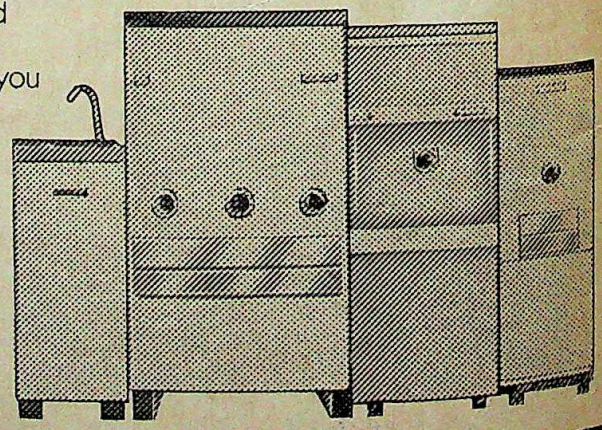

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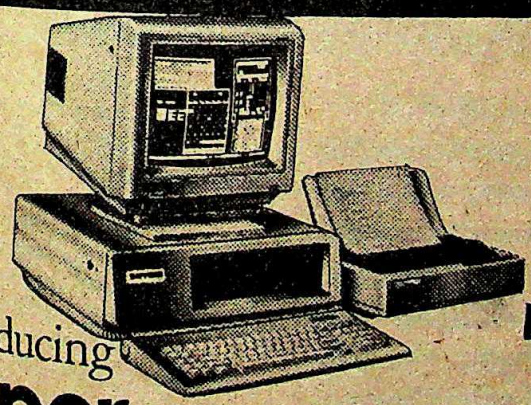

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PUNJAB A RISKY

THE irony was inescapable: the Akali Dal had come into power after its leader Harchand Singh Longowal was gunned down by terrorists on August 20, 1985. It was unceremoniously dismissed a brief 21 months later, on the very day that Longowal's assassin Jarnail Singh was killed in a police encounter.

The late night imposition of President's rule in Punjab marked the end of yet another watershed in Sikh politics: it buried the Punjab accord for which Longowal had paid with his life, which the people of Punjab had endorsed at the polls, and for which the deeply religious chief minister, Surjit Singh Barnala, had suffered excommunication. It also buried with it any hope of a political solution in the near future. In Punjab, Akalis called it the second murder of Longowal.

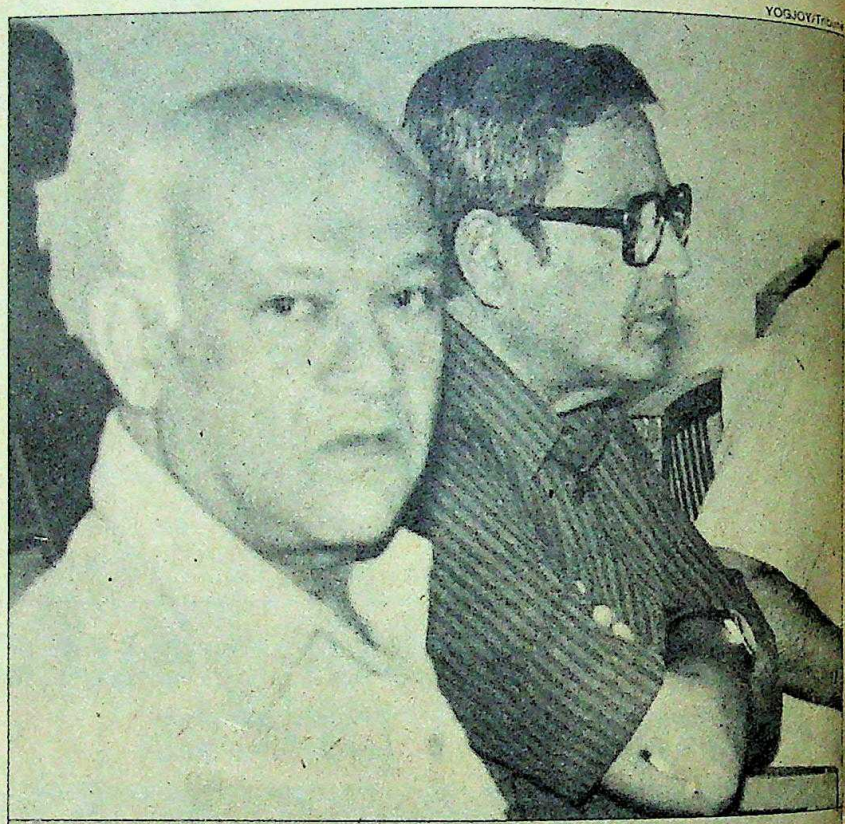
The action once again exposed Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress(I) to charges that common sense, principles and goodwill had been sacrificed at the altar of political expediency, that the logic of the tough action in Punjab lay in neighbouring Haryana, where predominantly Hindu voters were to go to the polls five weeks later. In tell-tale fashion, one of the first tasks assigned to Punjab Governor S.S. Ray was to speed up construction of the Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal for the supply of water to Haryana.

President Zail Singh signed the promulgation with the same reluctance with which he had delivered his speech to Parliament in February praising the Barnala government. Then, he had warned the prime minister against eulogising any chief minister lest the Government be forced to eat its words later.

The warning proved prophetic. Late in the afternoon of May 12, the President was alerted that he would be requested to sign an important document. This arrived in a sealed envelope, containing Ray's report requesting Zail Singh to impose President's rule in the state. Zail Singh immediately sent the report to Home Minister Buta Singh for advice. At 7.30 p.m., the prime minister summoned a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA), which endorsed the governor's recommendation. The CCPA's decision was promptly approved by the full Cabinet, though some of the ministerial experts on Punjab expressed their dissent. But Buta Singh carried the day and finally conveyed the resolution to the President at 10.30 p.m.

Zail Singh signed the controversial notification, but he held back the concerned file, to note two days later that the Government should have considered the implications of dismissing a government which enjoyed majority support. He also reiterated his earlier contention that the February eulogy of the Barnala government had not been a wise decision.

If this highlighted the Government's contrary stands on Punjab, the contradiction was only the culmination of almost four months of confusion and seeming double-dealing: public support for Barnala being undermined by sharp criticism delivered privately. That was not all. The crackdown in Punjab began, most surprisingly, at a time when the Government had indirectly opened a front for negotiation with the Akal Takht acting jathedar, Darshan Singh Ragi, and when a political initiative seemed round the corner with the release of the Jodhpur detenus. It also came when Barnala had refused to give in to Central blandishments for accepting the report of the Eradi tribunal on the sharing of Ravi-Beas waters with Haryana and Rajasthan. The report apparently favours Haryana.



YOGJOY/T

Governor Ray with police chief Ribeiro: crackdown

The imposition of President's rule in Punjab once again exposed Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress(I) to charges that common sense and principles had been sacrificed at the altar of political expediency.

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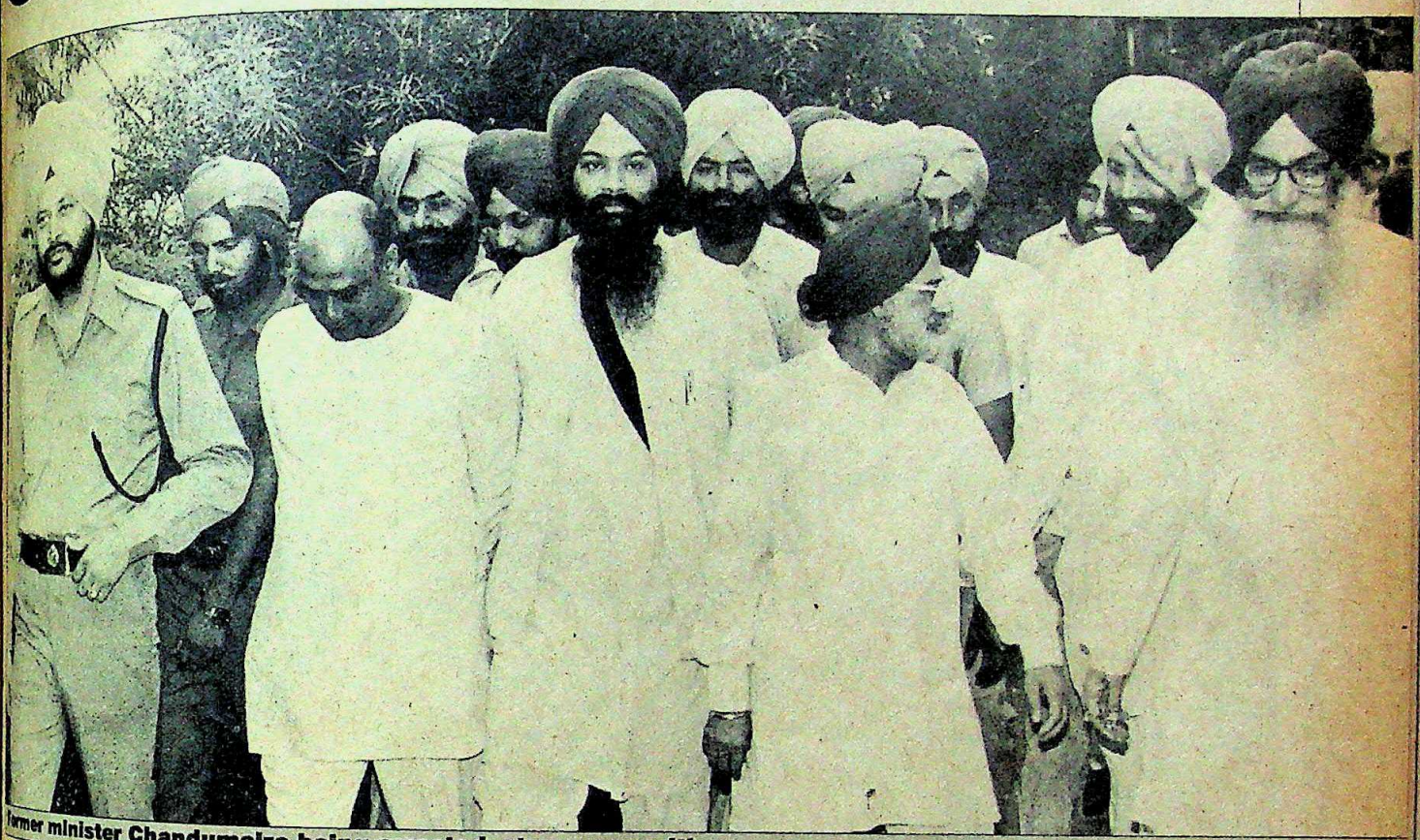
GAMBIT



Former minister Chandumajra being arrested: strong opposition

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Finally, the dismissal took place when senior Akali ministers were engaged in a public slanging match with Punjab police supremo Julio Ribeiro, whose term was coming to an end in May, with the Centre and state differing over a fresh term.

The central issue which the Government pushed to the forefront to justify Barnala's dismissal was the rising graph of terrorist killings in the state: from an average of around 50 a month last year to 79 in April, with the graph still climbing. Home Minister Buta Singh charged after the dismissal that the "Barnala government was only on paper. Extremists were running a parallel government, and we did not want to run away from our responsibility." On the morning before the dismissal, Buta Singh had reeled off statistics in Parliament to prove that the law and order situation was worsening, and that over 3,000 Hindu families had migrated out of Punjab during the last two months alone—following the militants' campaign against shops selling meat, liquor and tobacco. An Intelligence Bureau report also said that practically every shopkeeper was being made to pay a ransom for running his business.

The Centre claims that because of a parallel government set up by the extremists and the sharp hike in killings, the Barnala government was no longer in a position to handle the situation.

But if this was the real scenario, it clashed hopelessly with the public face that the Congress(I) itself had been putting up. Rajiv Gandhi's support for the Barnala government was evident even upto April 25, when the Congress(I) issued a statement that it would continue to support the Barnala government "which is fighting fundamentalist and communal forces". Two days before that, Barnala had visited New Delhi and been personally assured by the prime minister that he had his support. And on April 14, Human Resources Development Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao showered praise on the Barnala government at an all-party convention on Baisakhi day, and said that Rajiv had sent him to convey the message that "we will not rest until the accord is implemented". He also announced that the Centre had decided to review the cases of all Jodhpur detenus. The previous day, Barnala and Rajiv had met for two hours to discuss this issue.

Yet, on April 27, Buta Singh despatched the first of three quickfire missives to Barnala, sharply pulling him up for his failure to handle a law and order situation which, the Union home minister

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BUTA SINGH

"Barnala sided with communalism"

WHEN Buta Singh, 53, was appointed in May 1986 as Union home minister, eight months after Surjit Singh Barnala's ascent to chief ministership of Punjab, it was believed that his brief was two-fold: keep both terrorists and the Barnala government in line. After a year in office, he has achieved at least one objective. It was his ministry which, over the last six months, built up a strong case against the Barnala government. With absolute loyalty to Rajiv Gandhi, Singh carried out the task with precision—and without reservations.

His career at the Centre began in 1974 when he was made Union deputy minister for railways. Later, during the Janata Party rule, he was the party's only AICC(I) *general secretary. When Mrs Gandhi rode to power in 1980, Singh was inducted as minister of state and elevated to cabinet rank in 1983.*

Singh's formula for success is a submissive approach coupled with a determination to execute perfectly any order issued by anybody close to the top party bosses. He came on the terrorists' hit list for his role in the reconstruction of the Akal Takht after Operation Bluestar. He was later declared a tankhaiya and excommunicated from the Sikh community.

More recently, he was accused of being involved in a factional war within the party which led to the sidelining of both former Union minister of state Arun Nehru and former party vice-president—and now Union minister—Arjun Singh. Today, one of Rajiv's most trusted cabinet ministers, Singh has been used to tackle several sensitive matters. In the process, he has been accused by many opposition chief ministers of misleading the prime minister on many issues relating to Centre-state relations.

Singh spoke to Senior Editor PRABHU CHAWLA *at his North Block office after the declaration of President's rule in Punjab. Excerpts:*

Q. *Why did you dismiss the Barnala government now? Its functioning wasn't any worse than it was a few months ago.*

A. We had been thinking about the possible options. It was an ongoing process. We watched the impact of peace rallies by all parties. These were having some positive impact and extremists were being isolated. They also realised that the slogan of an independent Khalistan was not being bought by the people anymore. But in the last two months, they have changed strategy.

Q. *What has changed?*

A. They changed their slogan. Terrorists announced that they would eliminate what they termed as Hinduism in Sikhism. It was announced that any Sikh woman who took to any fashion, any Sikh smoking tobacco, trimming his beard or selling mutton would be eliminated. They launched the worst kind of cultural revolution to impose fundamental Sikhism in Punjab's villages. Since the majority was against this kind of communalism, it led to killings of more Sikhs. It was a sinister move leading to the mass exodus of Hindus.

Q. *But that was happening earlier too.*

A. But it was on a large scale now and the state government was not doing any thing to reverse this trend: it could have led to a civil war. Barnala was not at all capable of handling this situation.

Q. *Why do you feel that way? Hasn't he always stuck his neck out?*

A. Barnala himself was not convinced about the extremists' sinister motives. At the core of his heart, he believed that they were doing the right thing. Barnala's sympathies were with this rabid kind of communalism.

Q. *But only a few months ago he was eulogised by your party as one of the most secular Sikhs fighting terrorism.*

A. We built his image because he took a vow to finish fundamentalism. Unfortunately, he failed miserably. Though he was chief minister, a parallel government was being run by the fundamentalists. The Barnala government existed only on paper and functioned from barricaded houses.

Q. *But you praised his ministry in the Presidential address to Parliament.*

A. We praised him at that time because he challenged religious interference in the running of the state. We praise him now for his stand on this issue. But his number two in the cabinet and half his cabinet colleagues pledged themselves to the high priests whom Barnala had vowed to fight. What kind of team was he leading? He had no control over his ministers who were aligned with extremist groups.

BHAWAN SINGH

Q. *Have you evidence of this nexus?*

A. Yes, we have it. They withdrew cases against criminals and released a large majority from jails. Government funds were used to finance them.

Q. *But can you dismiss a ministry enjoying a majority on these grounds?*

A. This majority is a myth. The Supreme Court has decided that all those MLAs unseated by the speaker will have the right to vote in the Presidential election. So they are all members.

Q. *So you believe that the Barnala government was in a minority?*

A. I am a layman and not a legal expert. Since the Supreme Court has acknowledged their right to vote, they

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are technically members.

Q. If the Akali ministry was in a minority, the Congress(I) should have withdrawn support and it would have fallen automatically.

A. Why should we get rid of an insufficient government in a dubious manner? Ensuring stability was our responsibility so we chose the open action of dismissing the Government.

Q. But the general impression is that the ministry has been sacrificed to enable the Congress(I) to win the Haryana Assembly elections.

A. It is too far-fetched a contention:

"If we had not intervened, it could have led to a civil war. We were convinced that Barnala was not at all capable of handling this situation."

"The Barnala government existed only on paper and functioned from barricaded houses. We could not have remained silent spectators to this kind of situation."

Your claim is just a political stunt. We did not dismiss Barnala because of that.

Q. Or was it because Barnala refused to accept the Eradi Commission's report on the sharing of river waters which would have helped Haryana?

A. This is an absolutely false allegation. There was no question of pressuring anybody to accept the verdict.

Q. Maybe, as Barnala has charged, you were misleading Rajiv for personal reasons and finally succeeded?

A. It does not behove Barnala to hit below the belt now when he is out of office. Till yesterday he had established a good rapport with me and was discussing all kinds of important issues.

Q. The Akalis have also charged that a member of your personal staff had links with terrorists?

A. Barnala was being advised to tarnish my reputation. It was as part of this conspiracy that the house of my personal assistant was raided by a police official related to Barnala. The police did not find a needle and confiscated a licensed gun which was returned a week later with an apology. The police even arrested a sarpanch and forced him to give false testimony against my staff. I being a Sikh from Punjab can't swear on oath that none of my close friends or relatives is related to any fundamental forces, but so far nobody has been able to establish any link.

Q. With one moderate government out of office, whom are you going to trust to restore normalcy?

A. The Barnala government was not a moderate government. It was a timid government. Ministers and their relatives were buying protection from the terrorists. They were being given official patronage. Dreaded terrorists were using official circuit houses and ministerial bungalows as their hide-outs.

Q. Part of the blame should also be shared by police chief Ribeiro.

A. Yes, he should have shared it but he never got a team of his choice. He had no transfer powers. And whatever action he proposed to take against terrorists was leaked out to them. Executive magistrates were directed to release people arrested for their role in killing innocent people.

Q. Do you agree that both Ribeiro and Governor Ray were conspiring against Barnala so that they could assume direct power?

A. I don't believe in this conspiracy theory. They never gave that kind of impression to us at the Centre. Ribeiro never complained against Barnala.

Q. How do you propose to restore normalcy now? Will you talk to the other Akali faction now?

A. Our first priority is to restore the people's confidence. But we will not open any dialogue with those who do not believe in the Constitution.

Q. What about muni Sushil Kumar Jain's talks with them?

A. I have no knowledge about that. It was not done with our permission. But we have all the political parties with us on the question of eliminating terrorism. And I will not hesitate in talking to even the Longowal group if it helps in restoring communal harmony in Punjab.

said, was getting rapidly worse *(see box, page 32)*. Simultaneously, Governor Ray had sent two notes to Rajiv recommending Barnala's dismissal.

Rajiv's personal feelings, it would seem, were quite different from what his public posture suggested. For shortly before insisting that the President sing Barnala's praises in Parliament, he had written to Barnala saying that "the country has been greatly exercised over the lawlessness and terrorism in Punjab. The gruesome killings in the last few days have been particularly shocking. After the Khuda disaster (in December), I had told you that you must exert yourselves to the utmost to check the deterioration in the situation. You had assured me that stern action would be taken. But the situation has only worsened...you and your government will be judged by the firmness with which you will act now."

IF that was an unmistakable warning, the combined weight of Buta Singh, Ray and Ribeiro finally convinced the prime minister that Barnala's government could not deliver the goods.

Nevertheless, the dismissal came at a particularly indefensible time. Barnala had only recently joined battle seriously and sought to mobilise the silent Sikh masses behind him. He had also just regained a majority in the Assembly, following a Punjab High Court ruling that upheld the anti-defection law and ended up with the removal from membership of most of the rival Akali Dal MLAs. And while the crime graph was certainly climbing, the police were notching up successes too, and the militants' campaign against the consumption of meat, liquor and tobacco had begun to run aground and prove counter-productive.

Said Barnala: "Villagers had begun to form vigilante squads against these goondas. They had even begun to offer resistance with guns." And more than half the 598 liquor vends that had been closed, had reopened by the first week of May, with another 30 vends being reopened every day.

Inevitably, the Central move was fraught with grave risks. In seeking a police solution without a political counterpoint, in removing a buffer between a largely alienated Sikh community and the 'Dilli durbar', and in seemingly driving home the message that the Centre had no use for Sikh moderates, the imposition of President's rule could end up by making the Punjab problem even more intractable than it has been.

Barnala's government may have been

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SURJIT SINGH BARNALA

"Haryana was the cause"

FOR a man who has just lost the chief ministership, Surjit Singh Barnala is surprisingly devoid of rancour or bitterness. He says he was not overjoyed when he was elected chief minister: he anticipated the problems. And he is not crestfallen at his dismissal: it was building up to that. There is no feeling of betrayal, of a stab in the back. Only sadness that Punjab may be back to square one and the prospect of peace may have receded further. In between accepting the sympathies and support of friends, MLAs and officials who came to wish him well, Barnala sat with Special Correspondent RAMINDAR SINGH *in two separate sessions to answer questions about the state of Punjab and what brought on President's rule. Excerpts from the interview:*

Q. *You have said you were asked to sell out Punjab's interests. How?*

A. The accord with Sant Longowal was the culmination of a long struggle to achieve the just rights of Punjab. But when the question of implementation came up, nothing notable was done. We cannot give in where the state's interests are concerned. There can be no deviation from the terms of the accord, which were very clear. One commission asks us to part with Punjabi-speaking areas when the accord says only Hindi-speaking areas can be transferred. Agreeing to this would have violated the accord. On waters too, the accord clearly safeguards the water that Punjab was using in June 1985. It is difficult for us to accept anything else.

Q. *What was the breaking point?*

A. There was no breaking point. The Centre never bluntly said 'no' to any of our demands. That's why we continued discussions and tried to reach an understanding. Only two months earlier, in his address to Parliament, the President had praised the Punjab government and me. The prime minister is also on record that I was performing better than most Congress(I) chief ministers. Even as recently as April 14, Central leaders were all praise in joint rallies we held. And on April 30, the governor, addressing students of Punjabi University, praised the government's functioning. Then suddenly the Haryana elections intervened.

Q. *Was there a breakdown of law and order?*

A. No question of it. There was absolutely no reason for imposing President's rule. The reasons given are quite frivolous. In fact, in April and May we had the best successes in catching known terrorists. The largest number were caught in April, the largest caches of sophisticated firearms uncovered and the largest amount of robbed bank money—Rs 27 lakh—recovered. Only yesterday Longowal's assassin was killed. The so-called reform movement had been checkmated and was on the wane. From all aspects, the performance of the Government was much better than ever before. For all this we have been rewarded with dismissal.

Q. *Why?*

A. Because of the Haryana elections. The Congress(I) has already lost in Kerala and West Bengal. The prime minister has to face the Haryana elections. So Punjab's interests have been sacrificed at the altar of Haryana.

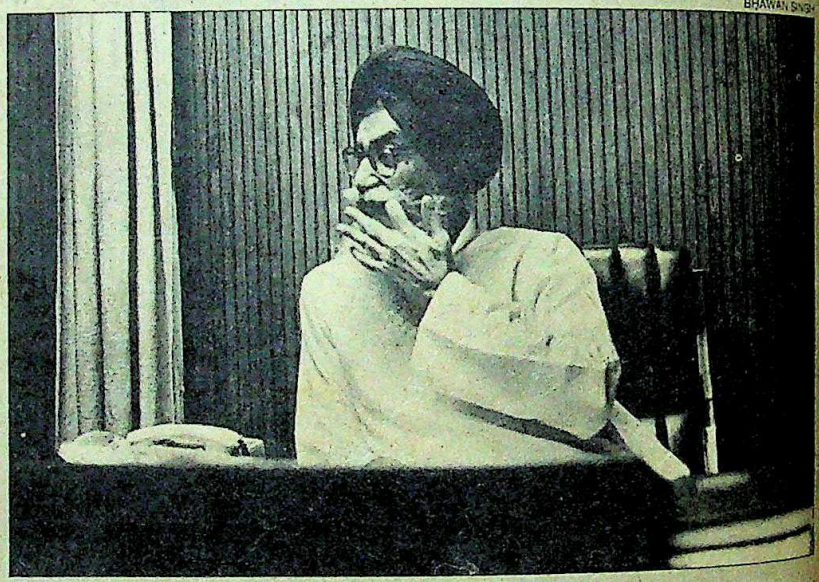
Q. *How much faith do you have in the prime minister now?*

A. My faith in him began when Longowal remarked: "Nek munda hai. Dilon bolda hai" (He is a good boy, speaks from the heart). This impression was endorsed in my meetings with him.

Q. *Why then was the accord not implemented?*

A. Compulsions, wrong advice. Even now I say he acted on the basis of wrong advice.

BHAWAN SINGH



"The search for a political solution has received a setback.... The situation in the state was improving."

Q. *Your party has criticised the role that the governor played.*

A. It was all orchestrated, engineered. On his trips around Punjab the governor organised meetings and received memorandums, mainly from Congress and BJP men. He never went to any rural areas. All this was being done under the direction of disgruntled Congressmen in Punjab, perhaps at the instance of Congress leaders in Delhi opposed to Punjab's interests.

Q. *Who are you referring to?*

A. I won't name anyone but some lobbies keep on working against Punjab's interests.

Q. *Was the governor part of the conspiracy?*

A. If the Home Ministry had already decided to dismiss us, then he was part of that conspiracy. I don't say he misled the

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Centre. But his assessment of the situation was wrong. The situation in the state was improving.

Q. When did you first hear of the move to dismiss your government?

A. From newspaper comments on the governor's tour and meetings. We were expecting it and perhaps the Home Ministry's three letters were intended to prepare the ground. One letter was leaked to the press before it reached me. There was no indication of dismissal even on the 11th evening when Rajiv phoned me.

Q. Where does the dismissal of your government leave the accord?

A. In the doldrums. I won't say the Centre has rejected the accord, but non-implementation amounts to that:

Q. Are the moderates now out in the cold?

A. The moderates are where they have been. We will pursue the Longowal path more vigorously.

Q. Do you see the dismissal of your government as part of a plan to enable holding of discussions in Amritsar between the militants and representatives of the Centre?

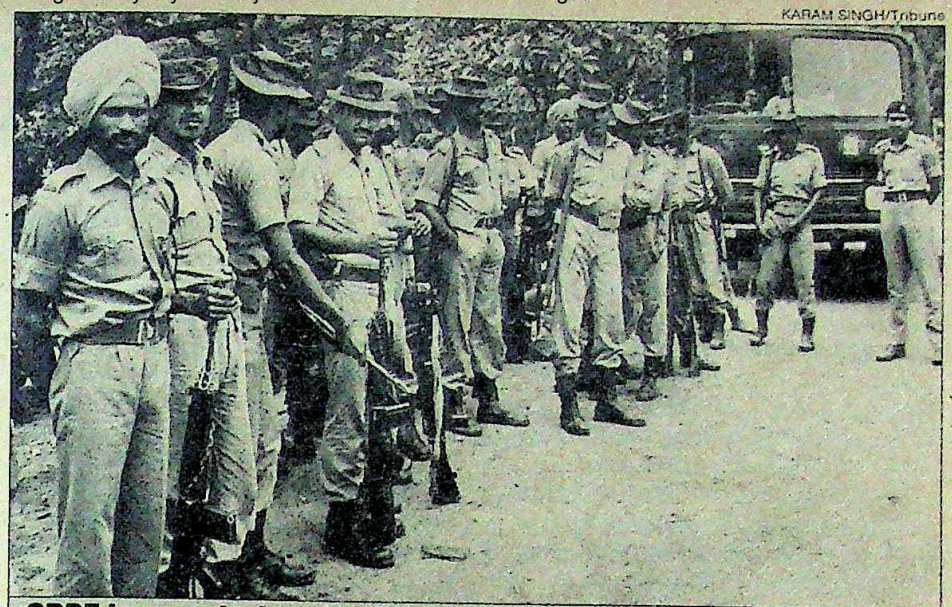
A. I don't know whether muni Sushil Kumar is lying (by saying he is acting on behalf of the prime minister) or Buta Singh is (by denying that the muni is acting on the Centre's behalf). One of them is, and if Buta Singh has lied, he has lied it before Parliament. On my part, I have told Rajiv that we have no objection if any agency wants to talk to the extremists. If such talks bring peace, we are welcome.

Q. Do you now feel that you were used by the Centre to confront the head priests?

A. Nobody was using me. The situation just arose and I opposed the wrong decision taken by them (head priests) on moral grounds.

Q. What next? Some of your colleagues say the situation is back to 1984.

A. I won't say it's back to 1984, but it appears they will use repressive measures. Chandumajra was arrested this morning. They are arresting our party members but cannot trace those really wanted catching. This is not the correct method of solving the Punjab tangle. The search for a political solution has suffered a setback. We have called meetings of MLAs, jathedars and the party working committee in the next 10 days to decide what line to take in the future.



KARAM SINGH/Tribune

CRPF jawans deployed in Punjab: short-term gains

ineffective: it may have failed to prevent a split in the Akali Dal or even to function as a cohesive team. And after 19 months in office it may have ended up with sharply reduced support from both Sikhs and Hindus. But the circumstances of its ouster will show to a watching Sikh populace that the man who parleyed with Delhi finally left with empty hands.

Meanwhile, the arrest of the Barnala cabinet minister Prem Singh Chandumajra along with more than 400 activists of the All-India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) and the Damdami Taksal, immediately after President's rule was imposed may have had its justification, but it also brought forth outcries of repression.

In Punjab, the dominant Sikh sentiment was that once again a direct confrontation was developing between the Centre and the Sikhs, and not between the Centre and extremists. As former finance minister Balwant Singh put it: "During Indira Gandhi's days a political conflict between the Congress and the Akalis was converted into a personal confrontation between Indira Gandhi and the Sikhs. A similar mistake is being made now. Some of the same forces active then—Darbara Singh and Buta Singh—are pushing Rajiv Gandhi into a position of confrontation with the Sikhs." The dismissal, he said, would only bring about an emotional unity among the Sikhs and "deepen their alienation from the Centre and the national mainstream". Even though the Barnala government's support base among the Sikhs had shrunk, its dismissal would convince even greater numbers that New Delhi was not to be trusted.

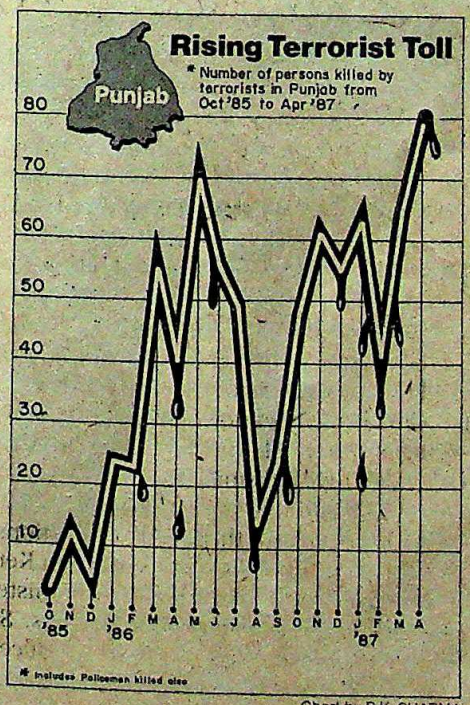


Chart by B.K. SHARMA

OPPOSITION members of Parliament who flayed the Government's decision were vociferous in charging that imposition of President's rule was done with an eye on Haryana. Even L.K. Advani of the BJP, which has long supported President's rule in Punjab, said that its timing would cost the Government its credibility. And Vellampuri John of the AIADMK got a rousing response when he asked: "In case the situation does not improve even after President's rule, will the Central Government be prepared to get dismissed on the grounds the Barnala government was dismissed?"

Equally shocked by the proclamation of President's rule was religious leader Jain muni Sushil Kumar, who had recently completed four days of peace talks

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with Akal Takht acting jathedar Darshan Singh Ragi in the Golden Temple. "We were trying to bring the militants to the path of peace," said one of his supporters, "but now all those who were talking to us will go underground again and Punjab will become a war zone." Even though the muni does not comment on his connections with the Centre, it is reliably learnt that he enjoyed the confidence of key people in Rajiv's camp. In fact his importance was demonstrated during his negotiations with Ragi, when for the first time since 1984 the Punjab Police chief pulled back CRPF pickets from around the temple for three consecutive days.

The muni's was a religious mission, not unlike that of Jayaprakash Narayan to the dacoits of Madhya Pradesh. He has documents showing that all the five jathedars and extremist groups, including the AISSF and the Khalistan Commando Force, had given their approval for and participated in the negotiations, which were tape recorded and copies distributed to villages in Punjab. According to the muni, an agreement had been reached under which, in exchange for the release of all prisoners—except those charged with patently heinous crimes—the extremists would pledge to work within the Indian Constitution. This would be followed by a call from all five jathedars for a cessation of violence and a threat of excommunication for those refusing to obey, and finally a voluntary surrender of arms at the Akal Takht.

Whether this would have succeeded or not is unclear. But Ragi and the extremists, were guarded in their comments on the imposition of President's rule: significantly, they refrained from lashing out at Rajiv Gandhi—perhaps because they were happy that Barnala had gone, perhaps because they hoped that direct negotiations would start.

MEANWHILE, villagers continued to flock to the temple complex, to extremist groups who continued to dish out rough justice on matters like property disputes. The extremist leaders had gone underground, but the 'parallel government' that the Centre made so much of was still functioning a day after the imposition of President's rule.

On the face of it the situation was incongruous: the Centre was dismissing a moderate Akali government while at the same time it was giving its nod to negotiations with terrorist groups. But equally incongruous was the situation in which it ignored these parallel negotiations as well as the gains made by the moderate Akali government and rammed Central rule on the state at a time when no spectacular terrorist incidents like the Khuda or Muktsar killings had occurred.

In its justification for its move the Cabinet used a report from Governor Ray datelined May 11, in which he wrote that the "ruling party and its government have no political will to combat...the fundamentalist movement....There is total chaos and anarchy...the killings have increased—in fact in the month of April past it was the highest ever." Ray also referred to state ministers' involvement with terrorists.

On the day that Ray's letter reached New Delhi, Barnala was supposed to fly to the capital for a final meeting with the prime minister. His home minister Kanwaljit Singh awaited him at Punjab Bhavan in the capital. But Barnala (who had tried a pre-emptive move against a dismissal by asking for an assembly session from May 27) was told not to come, and at about 8:30 p.m. Kanwaljit Singh received a call from the chief minister's office that Barnala was not coming. The die had been cast. With tears in his eyes, Kanwaljit Singh said: "They have decided to write off Punjab. The chief minister is not going to come here with a begging bowl. I just can't understand. You try so hard and then this happens. Who is going to trust the Centre any more?"

But matters had been coming to a head. Ray had gathered complaints against the Government during his state-wide tours, and on April 29, the Punjab Congress(I) organised a meeting where state party boss Beant Singh launched an attack on the Barnala government and its inability to maintain law and order.

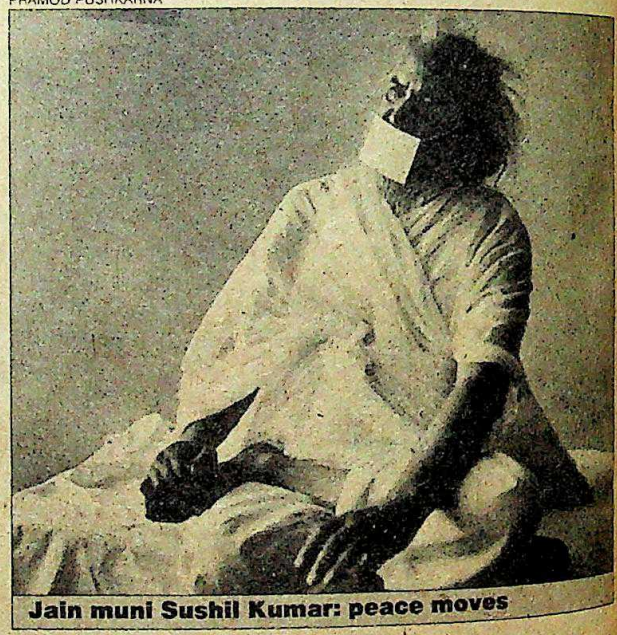
The Akalis had read the war signs, and begun to distance themselves from the Centre. The Barnala government refused to accept the findings of the Eradi Tribunal, and Barnala attended the opposition chief ministers' conclave in New Delhi. And most importantly, the Akalis attacked the one person who had become the symbol of the Centre's power in Punjab—supercop Ribeiro.

No sooner had an interview with Ribeiro appeared in INDIA TODAY (May 15), in which he discussed his retirement plans and expressed his willingness to

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Darshan Singh Ragi: careful comments

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Jain muni Sushil Kumar: peace moves

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continue beyond the age of superannuation provided he was given the powers of an army chief, than Balwant Singh let fly at him in a letter to the chief minister. Balwant wrote: "This is not the first time he has gone to the press over the head of the chief minister...his pronouncements on matters of policy and politics are simply violative of conduct rules of the service of which he can claim to be a proud member." Barnala himself declared that Ribeiro "is fond of publicity. He already has extraordinary powers. He can enter places of worship. He can arrest ministers. I gave him a free hand. He is a good and honest man. But he's not been that successful and he's trying to put the blame on someone else." Added Balwant Singh: "Ribeiro's demand for more powers is like him telling the prime minister that he should have nothing to do with the Border Security Force's work and that he should confine himself only to Parliament." Other Akali leaders asked why Ribeiro was not getting any of the blame for the rising graph of terrorist killings.

NEVERTHELESS, the Akalis don't have entirely clean hands. There is at least one confirmed case of a minister's son being involved with terrorists: Harpreet Singh, the son of Mohinder Singh Saiyanwala, minister for local bodies, who was arrested by the police for consorting with known terrorists and then freed on bail under pressure from his father. But Harpreet has now been re-arrested by the CBI. The other name prominently mentioned is that of cooperatives minister Chandumajra, who was arrested last week. A recently published story (that Ribeiro had informed the Home Ministry that finance minister Balwant Singh had urged him to free a suspected terrorist) has been denied both by Balwant and by Ribeiro.

Of course, the Akalis have their defence too. "When they say this about us," said Kanwaljit Singh, "they tend to forget that Barnala is number one on the terrorist list, as are most of the ministers. Our workers have been killed, the son of J.S Tohra has been killed." Chandumajra's supporters, including Balwant, point out that Chandumajra's Akali Dal youth wing was so far the only counterpoint to the AISSF. It was this youth wing that clashed with AISSF during the 1985 elections and helped to bring out the vote.

In defending the work of his government against terrorists, Kanwaljit Singh admits killings have gone up slightly. But

JULIO F. RIBEIRO

"It's much better now"

IF there is a super cop in the country today, it is Julio F. Ribeiro, director-general of the Punjab Police. And now, more than ever before, he is in the hot seat. He must confront the terrorists directly without the buffer of an elected government, and face the flak if the killings don't stop. On the first day of President's rule, Ribeiro took time off for an interview with Special Correspondent RAMINDAR SINGH. *Excerpts:*

Q. *Now you are in the hot seat. What happens next?*

A. It's much better to deal with a situation of this type on your own. Police officers get politicised under a popularly elected government. They owe allegiance to those in authority. There is a quid pro quo and policing suffers. Even if 25 per cent are posted according to the wishes of politicians, that is pretty bad for a uniformed force. That's the crux. The problem is with officers. The men are good.

Q. *How will that change?*

A. Now the officers in the field know what I want. I feel confident we will get results. More officers will join battle. Those who don't will be replaced. It would have been quicker if President's rule had come earlier.

Q. *Do you expect a spurt in terrorist activity?*

A. Yes. The terrorists are regrouping.

Q. *If the Centre says law and order was out of control, how can you evade responsibility?*

A. I cannot avoid responsibility. I don't have any excuses. But nobody can say I have not tried my best. If I join battle there will be casualties.

Q. *The Akalis say you had become an independent centre of power.*

A. What are the ministers objecting to? I put the interest of the people before the interest of the elected representatives. If those interests clash, what can I do?

Q. *Aren't elected representatives guardians of people's interests?*

A. I am also interested in the people.

Q. *Were you taking your orders directly from the Centre?*

A. What orders? I don't agree.

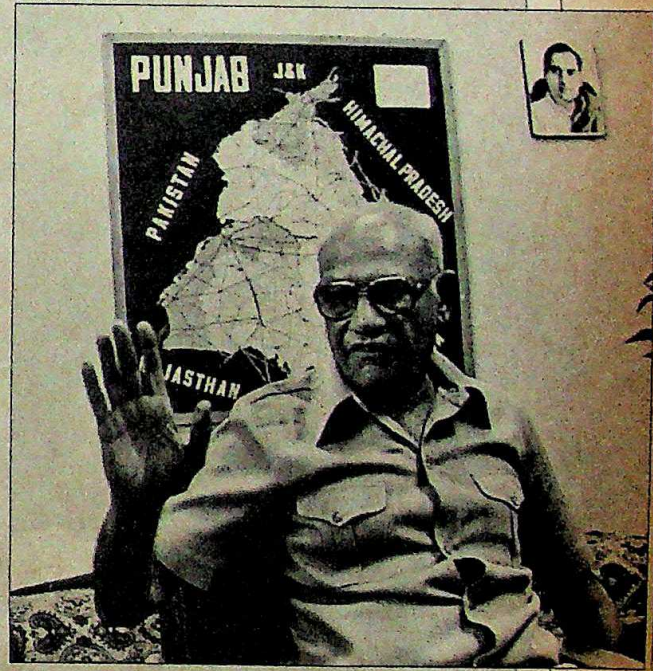
Q. *You had charged ministers' sons and followers of being in league with terrorists.*

A. There has been only one case so far. That was Saiyanwala's son.

Q. *How can you eliminate terrorists when the Centre has started talking to them?*

A. If talks succeed I am happy. But as long as extremists are moving about with weapons, we will fight them.

BHAWAN SINGH



Q. *Is it back to square one then? Repression will attract greater violence.*

A. I cannot give an authoritative answer. Unless persons with guns are neutralised there can be no solution. The campaign against meat and liquor is good. It's put a lot of Sikhs against them. It started off very strong, but later it petered out. Now it's confined to loot by robbers.

Q. *Is the army going to play a large role in policing Punjab?*

A. No role at all at the moment. But it has to be kept informed. Should it become beyond our capacity, it will step in. I hope that won't become necessary.

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BUTA LETTERS

A Litany of Charges

BETWEEN April 27 and May 8 (three days before the Barnala government was dismissed). Home Minister Buta Singh wrote three letters to Barnala with a litany of charges. Senior Editor PRABHU CHAWLA *acquired copies of the letters. Excerpts:*

April 27, 1987

Dear Barnalaji,

The situation in Punjab has continued to cause me concern. I had hoped that the all-party campaign against terrorism and fundamentalism would have a beneficial impact on the law and order situation. However, action by the state Government against terrorists has failed to keep pace...

In the last week, the level of violence by terrorists is the highest in more than two years. In fact, we have not had this level of violence in a single week since June 1984...Over 100 serious incidents were reported. Thirty-five murders have been committed....

You can imagine the insecurity that has gripped people. Normal business activity is being stopped in the name of social reform and the sudden spurt in violence is forcing, once again, migration of the minority community from Punjab.

The state Government should have tightened up measures to apprehend terrorists and to give protection to vulnerable sections. However, we find that the police are being hampered in performing their functions. Perhaps the state Government has not fully comprehended the gravity of the situation. I trust that immediate steps will be taken to remedy the weaknesses of the administration and the police set-up.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Buta Singh

May 6, 1987

Dear Barnalaji,

In my previous letter, I had drawn your attention to the gravity of the situation in Punjab. If March (with 243 incidents) was the worst month from the law and order stand point since 'Operation Bluestar', April, with over 370 incidents, has been far worse. During April, nearly 100 persons have been killed and this is possibly the highest figure for any month since 1982-83.

Not only is the administration proving ineffective against terrorists, but there is possible lack of consciousness at the highest levels...that the situation is fast getting out of hand. On the other hand, some ministers are more interested in denigrating the director-general of police who has been performing his duties with dedication under extremely difficult circumstances.

The burning of liquor vends, barber saloons, meat shops, etc is continuing in a manner that gives an impression of utter lawlessness, matched by the feeling that the state Government is totally helpless. I do hope that you realise that economic activities of the state are being paralysed.

The 'Amrit Prachar' campaign has also led to the deepening of communal and separatist feelings. Sikh masses are being deliberately incited to turn against the Hindus with a view to widening the communal divide. Ragis and Dhadis have been indulging in secessionist utterances...and there appears to be no effort on the part of your administration to apply any brake on them. Consequently, Sikh youth feel encouraged to indulge in terrorist crimes believing that this would not invite action from the state Government.

Dacoities and robberies and selective attacks on banks are increasing. The educational system is fast approaching a total breakdown, with colleges and schools remaining closed for long periods....

We have received reports that some of your ministers are in touch with terrorist elements and that nothing has been done to take suitable action against these persons. No administration functioning under a democratic constitution can and should tolerate, as members of the Government, persons who function against the Constitution.

It is obvious that the state is heading towards a very serious breakdown. Also, despite discussions that we have had on the subject and what the prime minister has told you, there is no realisation or inclination to deal with the situation firmly.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

Buta Singh

May 8, 1987

Dear Barnalaji,

The most disturbing feature is the growing insecurity among the people and the loss of faith in the state administration. The Government of Punjab has failed to measure up to the tactics, adopted by the terrorists, of creating panic under the cover of social reforms. This has been going on for nearly two months now. You are aware that about 3,000 Hindu families have moved out of Punjab due to fear and insecurity....

You are aware that the director-general of police has been directing action against terrorists in extremely difficult circumstances. The Government must strengthen his hands. On the other hand, some of your colleagues in the Government have chosen to raise unseemly controversies apparently aimed at the director-general of police.

The Central Government has lent full support to the Government of Punjab to combat terrorism. We are concerned about the deteriorating law and order situation in the state....

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

Buta Singh

EXTRACTS

"In fact, we have not had this level of violence in a single week since June 1984...over 100 serious incidents were reported. Thirty-five murders have been committed."

Letter written on April 27

"We have received reports that some of your ministers are in touch with terrorists and that nothing has been done to take suitable action against these persons."

Letter written on May 6

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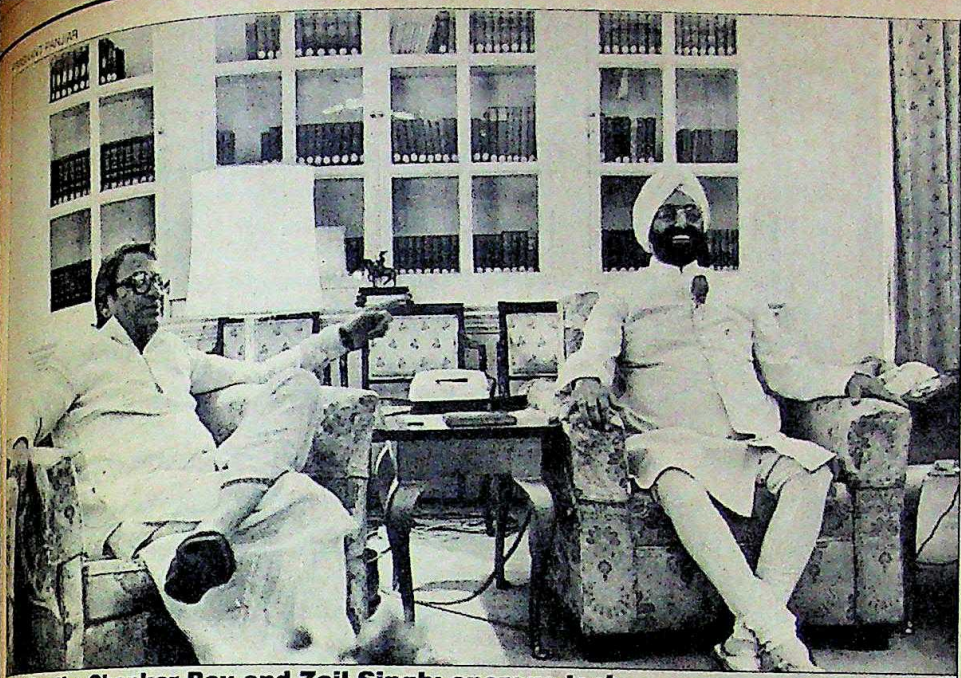

Siddhartha Shankar Ray and Zail Singh: onerous task

also notes that during the last few months—apart from the slaying of Longowal's killer Jarnail Singh—three of the members of the five-man Panthic Committee (Aroor Singh, Gajja Singh and Sunbir Singh Chaheru) have been arrested. And entire gangs operating in Jullundhar (those of Keval Singh, Bauni, and others) have been smashed.

BUT the bottom line remains that the fundamental problem is political. There can be no decisive battle against terrorism in a law and order context bereft of a political solution. Despite several promises, the Centre gave nothing to Barnala—not Chandigarh, not the Jodhpur detenus, not the water—in order to strengthen his hands and enable him to tell Punjab's alienated youth that he had obtained through peace and negotiations what they could not get through violence.

The Centre's gameplan is notable for its ambiguity. From what little can be discerned, the idea is to give Ray and Ribeiro a freer hand in organising the security forces, and in postings, thereby rendering the anti-terrorist actions more effective. In the end, the Centre will want to deliver some psychologically or physically decisive blow to the terrorist movement before starting moves for a popular government, while at the same time keeping some lines of communications with the extremists open.

But these moves are fraught with dangers. With the elimination of the political option and the sidelining of the buffer government, there is really no one left to fight for the accord. The extremists don't recognise it, and the Unified Akali Dal (UAD) doesn't accept it. In any case, both Parkash Singh Badal and Gurcharan Singh Tohra are still in jail. Akali moderates who supported reconciliation and were prepared to fight, will be forced now to mouth extremist phrases to carry conviction and credibility in Punjab. As the battle again turns into one between the Centre and the Sikhs, it will be that much harder for the Centre to bring Sikhs back to the negotiating table, let alone back into the national mainstream.

There is no certainty that the Punjab gameplan will work in the Haryana elections. If the Congress loses Haryana, the main objective of risking Presidential rule will remain unachieved.

Indeed, the Centre may not even be left with Ragi to talk to, for he can hardly be expected to negotiate when the police are arresting UAD, Taksal and AISSF activists. Already the first visual message flashed to the Sikhs at Ray's first press conference could be twisted, for he was flanked by Chief Secretary P.H. Vaishnav, Home Secretary R.P. Ojha, and Ribeiro—none of them Sikh. Ray has also turned his back on the practice of having advisers (among whom he could have included a Sikh).

As the police solution is intensely sought—and there is always the danger of repression without any recourse for the innocent—the feeling of alienation among even moderate Sikhs who will feel jettisoned from the political process will deepen and possibly swell the ranks of the underground. This is bound to force an emotional unity among Sikhs which could translate later into another political unity. Barnala's party will either have to fall in line or be rendered irrelevant.

An equally risky step is the Centre's desire to talk to Ragi. Whatever the performance of the Akali government, it had proved decisively to the Centre that in a war between the 'church' and state it would uphold the state. But the Centre itself has indirectly been talking to the church (Ragi), and helping foster the impression that the Akal Takht does indeed represent the Sikhs in political matters. In its criticism of Barnala, the Centre noted that his writ had ceased to run in Punjab. But it was the Centre which bowed to Ragi's writ when, on Ragi's request, Ribeiro withdrew the CRPF from the Golden Temple.

Worst of all, there is no certainty that the Punjab gameplan will work any magic in Haryana. The Opposition has already begun a campaign aimed at convincing voters that President's rule in Punjab is a gimmick aimed at getting their votes. If the Congress loses Haryana, Rajiv Gandhi will be left with a bankrupt policy and no reserves to draw upon.

There could be temporary peace in Punjab as terrorists bide their time. But President's rule has failed to deliver long-term results in the past, both in Punjab as well as in troubled states of the North-east. Indeed, Operation Bluestar took place after a prolonged period of Central rule. Rajiv Gandhi will do well to remember that terrorist killings in Punjab reached their lowest point in recent history immediately after the Longowal accord and the September elections that brought Barnala into office. Any gameplan without the objective of a similar political settlement can only meet with failure.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR with PRABHU CHAWLA, RAMINDAR SINGH and bureau reports

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CONGRESS(I)

Mood of Uncertainty

THE ornate Central Hall of Parliament is a fairly good barometer of the mood of the ruling party. Last fortnight, as the four-month-long session came to an end, the mood communicated by the flurry of activity in the treasury benches was one of nervousness. The portly Rajya Sabha MP, Kalpanath Rai, was seen hurrying between the rows of seats, waving a newspaper and telling his party MPs: "Vishwanath Pratap Singh has spoiled the image of my party and my leader Rajiv Gandhi." In another corner, AICC(I) General Secretary Bhagwat Jha Azad was discussing party strategy with three other MPs. And in mid-Hall, Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K.L. Bhagat was talking over with colleagues the mechanics of the proposed Congress(I) rally in Delhi on May 16.

In his Parliament office, the object of all this frenetic activity was quietly at work. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has not only been meeting senior cabinet colleagues almost every day but has also been calling party MPs individually and collectively for suggestions, these parleys often continuing late into the night. But the desire to outdo the other in displaying loyalty to the leader has only accentuated intra-party rivalry. The consequence has been confusing and contradictory advice to Rajiv.

One of the major questions facing the leadership is V.P. Singh. In the absence of any unanimity on strategy, those looking forward to rehabilitation within the party have launched a tirade against the former defence minister. Some like Azad, former Youth Congress(I) president Tariq Anwar and the discredited Rai have come close to calling Singh a CIA agent. While Rajiv's silence on the issue has been read as his approval, senior Congressmen have nevertheless refrained from attacking Singh.

Even in the meeting of the Congress(I) Parliamentary Party's (CPP-I) executive committee, the majority felt that Singh should not be subjected to any personal humiliation. The executive had to take up the Singh issue because a daily had carried Fairfax Chairman Michael Hershman's extraordinary interview that morning. Singh himself came out against Hershman's statements: "He has no right to interfere with our country's internal affairs." Rai and Azad's idea of expelling Singh from the party, though, did not find favour with Rajiv. Feels a senior Congress(I) MP: "By making charges against our partymen in public, like the Janata Party, we will ruin ourselves."

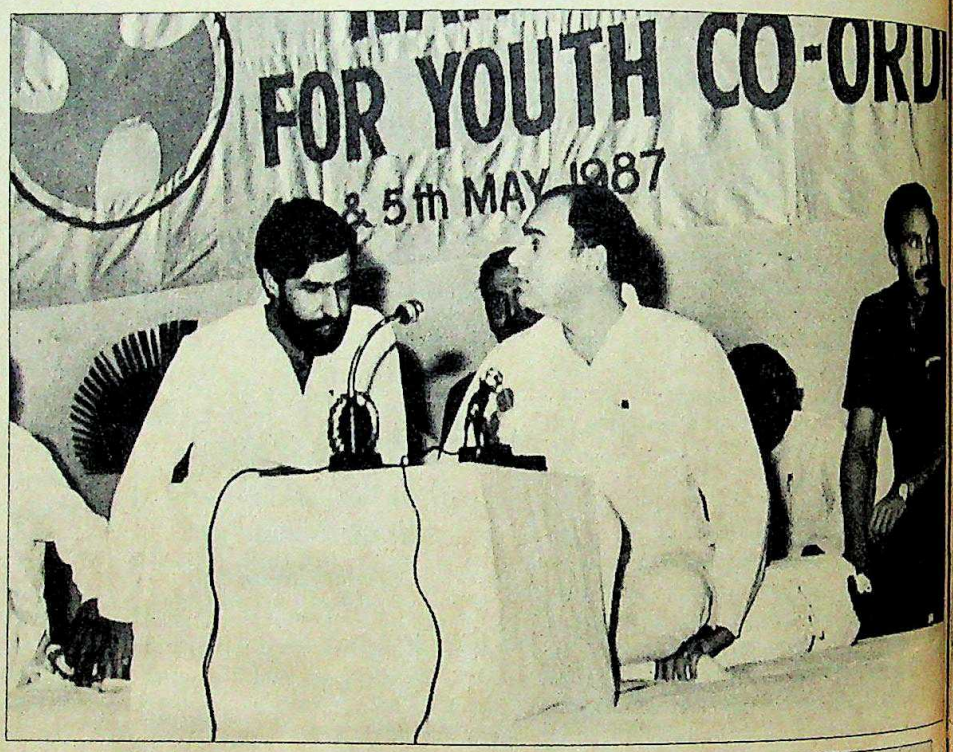
The personal attacks on the former defence minister by a section of the party—which has also questioned his integrity—appear to be a reaction to Singh's rising popularity. Rajiv has also used every platform available to drive home the point that the engagement of Hershman was part of a grand conspiracy to create instability—a charge denied by the former defence minister. Singh and his men feel that the prime minister is being misled by his close advisors who want to divert his attention from the corruption charges against big business houses.

But Singh has made it evident that he will hit back if pushed beyond a point. Says he: "I can surrender anything, my office, my politics, my social life, but I cannot surrender my right to live as a human being. I have not violated party discipline. I only implemented the party's programme of eliminating corruption. I have no regrets." In fact, over a dozen MPs have cautioned Rajiv in writing not to push Singh against the wall.

The reception Singh received in Lucknow and Allahabad, his home town, has also made party bosses uneasy. In the state capital, several MLAs and ministers met Singh although they knew he had fallen from favour. And, at a well-attended public meeting in Allahabad, half a dozen MLAs from the district, in addition to district office-bearers and former ministers, were present. Former Union minister Arun Nehru, though expected, failed to turn up.

Singh's and Rajiv's contradictory

Rajiv at YC(I) convention: no respite



The Congress(I) is at war with itself. The party's failure to finalise a clear course of action and the politics of one upmanship have sharpened intra-party rivalry.

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statements on the Fairfax matter have also heightened confusion. As the Thakkar-Natrajan Commission began its in-camera probe into the affair, Singh demanded the cancellation of the contract with the American agency if it was related as anti-national. The prime minister in turn said that there was nothing in the files to indicate the nature of the Fairfax agreement. This was out of tune with the Government stand—both inside and outside the House—that there was "a sort of arrangement with Fairfax".

What all this revealed was a party at war with itself. And, in the absence of any clear party directive on crucial issues, the Congress(I) hand wore an increasingly divided look. Party leaders have therefore been forced to fall back on cliches to defend their beleaguered leader.

But having ardently embraced the destabilisation theory, party members are surprisingly divided on its form and content. Says Arif Mohammed Khan: "In the absence of a firm and credible government, the forces of destabilisation are bound to have an upper hand. The threat is actually from communal forces which have unfortunately been encouraged during the last few months. We are diverting attention from the basic issues." Asserts Bhanu Pratap Singh, former minister and MP from Madhya Pradesh: "It is the duty of foreign agencies to cause destabilisation. But why isn't the public being taken into confidence? What has the Government done all these years except mislead the public by raising the bogey of the foreign hand? To term genuine political dissent as an act of destabilisation is blasphemy. The real danger is from sycophants within the party." Says Satya Pal Mallik, a Rajya Sabha MP from Uttar Pradesh: "The bacteria of destabilisation affects only weak people. If we have been affected, it is a reflection on our own government."

Many in the party feel Rajiv was wrongly advised to raise the foreign hand bogey which has found little public credence. But there appears to be some method in the madness since some powerful people within the Congress(I), who want to push Rajiv towards the left, believe they can achieve this by weakening the party and creating insecurity.

Indeed, the prime minister called communist leaders to discuss the new "threat perspective" and the Soviets have also been requested to pressure Indian communists to fall in line. But luring the reds into the Congress(I) bed will not be easy. Says CPI(M) MP Amal Datta: "We are aware of the threat from imperialistic forces. But the threat has arisen due to the ruling party's wrong policies."

The new insecurity is also reflected in other ways: leaders who had fallen from grace were summoned and asked to organise public meetings explaining the party viewpoint. Among them were former Maharashtra minister Ramrao Adik, former Kerala minister Vyalar Ravi, former Karnataka Congress chief K.H. Patil, former Bihar chief minister Jagannath Mishra and a whole string of MPs from Uttar Pradesh. All six AICC(I) general secretaries were also despatched to the states to ensure that resolutions expressing faith in Rajiv were speedily adopted by party units there, a task accomplished within a week.

Frontal organisations have also been mobilised. The Youth Congress(I) leadership summoned its coordinators from across the country for an extensive briefing on national issues and Rajiv found time to address them. Some enthusiastic MPs from Uttar Pradesh even decided to launch a signature campaign backing the prime minister but hurriedly called off the exercise when someone pointed out that it would imply that Rajiv had doubts about his own support.

The paranoia in the Congress(I) over the President's likely actions has forced the Government to adjourn both Houses of Parliament instead of proroguing them. According to the Constitution, though the presiding officers of the two Houses are empowered to summon a Parliament which has been adjourned, if it is prorogued, only the President can call the next session.

To round off its rally-round-the-leader campaign, a massive Congress(I) rally in Delhi—to be attended, hopefully, by five lakh people—has been planned. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh and Union Ministers Bhagat and Jagdish Tytler have been put in charge. Bir Bahadur Singh summoned MLAs and

V.P. Singh in Allahabad: strong support

The warm reception that V.P. Singh has received in Lucknow and Allahabad, his home town, has made the Congress(I) high command uneasy.

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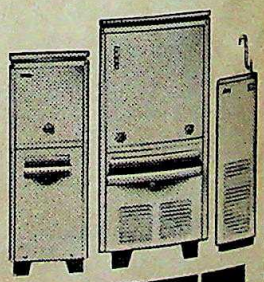

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MPs of the state's western part to discuss the question about mobilisation of people, whose ferrying has been made the responsibility of the state's Transport Minister Sanjay Singh.

The party views this period as crucial because of the heart-stopping dive Rajiv's popularity has taken. Moreover, in a government where little has got done over the last few months because of the preoccupation with clearing controversies, three ministers have resigned during the session—an unheard-of situation. The number of vacancies in the Cabinet has now risen to five—and though there are over 550 MPs in both Houses, it is doubtful if Rajiv can identify even a dozen dependable Congressmen who can fit into his style of working.

But Rajiv's immediate concern seems to be the Haryana Assembly elections which he must win to re-establish his reputation as a vote catcher. Only this, in the short-term, can still the hostile political winds blowing across the country.

—PRABHU CHAWLA with bureau reports

MICHAEL HERSHMAN

"Indians should know the truth"

MICHAEL HERSHMAN is back in the headlines with his threat to expose the "real truth" if the Indian Government's judicial probe comes up with any 'misleading information'. The 42-year-old president of the Fairfax group, which he calls a management consultancy, has suddenly taken on a very defiant form. In an interview to Special Correspondent SHEKHAR GUPTA, *he asserts that he has adopted this new threatening posture consciously. Excerpts:*

Q. *What are you trying to convey by suddenly taking up this threatening posture against the Government of India now?*

A. What I am trying to convey I have already conveyed. I am simply stating what I see and what I believe I have a right to say.

Q. *But isn't it unusual in your profession, where anonymity is such a valued commodity, to become part of the controversy by joining the issue like this?*

A. Yes it is unusual. But it is an unusual situation. It is different because for some reason our investigation has been questioned. So I think I have a responsibility to make known the circumstances surrounding this entire issue.

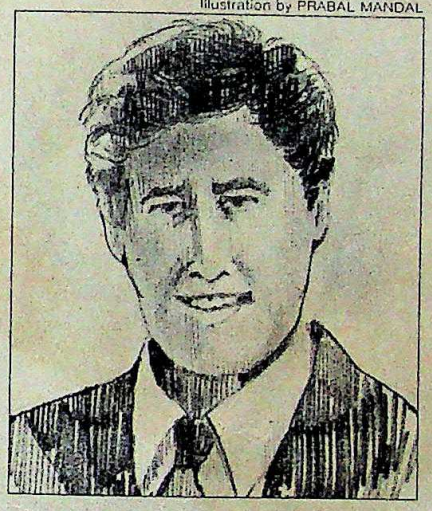
Q. *Is it because you feel slighted on being referred to as a courier company or as informers?*

A. I don't see myself disgruntled on anything. As to our being called a courier company, I have answered that earlier. What we are is obvious from our terms of reference. We have been formally hired by the Government of India for specific investigations. But now that new doubts are being raised I have to take action. The Government of India has said a lot of things wrong in this respect.

Q. *What exactly do you threaten to reveal?*

A. Well, all I am saying is that if there is any misleading information released (by the Thakkar Commission) we would correct that, and we would correct that even if it means releasing information from our files.

Illustration by PRABAL MANDAL



Hershman: threatening posture

Q. *But you have always maintained that in your profession such information is never disclosed.*

A. Because this is an unusual situation, the circumstances make this necessary. People of India should know the truth.

Q. *Why such concern for the people of India?*

A. Because I have worked with Indians for many years. I have a great deal of respect for them.

Q. *At the same time don't many people in India believe that you are part of a foreign conspiracy?*

A. Well, just look at the history of the Indian political system. Every time the Government finds itself in problems it finds some foreign factors to blame. This is nothing new.

Q. *Do you deny the charge that you are a* CIA *front and that you could be sharing information with the* CIA *which could be used to blackmail Indian leaders?*

A. This has been said before. It is the same old situation. Trying to divert attention.

Q. *Do you have a good understanding of the Indian political system?*

A. Yes, I know a fair bit. I do not pretend to know a great deal though.

Q. *By promising to assist the inquiry if it is conducted under V.P. Singh, have you embarrassed him?*

A. Yes. It may embarrass him in the short run from a political standpoint. But we believe that the Indian people know what he is like. His honesty and integrity is well known and we believe that in the long run, the people of India will understand that he is clean and fair. He is very well respected by the Indian people.

Q. *Who are you working for?*

A. We have been formally retained by the Government of India to conduct investigations on various different things. That arrangement still continues and as far as we are concerned we are still working on that. We are not working for anyone else.

Q. *Have you had any contact with the Government of India since this controversy surfaced?*

A. Yes, there have been contacts. And some very recent ones. The Indian Government has been in touch.

Q. *Have you protested against Brahm Dutt's statements calling yours a courier company?*

A. I am not prepared to disclose what I have said in my communications.

Q. *And have you as yet been paid anything for the work?*

A. I am afraid I am not prepared to say anything about that. It is not just something about this case. In every case we keep such terms confidential.

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THE PRESIDENT

Deepening Crisis

It was literally a case of exchanging sweet nothings. When Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi greeted President Zail Singh on his 71st birthday last fortnight, there was much friendly banter as the two offered each other sweets. But the bitterness between them and their sharp differences over the powers of the President has now escalated to a crucial stage with the prime minister making it clear that he was not prepared to budge an inch further on the presidential issue. Having showed signs of reconciliation earlier, Rajiv seems to have now decided to assert his right to determine the nature and extent of information to be given to the President.

The Government's hardening attitude towards the President was reflected clearly in Rajiv's three-page letter to Zail Singh. The communication—which was a reproduction of the cabinet resolution—unequivocally stated that the Government had given sufficient information to the President and that it could not accede to his requests for more information.

Rajiv's strong stand was in response to a letter written a week earlier by the President in which he had sought information about the Bofors deal. Among the facts he had asked for were the preliminary test reports of the gun, comparative offers of other companies and details about the time-frame of the transfer of technology and supply of ammunition from other countries.

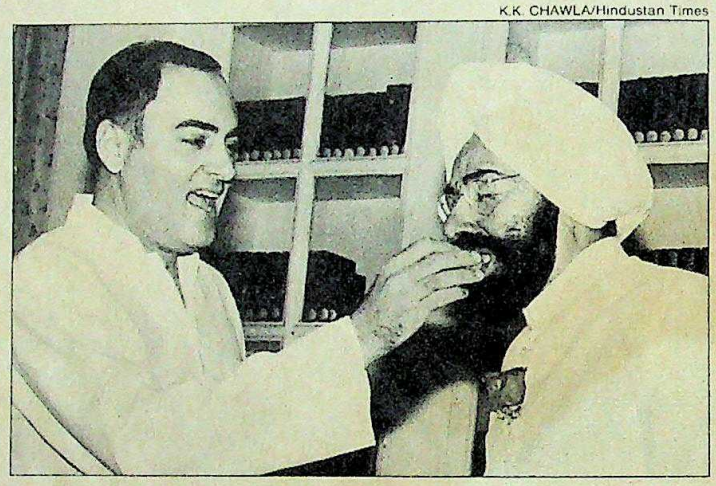
The prime minister sent Home Minister Buta Singh and Defence Minister K.C. Pant to brief the President on the deal. Rajiv also met Singh and discussed with him the background in which the deal was signed. The President, however, made it clear that he would like to have more information in writing rather than being told about it in generalities.

Meanwhile, as he was about to formalise his request in the letter to the prime minister, the controversy over his alleged plans to dismiss the prime minister on the grounds of corruption, exploded into the open. The bizarre proposition, which emanated from an official in Rashtrapati Bhawan, finally boomeranged on the President and cost him considerable public sympathy. Even the opposition parties roundly condemned such a move and the President found himself being accused of participating in a design to destabilise the country. Rajiv himself criticised the President indirectly when he declared that no individual, however big, would be allowed to subvert the Constitution.

Realising that the public mood had changed, Rajiv quickly got together with his new coterie of advisors to formulate his reply to the President. The Political Affairs Committee of the Cabinet met thrice within 48 hours to discuss the draft reply prepared by officials in the Cabinet and Prime Minister's Secretariat. For the first time, the prime minister took the entire cabinet into confidence before finalising his reply. Commerce Minister P. Shiv Shankar, Home Minister Buta Singh and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K.L. Bhagat suggested taking a strong line so that the controversy over the powers of the President to seek information under Article 78 was permanently set at rest. They argued that the reply should reassert that it was for the Cabinet to decide the nature and extent of information to be made available to the President.

The Government's stand was a deliberate departure from its earlier position on the issue. Inside and outside Parliament, the Government had taken the stand that it would always keep the President posted with details on every major issue. In fact, an hour before the President wrote his letter on the Bofors deal he had received a communication from the prime minister requesting him to send his views on Article 78. The President had to redraft his letter to incorporate the request.

K.K. CHAWLA/Hindustan Times



Rajiv greeting Zail Singh on his birthday

But Rajiv's decision to keep information away from the President on an issue like the Bofors deal, in which serious corruption charges have been made, has also boomeranged on the ruling party. Already, it has rallied the Opposition and sections of the media behind Singh. Said Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao: "Denying information to the President is an insult to the country." Added Lok Dal chief H. N. Bahuguna: "If the President of the country is not trusted by the Government then who else would be? It is a wrong precedent."

The President himself seems determined to assert his right and finally settle the issue. Significantly, as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, he can direct the service chiefs to report to him on all defence matters. Said a presidential supporter: "The President is bound to protect the Constitution. If he surrenders his right to be a constructive check on the Government, then democracy will not survive in this country."

Among the options being considered by the President is to issue a directive to the Government to furnish information on all the defence deals, details of Foreign Exchange Regulations Act violations by big business houses and action taken against them, foreign accounts held by Indians abroad, and corruption charges received against some of the ministers. Singh himself has received independent information on all these issues and is likely to confront the Government with it. In addition, he is likely to make the entire correspondence between him and the Government public.

But the crucial question is what shape events will take if the Government refuses to oblige the President. In the absence of any precedent, the only certainty was that the country was headed for the biggest constitutional crisis since Independence.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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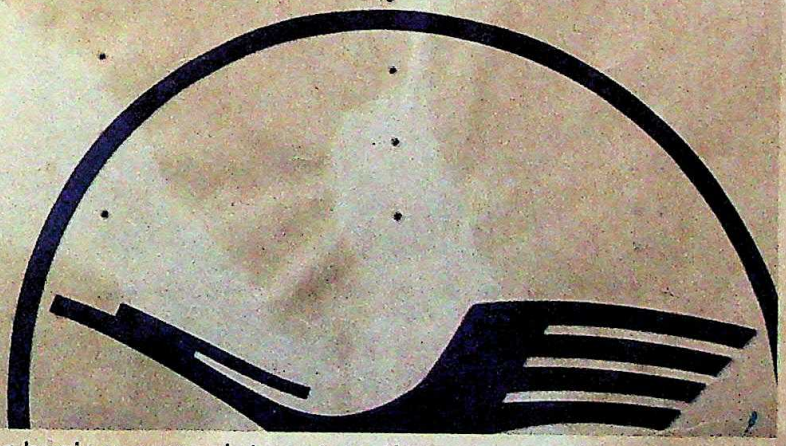
The more important the meeting, the more important the airline.



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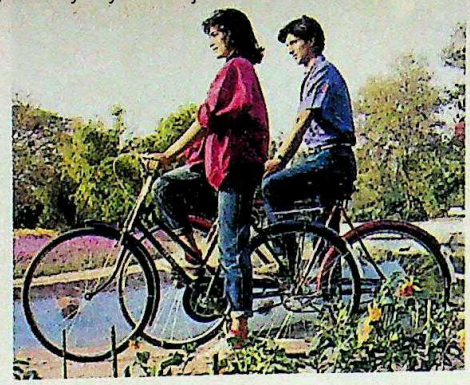

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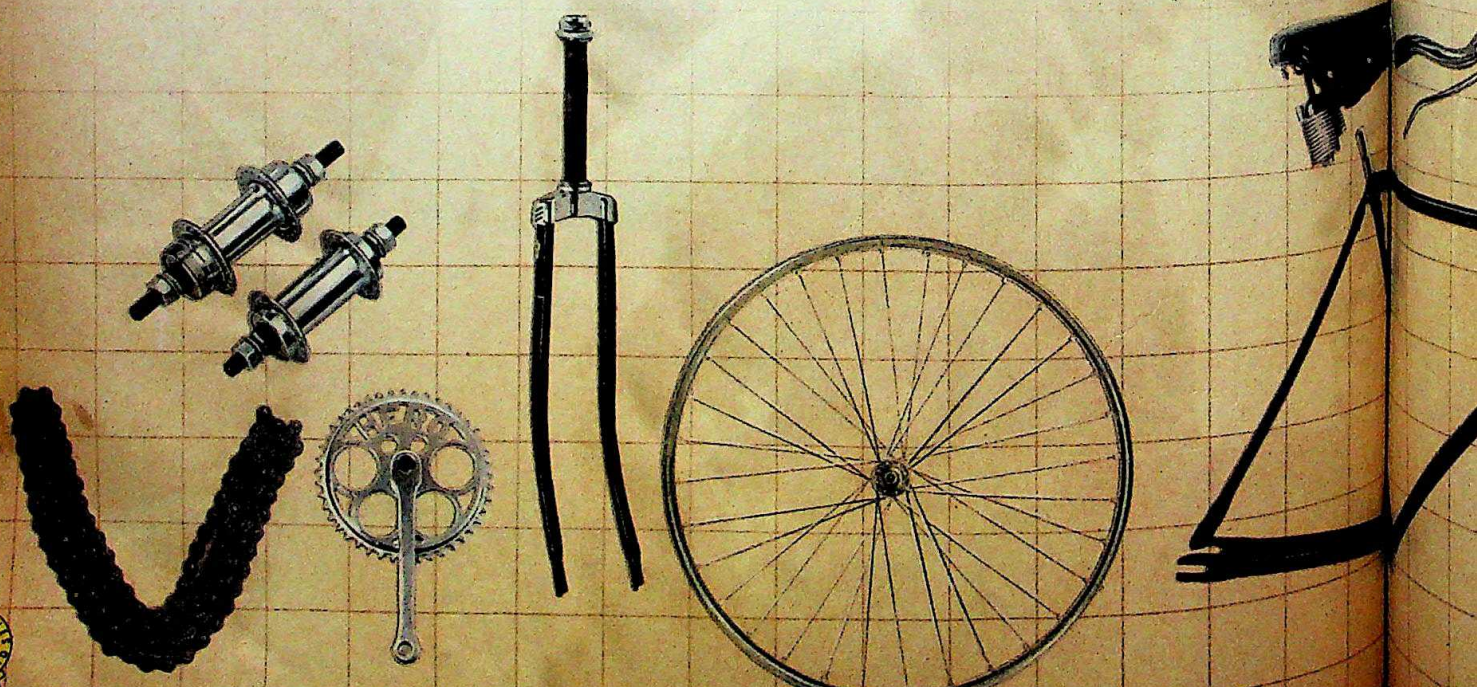

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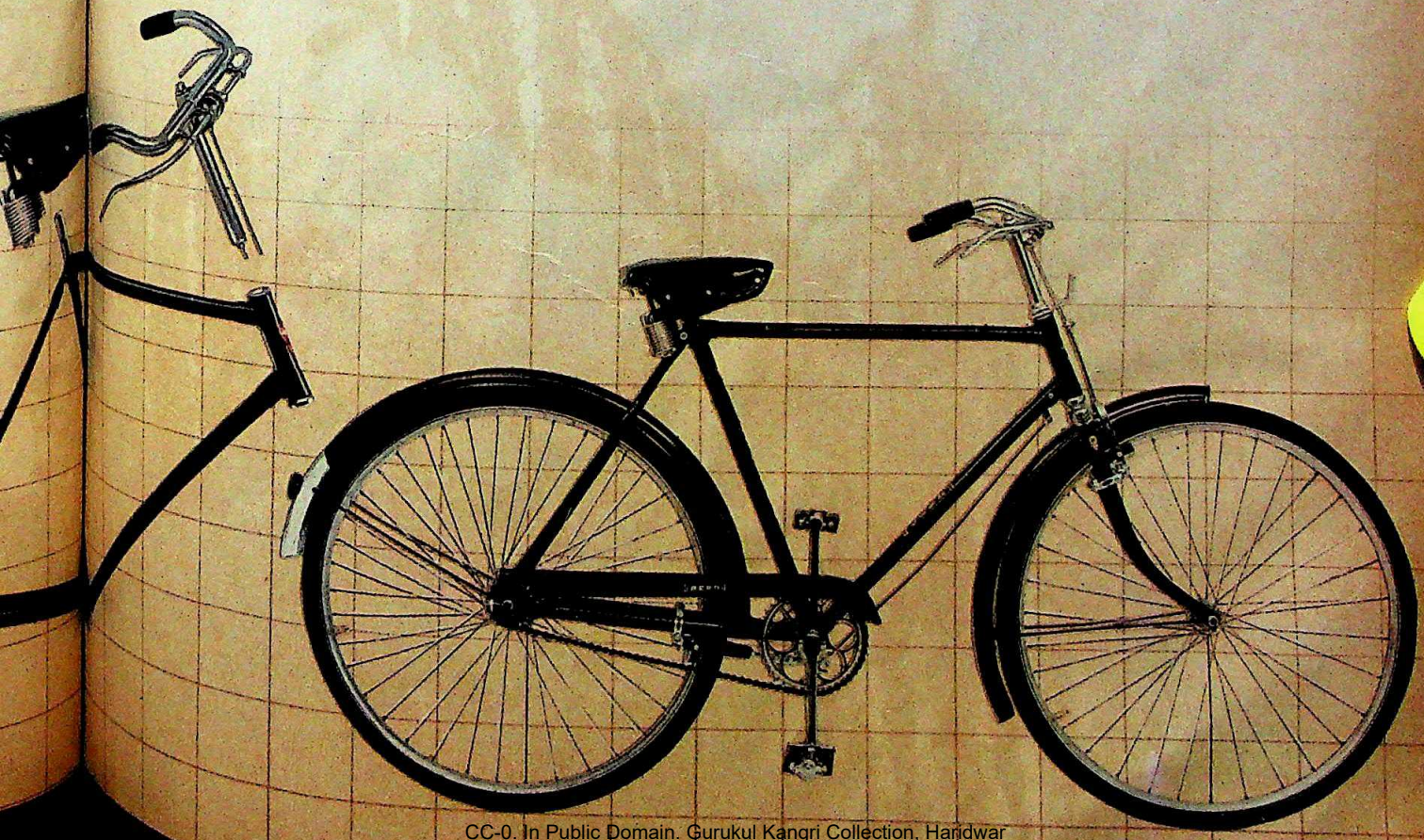

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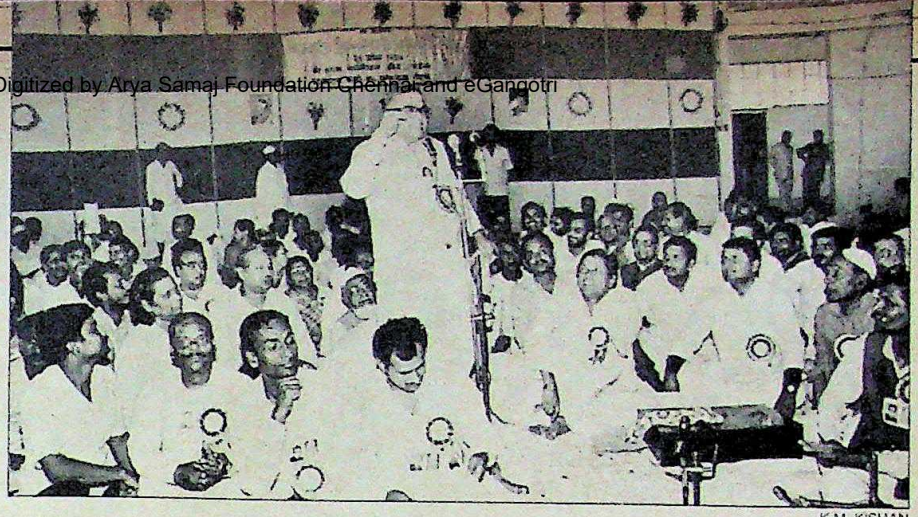
BIHAR

Divided Rule

BIHAR'S former chief minister Jagannath Mishra, who has become his successor Bindeshwari Dubey's biggest bogeyman, has delivered yet another telling punch. He has now broken up the state unit of the Youth Congress(I) and formed a parallel organisation called the Bihar State Youth Congress(I) Campaign Committee. The objective of the new organisation: to assist 'dedicated' and 'loyal' workers in carrying out a mass contact programme and defeat opposition designs.

The split was announced at a well-attended meeting of youth workers in Patna last fortnight: among others, 18 ruling party legislators were present. Claiming that the majority of the Youth Congress(I) workers and leaders, leaving aside the office-bearers, was with him, Mishra said that "the state party and the Government, dominated by power-seekers, contractors and vested interests" were dead. He was therefore launching a parallel organisation to



K.M. KISHAN

Mishra at the parallel state YC(I) meet: telling punch

PANIDARI

Water War

THE 300-km stretch of the Ganga between Patna and Kursaila in Bihar's Katihar district—normally a placid waterway—has suddenly attracted attention because of the spotlight on a unique and controversial feudal system, 'panidari'. Under it, waterlords or panidars tax anyone who uses their waters. Last fortnight, Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini (CYSV) volunteers, local fishermen and boatmen, made a symbolic two-week trip down the Ganga, announcing their intention to "liberate the river".

The cruise was aimed at pressuring the state Government which has failed to do anything to end the system. Neither has it introduced any law to end panidari nor has it transferred the 60,000 tanks and ponds—the scene of regular bloody battles for fishing rights—to the Animal Husbandry and Fisheries Department to lease out to cooperative societies, as is normally done elsewhere.

P.N. Bhagwati, the former Supreme Court chief justice, had opined last year that panidari could be abolished if the state Government introduced a legislation on the pattern of the act that abolished zamindari. In fact, when Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey met the CYSV delegation, he assured them that since legislation would take time, he would pass an ordinance. Home Department officials, however, now deny that any such promise was made. Nobody in the Government is willing to explain why it refuses to act on the issue.

The panidari system is unique to this area of Bihar. An 80-km stretch of the river from Pirpainti to Sultanpur, for instance, is controlled by two waterlords who claim that they had inherited the rights—together with the right to tax the users—for navigation and fishing from the East India Company. There are others who claim that their rights are even older. One panidar has even transferred his rights in the names of gods and goddesses to sanctify his ownership.

Taxes ranging from Rs 300 to Rs 1,000 annually, depending on the size of their nets, are collected from fishermen. Interestingly, the panidars have even appropriated the right to flood waters. "Every year flood waters submerge over 80,000 acres of land. Even here the cultivators cannot fish for fear of inviting the wrath of waterlords and their musclemen," says a CYSV volunteer. Judging from the Government's attitude, much more pressure will have to be applied before it picks up the courage to dislodge the powerful feudal interests.

—FARZAND AHMED

K.M. KISHAN

Crusade against panidari: tax trouble

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"reinforce people's faith in the Congress(I)" and strengthen Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's hands. Vijay Kumar Choudhary, a legislator, was named president of the new organisation.

Quite understandably, Mishra's claims of strengthening the party did not impress state party leaders who were the object of his attack. Calling it an "act of gross indiscipline", a harassed Dumar Lal Baitha, president of the Bihar Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (BPCC-I), asked: "Is this the way of strengthening the organisation? If Mishra had any grievance, he should have aired it from a party platform instead of publicly denouncing the party." And a visibly annoyed President of the Bihar Youth Congress(I), Shyam Sunder Singh Dhiraj, lashed out angrily: "Mishra is in league with the Opposition and is trying to destroy the party."

Mishra's action was largely seen as a move to gain control of yet another Congress(I) frontal organisation. Last year, he had split the state's unit of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), headed by Dubey. He had also broken up labour organisations affiliated to INTUC—like the Rashtriya Colliery Mazdoor Sangh in Dhanbad and the Bokaro Steel Workers Union—to strengthen his grassroots support. He has already secured much political mileage out of his Jana Jagaran Abhiyan, which was launched two years ago with the sole objective of denigrating the Dubey Government and building himself up as the most popular Congress(I) leader in Bihar.

Says Upendra Vidyarthi, a senior Youth Congress(I) leader and social worker who backs the former chief minister: "Mishra has no alternative but to isolate the spineless people who control such organisations." However, seasoned politician that he is, Mishra has been careful to guard against any action by the party high command. He makes it a point to swear loyalty to Rajiv consistently—"I am not ready to accept anyone as my leader except Rajiv Gandhi," he says.

Mishra is now expected to try and break up the BPCC(I). Dubey puts up a brave front and says: "People like Mishra are obviously living in a fool's paradise. His objective of breaking up the BPCC(I) will never be achieved." But there is little doubt that Mishra has made major strides on his way to gradually gaining control over Bihar's ruling party apparatus.

—FARZAND AHMED

LAST WORD/ANDER PURI

Licensed to Pry

007 suddenly knew that he was tired. He also knew that he had no business to be tired. Every tingling nerve in his body told him that violence was about to erupt. Just then, a dark shadow hurtled around the corner of the deserted street. 007 lunged forward to leap on the three-wheeler scooter and delivered a hard karate chop at the base of the driver's neck. It was a single smooth action. The driver gurgled with pain and the rickshaw lurched to a halt. 007 ordered the driver to proceed to the five-star hotel, and settled back on the seat. This was the only way to stop a rickshaw in Delhi, he thought....

As he entered the hotel, 007 swept the lobby with a quick look till his eyes settled on the crowd of Swedes chatting with the Indians. From the corner of his eye, he noticed reporters earnestly talking with a pretty Swedish woman reporter. A fat Swede looked at him. 007 extended his hand. The name is Bondopadhya, Jamshed Bondopadhya. I am the correspondent of the *Cycle and Auto Parts Gazette....*"

Later that evening, as he sat across the large mahogany desk in M's room in the RAW building, he reflected on the day's happenings. The pace had been hectic.

"Well, 007," M said dryly. "I've just gone through your report. You haven't got much, have you? The entire cabinet is breathing down my neck. They want some positive proof on the defence deals."

"About the corruption, sir?"

"About the attempt to destabilise the country, 007," M snapped. "Where was your mind wandering when I was briefing you?"

"I meant the corruption by the press, sir," Bondopadhya said gently.

M leaned forward. "Have you got anything on Goenka?"

"I believe I have, sir," 007 said and lit a cigarette. "Remember all the noise the press made just because the Government bought three subs for the price of four?"

"Yes, yes, go on!"

007 exhaled smoke. "Well, I have irrefutable evidence that Goenka obtains four subs for the price of three!"

M looked puzzled. "Why does Goenka need submarines?"

"Submarines, sub-editors, what is the difference? It's the principle of the thing that matters, doesn't it sir?"

"I suppose you're right," M said.

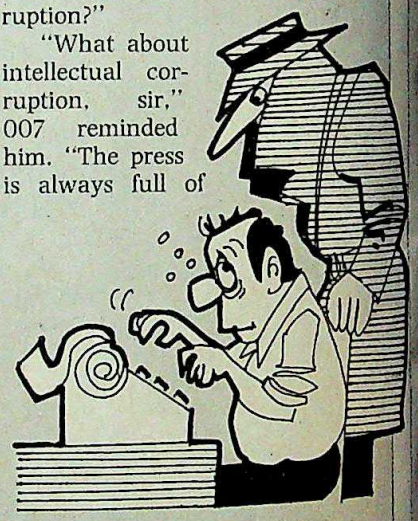
"And there are kickbacks in the press too, " 007 said.

"Tell me," M said sharply.

"Remember the stories we tried to plant against V.P. Singh? Apart from the nationalised editors, the rest kicked back like infuriated mules!"

"But is that corruption?"

"What about intellectual corruption, sir," 007 reminded him. "The press is always full of



how weapons are being manufactured and sold."

"What about it?"

"Why don't we talk of how stories are manufactured and sold, sir?"

"Good idea, 007," M said. Find out how they obtain the RAW material for manufacturing their stories."

"One last question, sir," 007 said. "Why don't we investigate Bofors instead of the Indian press?"

M shot him a piercing look. "You should know. You are one of the half-dozen men with the double-0 prefix. Don't you know what that means?"

"Yes sir, it means I have the licence to kill...."

"Kill what?" M snapped.

"Kill time, sir!"

"Exactly," M said, with a dismissive nod. "Carry on, 007...."

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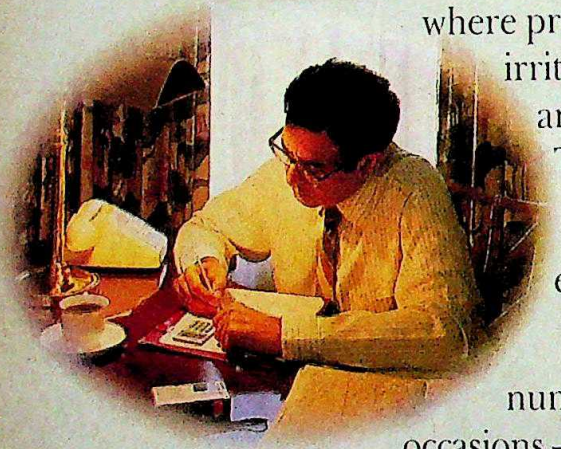
Executive Mental Space and the

Time, it has now been generally accepted, is not the principal enemy of the senior executive. When he complains about the shortage of time he is in fact admitting to a shortage of space – mental space. (This is perhaps one instance where the space-time continuum becomes apparent.)

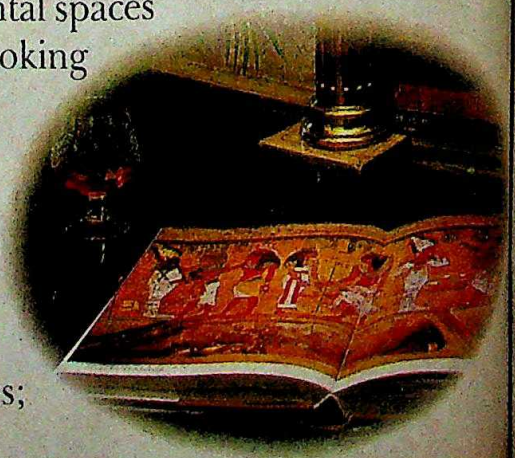
It is not time, or the shortage of it which prevents him from arriving at solutions; it is the intrusion of irritants into the sacred precincts of his mind where problems are in the process of being sorted out; irritants which are an inevitable part of the corporate and quotidian environment in which he lives. Take these away and he has more mental space.



The reality, however, is that this is more easily said than done.

Happily (and this has been reported by a number of executives) there are legitimate corporate occasions – such as the quick business dash to another city – which almost unconsciously help create these mental spaces. Physically distanced from routine irritants, the mind seems to make room for ideas.

Here then was an exciting concept which caught the imagination of Welcomgroup; the possibility of consciously creating for the business traveller an environment in which those mental spaces could be encouraged. Suddenly they were looking at a totally new genre of hotel services – one which went beyond the mere plushness and luxury of the five star deluxe experience; beyond the obvious provision of executive facilities such as secretarial services and access to equipment. It meant shaping new concepts of property design and services;



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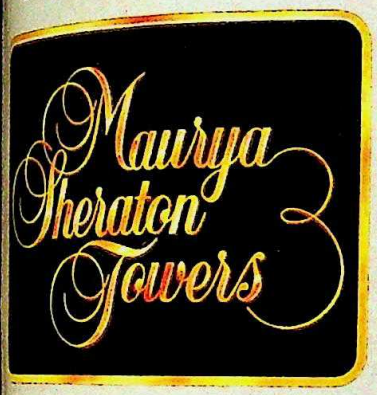
the Effects of Environment.

it involved programmes of executive life-style study and intensive training for a new breed of hotel managers and personnel.



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A photographer's delight, the Maurya Towers tempts you to display the glossy photographs of impressive property. But we in the agency resisted that temptation, realising that these were not sufficient to convey the real discriminator between this breakthrough concept and other five star deluxe hotels.

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What makes the Maurya Towers another genre in the art of executive hospitality is the intangibles which the sensitive and mature intellect will perceive – in the finesse, the unobtrusiveness of the service, the incredible efficiency, the charm and the flair with which the personnel allow you that 'mental space' which in fact is possible during your stay.

The next time you are in Delhi on business it may be a good idea to try this fertile environment to create those wide open mental chambers of creativity.

The Maurya Sheraton Towers, at Welcomgroup Maurya Sheraton, Diplomatic Enclave, New Delhi 110 021

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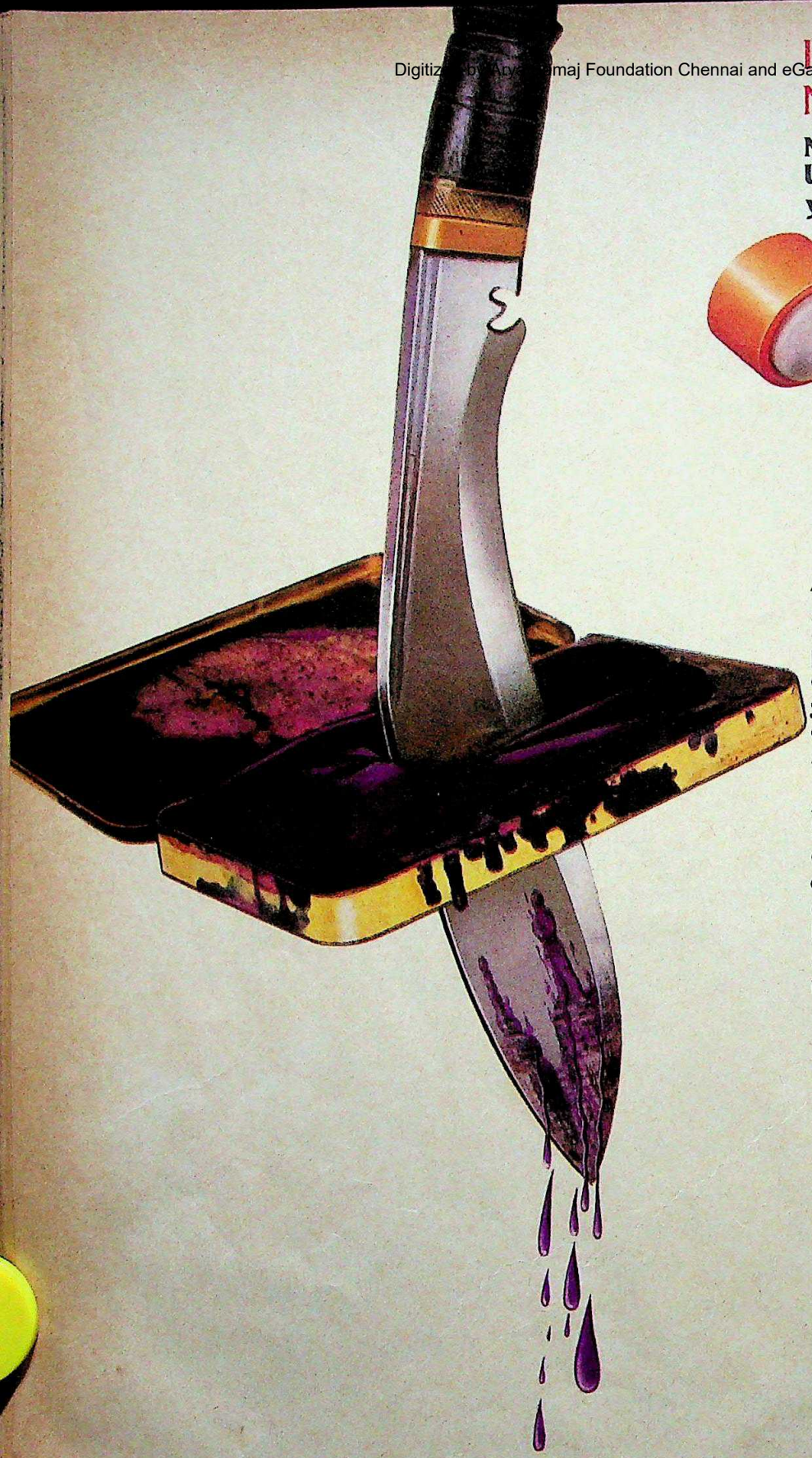

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THE INK-PAD IS DEAD

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ANDHRA PRADESH

Hydel Havoc

THE saffron-robed Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao is busy praying to the rain gods this summer. The monsoons are his only hope for overcoming an unprecedented water and power shortage, a lethal combination that has seen blood pressures in the state rising even as the water levels in the state's reservoirs have continued to fall.

Already, water is being supplied to Hyderabad only on alternate days, and could be reduced to every third day. And the sudden 60 per cent power cut imposed on high-tension consumers has forced 300 industrial units to down shutters and lay off over 70,000 workers.

There had been advance warning of the problems in store. The Andhra Pradesh State Electricity Board (APSEB) had informed the Government in February of an imminent power crisis and suggested power cuts. But NTR, keen on getting votes in the March parishad elections, deferred doing so. The power cut, when it finally came on April 14, hit without warning all the power intensive industries and the railways. The worst-hit was the cement industry: 20 per cent of the country's 33-million tonne output comes from Andhra Pradesh. The result: thousands of people have been rendered jobless as contractors have stopped work on irrigation projects (like lining canals) as cement prices have sky-rocketed.

Work at the Vishakhapatnam steel plant and the Hindustan Shipyard, beset by time and cost overruns, was also badly affected. T.V.S. Sastry, managing director of the state-owned Bharat Heavy Plates and Vessels Ltd (which supplies equipment to large projects), predicted that, in the long run, the power crisis would delay expansion of the Rourkela steel plant in Orissa.

At first, NTR was cool to the flood of criticism, and APSEB Chairman Narla Tata Rao passed the buck on to the Singareni collieries and the generators supplied by Bharat Heavy Electricals. But on May 8, NTR assured industrialists that a way would be found to stagger the available supply. Said Chairman of the state committee of the Confederation of Engineering Industry E. Ananda Rao: "The impact may not have been severe if the Government had imposed a uniform 15 per cent cut on all sectors, instead of picking on us. The situation got worse with the sudden rise in sales tax on diesel from 11 per cent to 16 per cent, making it more expensive to run generators."

With two-thirds of the state's total installed capacity of 3,595 MW drawn from hydel power stations, Andhra Pradesh depends largely on heavy rains to produce electricity. But with poor flows into the Nagarjunasagar and Srisailam reservoirs in the last two years, power cuts had become necessary. The Central Electricity Authority's annual power survey had also forecast a shortfall of 23.13 per cent even with normal rains.

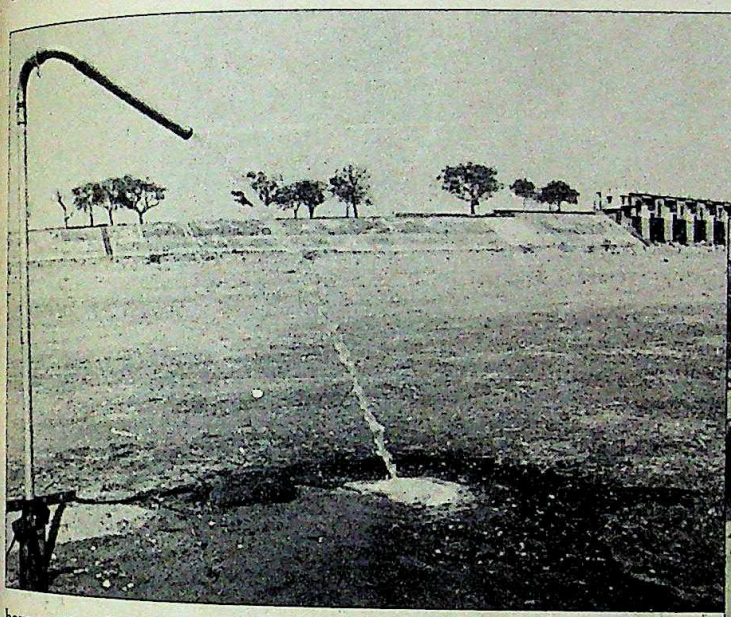
Power planning went even more awry as NTR cut the allocations on power to a mere Rs 169 crore and Rs 180 crore in the last two years, instead of the anticipated Rs 300 crore each year. APSEB officials now argue that if more money had been spent on power projects, mainly the Vijayawada super thermal station, the consumption cut might have been only 10 per cent—a normal rate in summer in most states.

If there is little electricity, there is even less water. As a fire-fighting measure, the state Government has allocated Rs 3.5 crore for digging 22,500 bore wells and another Rs 6.5 crore to meet the drinking water needs in villages and towns. Hyderabad water officials dug bore wells in the drying Himayatsagar and Osmansagar lakes, and 500 wells all over Hyderabad and Secunderabad to maintain the daily flow at 33 million gallons to half the city. Most (nearly 27 million gallons) is drawn from the Majira river, and the supply may have increased if the storage capacity of the reservoir and another one at Singur, had been built as scheduled.

Not having reacted in time to warnings, Rama Rao is now taking his cue from the other actor-turned-chief minister, M.G. Ramachandran, to bring water to the people. Nearly 700,000 gallons of water are being pumped from the Krishna at Vijayawada into two 50-tanker trains. He also plans to try cloud seeding for artificial rain, and has asked MGR to loan Tamil Nadu's specially-equipped aircraft for the purpose. Said a sardonic K. Rosaiah, state Congress(I) leader: "NTR should get a couple of water diviners and a violinist to play in the Osmansagar lake bed to repeat MGR's Madras water supply show." Such antics might at least provide entertainment, if not power and water.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

Snaps India



BABJI/Janta Studios

Bore well; and (right) queuing for water

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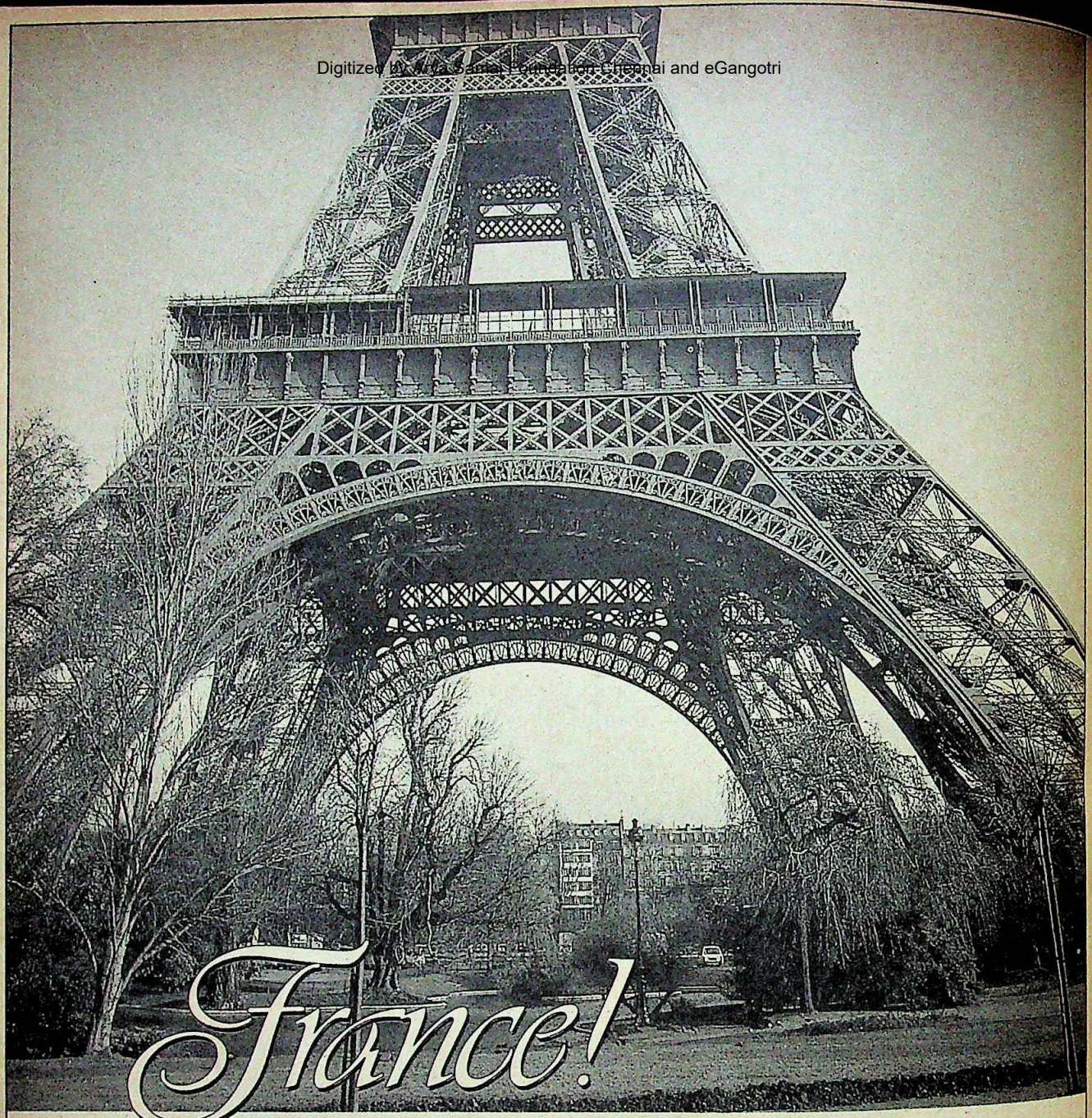

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ANDHRA PRADESH

Reddy Cash

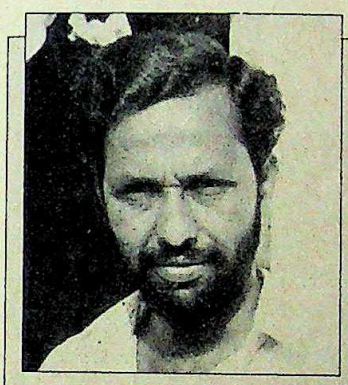
ENTERPRISING villagers of the ring-shaped Ranga Reddy district skirting Hyderabad have found a truly novel way to pick the state Government's pocket. Over 3,000 farmers, teachers, students, vegetable vendors—and even a village fair price shop dealer—have listed themselves as bonded agricultural labourers to collect cash relief of Rs 500. They can hope to receive another Rs 5,750—in the form of bullocks, poultry or land—for their "rehabilitation".

Ever since 1976, when the law banning the practice was enacted, Andhra Pradesh has set the lead by setting free 25,000 of the roughly 200,000 bonded labourers released throughout India. Now the home district of the Andhra Pradesh Labour Minister, P. Indra Reddy, is in the process of earning the distinction of having the highest number of "bonded labourers" anywhere. The racket is flourishing because the Telugu Desam has an eye on the forthcoming elections to the zilla praja parishad and the mandal praja parishads—both were not held here along with the rest of the state—as also gram panchayat and the village agricultural co-operative credit societies' elections.

INDIA TODAY investigations revealed that in at least seven villages—Lemur, Rachlur, Kandukur, Ameerpet, Timmapur, Jattaram and Dabbedguda—money was distributed to land-owning villagers who paid middlemen up to Rs 100 for the favour. In Lemur, 31 km south of Hyderabad, 73 of the beneficiaries do not figure on the village voter list, ration shop record or even in the memory of village elders. The Ranga Reddy district Telugu Desam President, Mula Bhaskara Reddy, belongs to Lemur and his brother Janardhan and two other close relatives figure as bonded labourers, though they are upper caste, land-owning Reddys. To cover up the fact that they are not, as mentioned, backward castes, the bonded labour list carries altered names. Confessed Venkat Reddy: "My family owns about 25 acres, but who will refuse *sarkar* money and benefits?" Forty nine land-owning Reddys—mentioned as Harijans or backwards—have similarly been listed in Lemur and its hamlets.

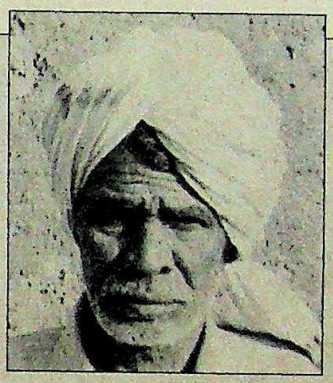
Photographs by K. BAL REDDY

Indra Reddy: embarrassed



"I helped 63 persons. What is wrong in collecting a fee for the service rendered?"

A. SUDHAKAR REDDY
Telugu Desam activist



"For many years only Harijans were bonded labour. Now, every caste is claiming money."

BAINDLA DURGAIAH
bonded labourer

Local Telugu Desam activist, A. Sudhakar Reddy, accused of collecting Rs 100 from each beneficiary, doesn't even deny the charge: "I helped 63 persons. What is wrong in collecting a fee for the service rendered?" But Lemur Sarpanch Satyanarayana Reddy says many on the list have not even received the money.

The attempt at defrauding the state is brazen. In Kandukur, Tankari Narayan Reddy was shown bonded to a cobbler, Ramajah, while S. Darshnajah who was bonded, has at another place been listed as a landlord with five bonded labourers himself. And in Rachlur, while four men were released from the bondage of Vala Erappa, his own son Rajaiah was shown bonded to another villager.

Denying his own involvement, Bhaskara Reddy concedes Telugu Desam workers were responsible for the fraud in Lemur. Says he: "In Dabbeduguda, for instance, 238 persons were released though there are only 252 persons on the voters list." The embarrassed Indra Reddy, now seems keen on busting the racket: "Both Congress and Telugu Desam workers are indulging in this mischief. I will have them booked for cheating after a full inquiry." Says a district official, however: "The landlords and party workers must have joined the racket at least with the knowledge—if not the backing—of the minister."

The immediate gain of votes apart, the long-term strategy seems to be to scuttle the bonded labour rehabilitation scheme, something landowners and officials have done successfully together in the past. Wages in the district have shot up dramatically—from between Rs 60 and Rs 80 per month to between Rs 12 and Rs 15 per day—primarily due to the efforts of the Ibrahim Patnam Taluka Vyavasaya Coolie Sangham, a voluntary organisation. Sangham activists feel that the fraud was deliberately organised to cast doubts on the genuine bonded labourers of the area. But the saddest comment comes from Baindla Durgaiah, a genuine bonded labourer and a Harijan: "For many years only Harijans were bonded labour. Now, every caste is claiming money." If official and landowners' designs are allowed to succeed, many like Durgaiah may find their door to escape from this exploitative system blocked.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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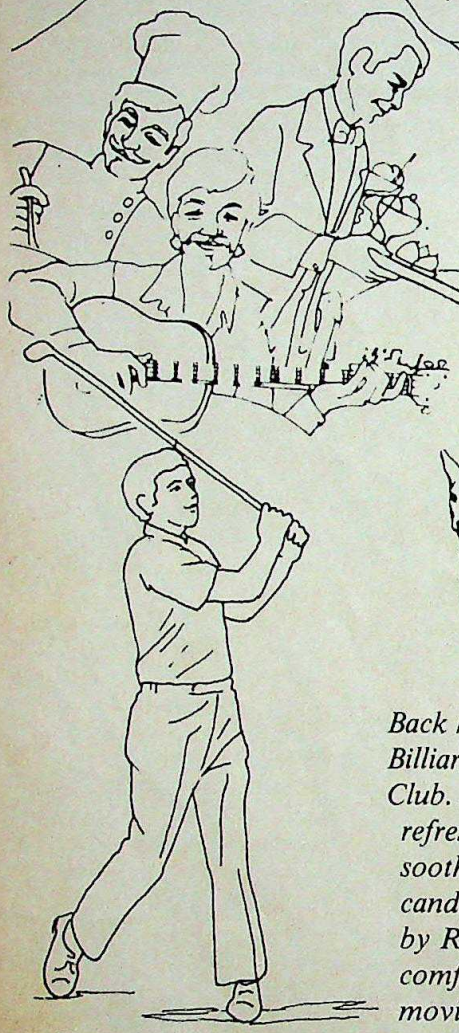

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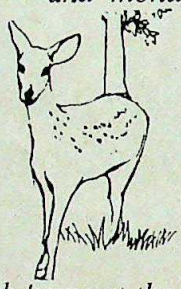

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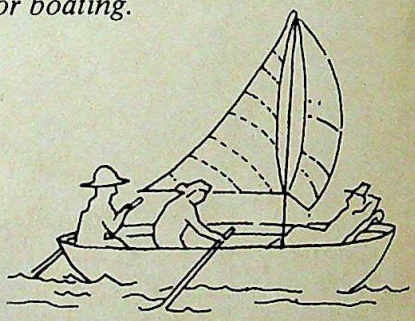

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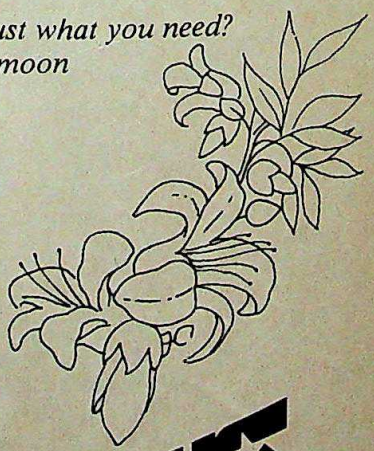

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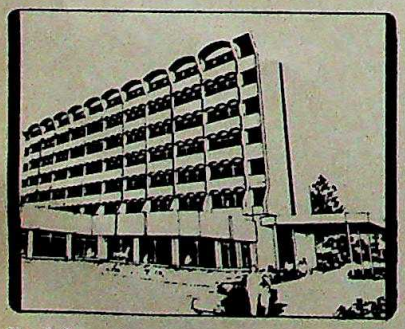

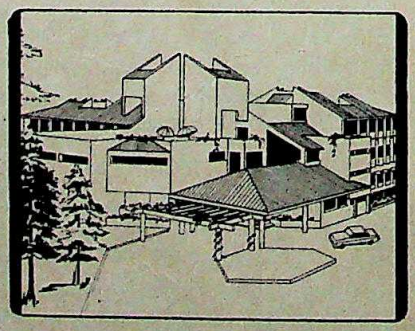

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GHANI KHAN CHOUDHURY

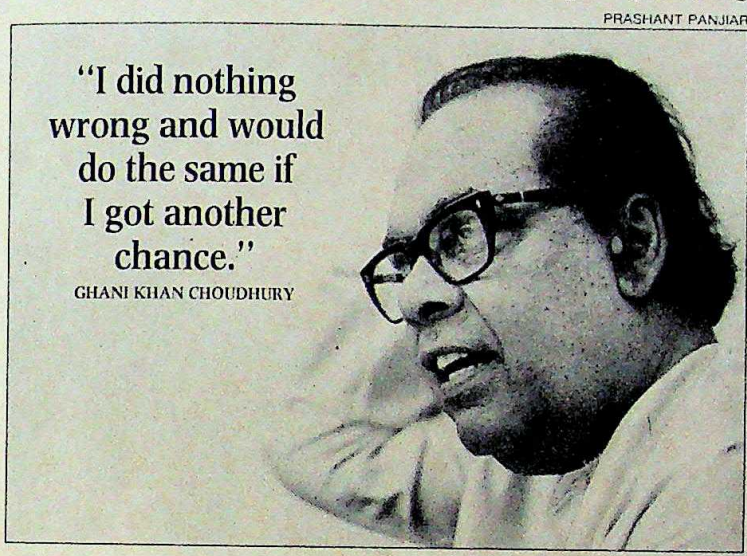
Change of Fortunes

ONE of the finest trains in West Bengal at one time was the Gour Express, the first of many introduced by Abu Barkat Ataul Ghani Khan Choudhury during his tenure as Union railway minister. The Gour Express was a fast, punctual, unusually clean, dream of a train for people travelling between Ghani Khan's home-town, Malda, and the state capital, Calcutta. Today, however, it is invariably late, dirty, tracted most often by ancient steam engines and imbued with an air of almost deliberate neglect. The condition of the train is, if anything, an uncanny reflection of its creator's political fortunes.

Last fortnight, after having perforce relinquished his cabinet sinecure as Union programme implementation minister—a move that many believe, spells the ultimate break in his life line to Central power—Ghani Khan chose an unusual route to return home to Malda. Instead of riding, as he usually does, the Gour Express—often coupled with a special ministerial saloon—Ghani Khan chose the eight-hour road route from the state capital. Leaving Calcutta airport in his Mercedes Benz on his arrival from New Delhi where he had tendered his formal resignation the previous day, it was perhaps best that he did not use his favourite train. For, at around the same time last fortnight, the Gour Express, which at one time went packed with contractors, government officials, Congress(I) bigwigs and party workers, was being used by the state's ruling Marxists to ferry hundreds of CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions) workers into the once-impregnable Congress(I) fortress of Malda for the union's annual state conference. The red flags fluttering in Malda station were testimony to the fact that the wheel of political fortune had turned full circle for the former minister.

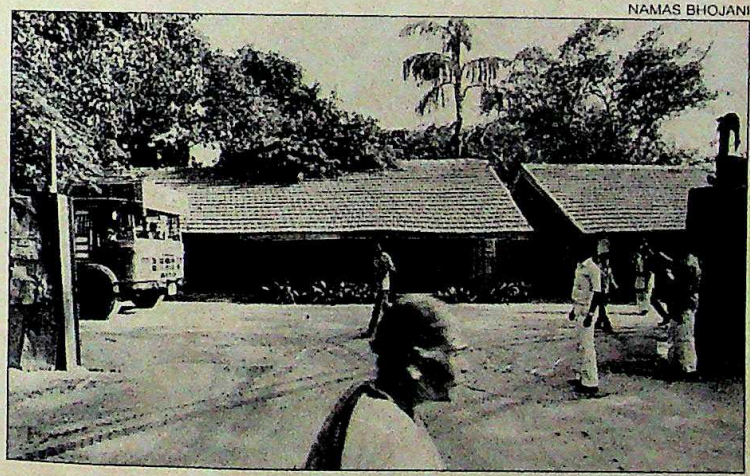
The final turn was not of Ghani Khan's volition. His associates suspect that detractors within the party, led by the formidable Makhanlal Fotedar, ensured his resignation by orchestrating a press campaign based on reports of a Public Accounts Committee (PAC) questioning his decision as railway minister, to help a private firm cling on to a piece of valuable railway land at Wadi Bunder in Bombay. The PAC report had remarked that Ghani Khan had shown "undue consideration" in allowing the private firm, Kirit Enterprises, to extend its lease over the 9,502-sq m plot by an additional five years even while the central railway authorities had been fighting in court to evict the firm. "The land grab was actively aided and abetted by extreme indulgence shown to this firm," the committee held. It noted that the minister intervened in favour of the firm on more than one occasion, overruling each time the advice of railway officials. He forced the ministry to reach an out-of-court settlement with the firm, against the recommendations of the Railway Board. The favours were reversed only when Bansi Lal took over the portfolio but the firm evaded eviction by presenting in court photocopies of the minister's file notings. Manibhai Doshi, the proprietor and former Rotary Club governor said: "I don't understand how we figure in this controversy. We bought these godowns from the Defence Ministry, and the lease agreement for the land with the railways was made before Choudhury became the railway minister."

PRASHANT PANJIAR



"I did nothing wrong and would do the same if I got another chance."
GHANI KHAN CHOUDHURY

NAMAS BHOJANI



Kirit Enterprises godown: favoured

On his part, Ghani Khan insists that the PAC report is no "slur" and does not suggest corruption on his part. "I could have stayed on in the Cabinet if I had wanted to," he says. "I had explained what the matter really was to the prime minister and besides, no minister in this country has ever resigned over similar remarks made by the PAC." Rajiv Gandhi, according to Ghani Khan, accepted his explanation "most cordially" and had listened to his arguments on how his decision had actually been in the railways' best interests.

Kirit Enterprises had initially secured a three-year lease (1980-82) on the Wadi Bunder property but after the expiry of the lease, the railways had wanted them to quit. "I wanted to help out the firm the moment I learnt that Manibhai Doshi had been a close associate of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and had fought in the INA (Indian National Army)," says Ghani Khan. Moreover, by getting an out-of-court settlement, Ghani Khan argues that the railways was saved expensive litigation, secured an assurance that it would get back the land after five years and freed of the

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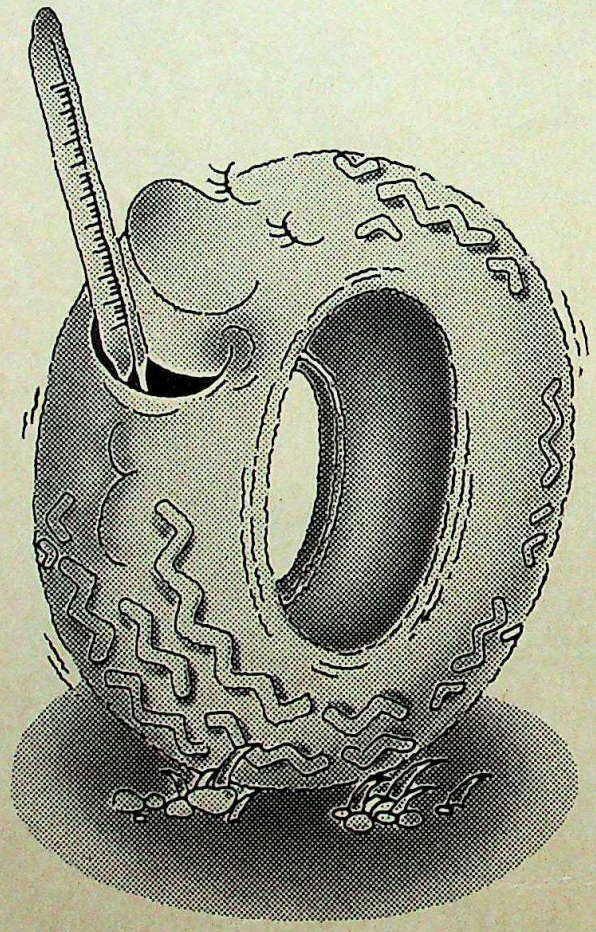

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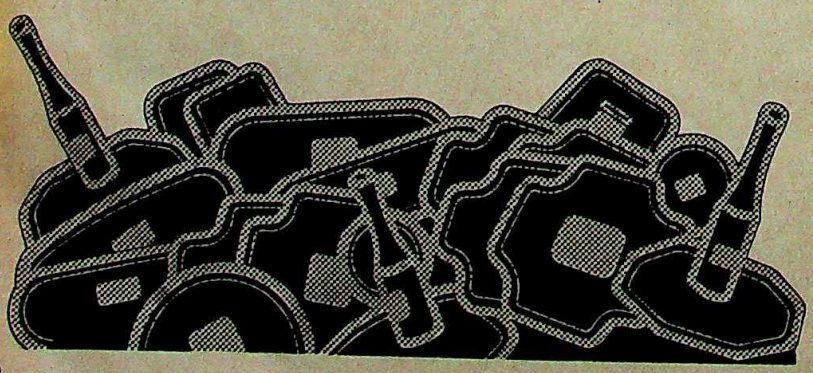

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bother about encroachers settling on the land. "I did nothing wrong and would do the same if I got another chance," he adds, "but I resigned out of respect to the Parliament and its committees."

State Congress(I) leaders, on the other hand, say that all is not hunky-dory between the prime minister and Ghani Khan. On May 3, when details of the PAC report were published, Fotedar is reported to have called him up, asking him to either resign or issue a convincing rebuttal since the prime minister could not, at this juncture, afford any hint of corruption in his cabinet. Ghani Khan reportedly banged the phone down on Fotedar and made an appointment to see the prime minister the next day. Accordingly, Ghani Khan met Rajiv at 10.30 a.m. on May 4 but could not apparently convince him. Far from being "cordial", the prime minister is said to have been extremely brusque and at one point refused to argue on "semantics" when Ghani Khan tried pointing out the difference between "undue consideration" and "favouritism".

All this is of course dismissed as total fabrication by the former minister. "These reports have done me immense harm and have given the false impression that I was pressured into resigning by the prime minister." At any rate, the morning meeting lasted for just about 20 minutes, and when the two met again in the afternoon, Ghani Khan handed in his resignation letter and returned to his Akbar Road bungalow to prepare for his journey home. This time his stay at home—either in Malda or elsewhere in West Bengal—promises to be much longer than any previous stint during this decade.

Ghani Khan is, however, unlikely to take a holiday from politics. For the moment he does not intend to cause any ripples in national politics. Moreover, unlike former Union law minister Asoke Sen or Union defence minister V.P. Singh, he cannot overplay the self-righteous stance. Also, he is marked as an Arun Nehru man and close to the dissident group within the party. Keen to avoid any more fire from the party high command, he refuses to comment on the "coteries" that have gunned him down. For the moment, his sights are lower: on the leadership of the party's Bengal unit.

Though state party leaders currently refuse to go on record on the Ghani Khan affair or the implication of his exit from national politics, most see in him a force capable of grappling with state party chief Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and his former Congress(S) cohorts. Unlike most other Congressmen in Bengal, Ghani Khan is unequivocal on the subject of Das Munshi. The root of the present malaise with the party's Bengal unit, according to him, was the merger of the Congress(I) and the Congress(S). "Just imagine what will be the repercussions if the CPI and the CPI(M) were to merge today and the general secretary of the CPI took over party leadership from Jyoti Basu. Something like that has happened to us", he says.

"People like Das Munshi just cannot be compared to people like myself," he adds in disgust. "Their thinking is completely alien to me and that is why our ideas on how to revive the party in Bengal will always differ." Ghani Khan first aired his differences when Das Munshi tried to interpret the Congress(I) defeat in Bengal as a victory by pointing out that the party's performance ought to be judged in terms of votes polled (which had increased by almost 6 per cent between the 1982 and 1987 assembly polls) and not by the number of assembly seats won (which had declined from 57 to 40). The minister from Malda had put a spanner in Das Munshi's logic by stating that the 1982 polls had been contested by the Congress(I) and the Congress(S) as two separate parties, and that their collective votes in both polls added to about the same.

NAMAS BHOJANI

Ghani Khan took his attack on Das Munshi one step further last fortnight by telling INDIA TODAY: "We have to face the fact that the people of Bengal are angry at the Congress(I) as the party did not do anything expected of it during the past two years and, in effect, ignored the terrible problems of unemployment, industrial stagnation and Calcutta's transport situation." He regretted that several railway projects promised during his tenure as railway minister were not being implemented. Consequently, the Congress(I)'s promises for development sounded hollow and were dismissed as election stunts. "We should know that a hungry man is an angry man," declares Ghani Khan, "and cannot be fed with ideology or promises."

Apart from stating that this credibility problem could be rectified by the prime minister taking interest in ensuring that promises are translated into reality, the former minister is not willing to say just how he intends to deal with Das Munshi and his followers. For the moment, he appears busy testing his potential support and checking out other disgruntled state Congress(I) leaders, like Sen. Although, Somen Mitra and his state-wide organisation promises to stand by their mentor, Ghani Khan, there is unsurety about whether other smaller factions will rally round as well. As it is in Malda itself, his support has been seriously eroded—the Congress(I)'s tally of seats in this district slumped from six to one—and his recent resignation from the Union Cabinet has not elicited any popular reaction anywhere in the state. Before taking a bash at anybody else, the MP from Malda had better armour his flanks first.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE
with bureau reports

> **"We bought these godowns from the Defence Ministry and the land lease was signed before Choudhury became railway minister."**
>
> MANIBHAI DOSHI
> *proprietor, Kirit Enterprises*

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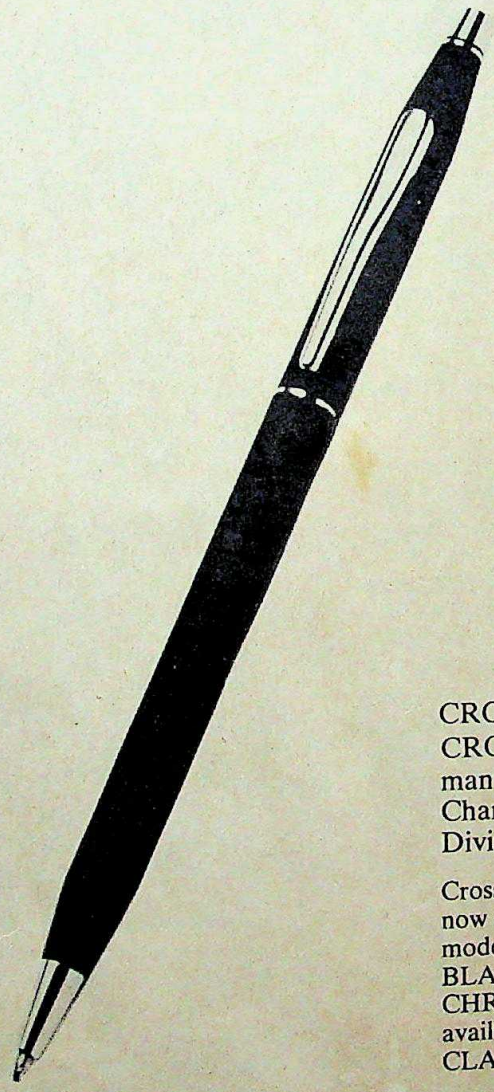

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MADHYA PRADESH

Criminals in Congress

THE involvement of criminals in politics has been public knowledge for quite some time. But how completely hooligans have entrenched themselves in the Congress(I) set-up has been sharply etched in the public mind in Madhya Pradesh in recent months by a series of appalling events.

The most recent of these was the pitched battle between two groups of the Madhya Pradesh Youth Congress(I) in front of its Bhopal headquarters last fortnight, in which lathis, crowbars and knives were freely used. The police scattered the violent mob and rescued with difficulty Jagjit Singh Brar, general secretary of the Indian Youth Congress, and Surendra Singh Thakur, Rajya Sabha member and president of the state Youth Congress(I). Ishwar Singh Chowhan, convenor of the organisation's Slum Cell, was beaten unconscious. The fight, ironically, broke out when a group tried to submit a memorandum to Brar against infighting and the criminal background of some office-bearers.

The genesis of last fortnight's incident lay in the ghastly 'Lucky episode', which led to Rajiv Gandhi's intervention and then turmoil in the state Youth Congress(I). Out of about 40 people on the organisation's executive—including office-bearers—21 have since been removed, 14 of them because of their criminal backgrounds.

On August 21 last year, someone threw a tumbler of acid on two-year-old Lucky Sharma, when he was accompanying his doctor-father Kailash Sharma, a Congress(I) activist, in Jabalpur. The acid burnt through Lucky's hair and affected his skull bone, his nose disappeared and an eye was covered by a burnt knot of flesh. His father, for whom the acid was meant, also suffered serious burns and along with his son hovered close to death for several months. Though he survived, in a dying declaration he alleged that the attack was organised by Manohar Chansoria, general secretary of the Jabalpur district Youth Congress(I), "due to political rivalry".

Pramod Sharma, then Jabalpur's superintendent of police, acted quickly. Despite immense political pressure, Chansoria was booked under the National Security Act (NSA). But a few days later, three Congress (I) legislators of the district—Chandra Mohan, Priyaranjan Dharamadhikari and Sunil Mishra—presented to Jabalpur's deputy inspector general of police, a washerman who "owned up" the crime. They not only argued that Chansoria should be released but also threatened to sit on a hunger strike if the SP was not transferred immediately. Although Chansoria was not released—the police refused to believe the story—the SP was transferred a week later, on September 1.

Kailash Sharma (left); and son Lucky

Even before this incident, complaints about the induction of criminal elements in Jabalpur had been sent to the party high command. Jabalpur Youth Congress(I) President Prem Dubey had said in a report to the organisation's President Anand Sharma: "The state organisation has inducted into the party goondas and criminals with more than 40 cases registered against them. Several warrants of arrest have been issued against them. But the police are ineffective because they are Youth Congress leaders. Extortion, gambling and forced eviction are their sources of livelihood."

Photographs by R.C. SAHU

Police trying to control YC workers

When Manohar Chansoria was nominated general secretary in 1985, there were already 14 criminal cases registered against him. His elder brother, Alok Chansoria, nominated general secretary of the state Youth Congress(I) two years ago, has a tally of 26 criminal cases. The cases against the two range from criminal intimidation to causing hurt by a dangerous weapon to causing hurt to deter a public servant from duty. Ramesh Choudhary, joint secretary of the state body, also has a dozen similar cases pending in Jabalpur police stations.

Party action did not materialise until Kailash Sharma took Lucky to the prime minister in March this year. A visibly moved Rajiv directed Anand Sharma to weed out all those with police records. Only then—six months after the crime—was Manohar expelled.

The Chansorias are related to Youth Congress(I) General Secretary Suresh Pachouri, Rajya Sabha member from Madhya Pradesh, and were nominated to organisational posts by Thakur. The

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two leaders helped the brothers by refusing to act even after Manohar's detention under the NSA. Moreover, no action has been taken against the three MLAs who pleaded Manohar's case.

In fact, Mishra, one of the MLAs who tried to help, is himself an accused in a similar incident. Dayashanker Vyas, a food inspector at Katni, Mishra's constituency, told Rajiv—he had met him along with Kailash Sharma—that he suspected Mishra's hand in last summer's acid-throwing case in which Vyas had been seriously injured. Vyas said he had earned Mishra's wrath for acting against a trader closely related to the MLA, an accusation Mishra denies.

Ironically, in the 'cleansing operation' that was carried out, among those to go were the youth body's state Vice-President Sarla Mishra and Jabalpur unit's President Dubey, both of whom had accompanied the acid victims to Rajiv to complain about criminalisation. They were, explained Brar, ousted for "indiscipline". On the other hand, a joint secretary involved in a stabbing incident sometime ago was not even touched.

The opportunity presented by Rajiv's directive was apparently used by Pachouri and Thakur to settle personal scores. Along with persons with police records, they also got rid of members opposed to them. Says Brijmohan Shrivastava, one of the ousted executive members: "There is no case against me anywhere. My image is also brighter than many of those still in office."

So murky has the situation turned that the ruling party leadership no longer knows whom it can trust. Earlier this year, Vora asked the police for character verification of party members including district Congress(I) committee and district Youth Congress(I) chiefs before nominating them to the official 20-Point Programme Implementation Committees. Several names suggested by senior party leaders were axed because of what the police had to say.

This precaution was taken with good reason. During the tenure of former chief minister Arjun Singh, many persons with criminal records found place on the implementation committees. When public outrage at their credentials started rising, about 600 members statewide were dropped in 1982. Some were even former convicts.

But if people of this kind found their

BHOPAL

Letter Bomb

ALTHOUGH they write letters regularly to one another, Union Communications Minister Arjun Singh and Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Motilal Vora have a serious communication problem. The friends-turned-foes have been sending missives to each other regularly (INDIA TODAY, December 15, 1986), leading to the washing of much dirty linen in public.

In the latest episode, Singh sent a two-page letter last fortnight accusing Vora of alienating slum dwellers, resulting in the Congress(I) losing "a solid vote bank in the urban areas of Madhya Pradesh". He claimed that the two lakh shanty dwellers, given ownership rights as a "revolutionary step" three years ago when he was chief minister, were being "harassed and forcibly evicted and no legal or official protection was being given to them".

In political circles, the hard-hitting letter is being seen as an attempt by the blue-blooded Singh to retain his image as a champion of the deprived in the state. Regularising encroachments on government land was one of the major coups Singh had pulled off during his tenure.

But what annoyed the mild-mannered Vora was the fact that photocopies of the letter, dated April 21, were distributed to the press on April 25 while Vora himself received it only on the evening of April 27. Singh's explanation: "I had marked a copy of the letter routinely to the gentleman who complained about the evictions."

But Vora refused to buy the line. Information was collected from across the state over the wireless and an official press note, ridiculing Singh for his "misleading and totally baseless" statement, was issued. The Government stand was that only 115 lease deeds had been cancelled state-wide and even action in these cases was not without reason. It also assured complete protection to slum dwellers. The chief minister has also complained to party bosses in New Delhi about Singh's "meddling".

Arjun Singh's hard-hitting letter to Vora is seen as an attempt to retain his image as the champion of the deprived.

Social workers, however, find Vora's reply far from convincing. Thirty-two deeds have been cancelled in a single Bhopal ward—number 37. The Regional Secretary of the state People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Rajendra Sail, was also arrested recently when he tried to stop Raipur Municipal Corporation officials from evicting eight hutment dwellers. The PUCL has accused the Government of "ruthlessness" in carrying out evictions. Moreover, shanty dwellers from several towns had protested outside Vora's house recently against harassment and the lack of basic amenities in slums.

That the Vora group had not taken the matter lightly also became clear when the issue figured twice at meetings of the Congress(I) Legislature Party. Pro-Vora MLAs demanded that "those who had tried to create anti-government feelings by raking up the controversy should be expelled from the party." To cap it all, Vora has sent Singh a two-page missive detailing the deterioration in telecommunication services in the state. Going by the record, the next episode in the serial won't be long in coming.

—N.K. SINGH

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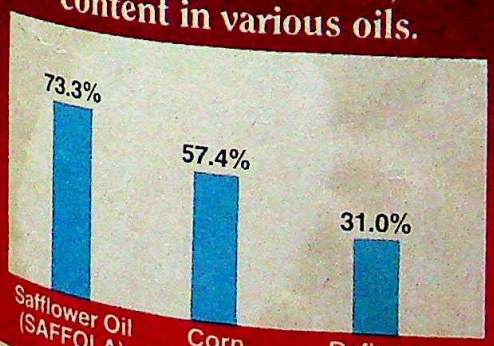

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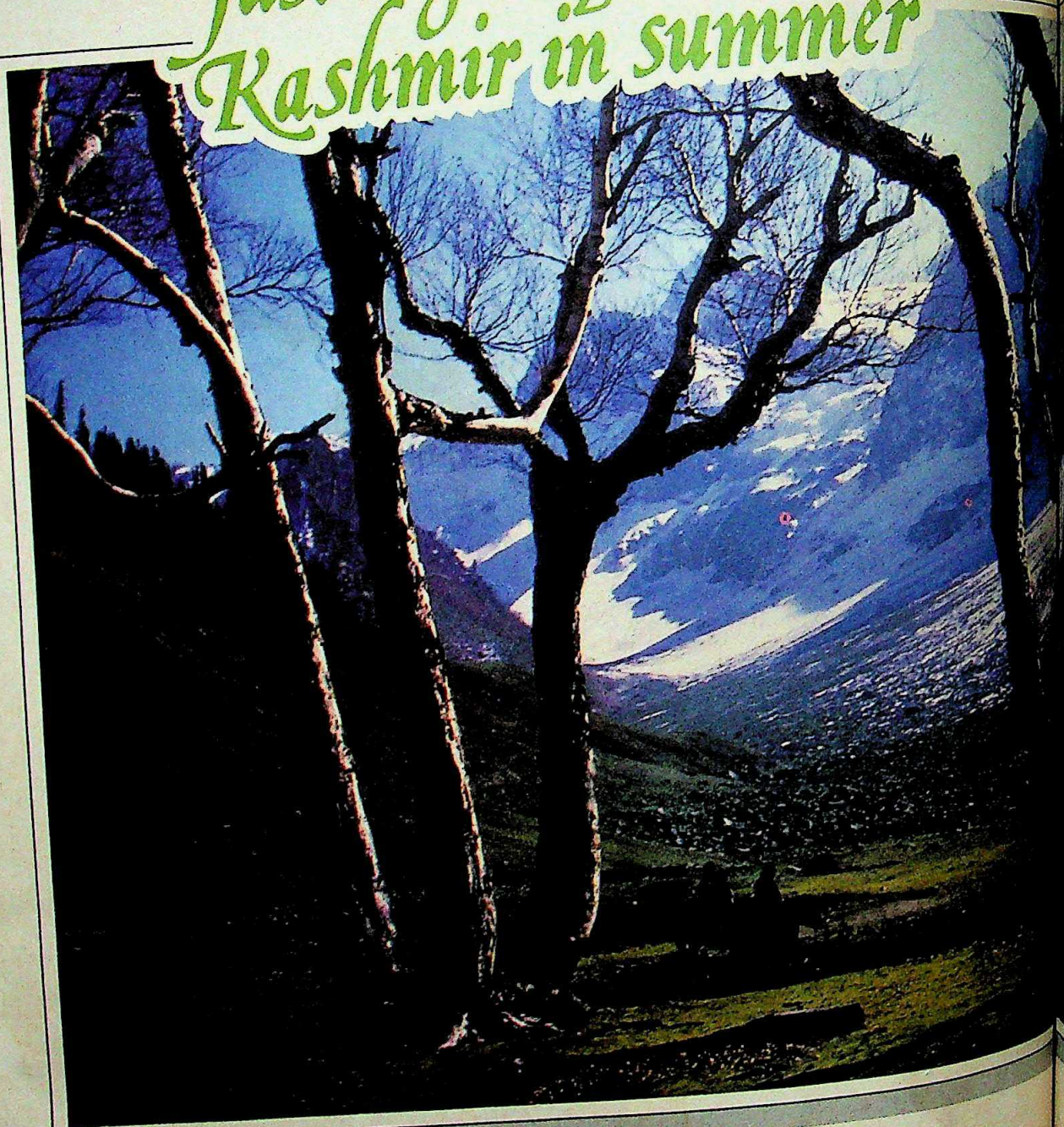

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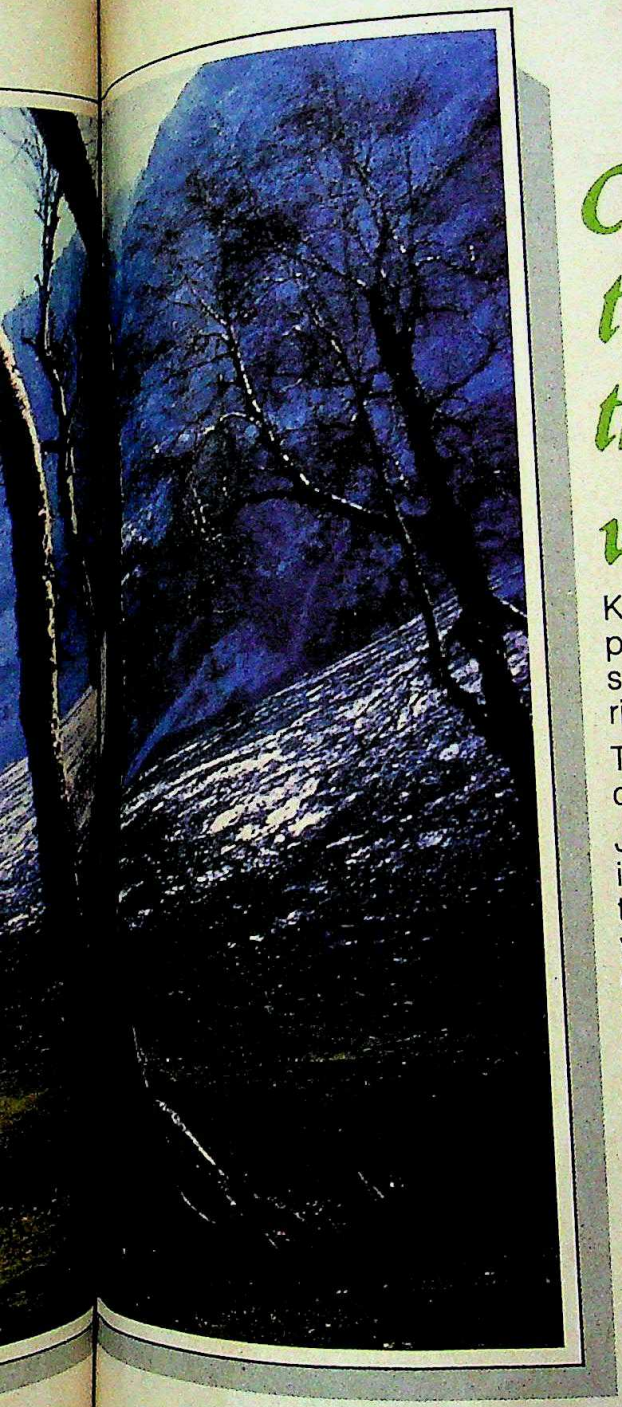

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IN A WORLD OF IMITATIONS, IT TAKES A CONNOISSEUR
TO RECOGNISE AN ORIGINAL

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SUMMER SUITINGS FOR THE CONNOISSEUR

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way into locally respectable positions, it had a lot to do with the signals they received from their party superiors. Shanker Dayal Sharma is today the governor of Maharashtra. But in 1980, when he was contesting the parliamentary elections from Bhopal, among his vital campaigners were Haider and his gang. Haider, a notorious underworld character—listed in Bhopal police's "goonda file"—was detained under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act during the Emergency. The prominent Congress(I) leader's explanation? "After all they are also my voters!"

Two years later the district magistrate of Bhopal resisted political pressure and externed Haider from the district. As a senior police officer noted on the history sheet of Haider and his brother, another "bad" character: "After their intrusion into politics they have become political goondas. Backed by money power and their connections, they have become more dangerous than before."

(From left) Alok Chansoria; Surendra Singh; Pachouri: criminal connections

That tradition continues in spite of the party's self-proclaimed attempts to have only people with "clean images".

► A vice-president of the district Congress (I) committee in Gwalior is a history-sheeter with charges of dacoity, rape, kidnapping, blackmailing and forgery against his name.

► A family of five brothers in the Bundelkhand region, whose members have occupied important positions in the ruling party's district committee, had, at one point, 40 criminal cases registered against them ranging from murder to dacoity to kidnapping.

► A Congress (I) corporator of Bhopal was arrested last year for attacking with a sword, an engineer of the Bhopal Development Authority who refused to pay him a "commission".

► A liquor contractor of Durg, Suchcha Singh, described as a "criminal element" in police records, became a Congress(I)-backed mayor four years ago. He was subsequently arrested under the NSA and lost his position.

Worse, during Arjun Singh's chief ministership criminal cases were withdrawn against various people, including an MLA, a MP and a minister of state.

So ingrained is the criminal element in the Congress(I) that senior party leaders who are sincerely concerned about the issue find themselves in a frustrating situation, unable to win the battle decisively. What they can gain is at most a temporary reprieve until new criminals take the place of old ones.

—N.K. SINGH

KARNATAKA

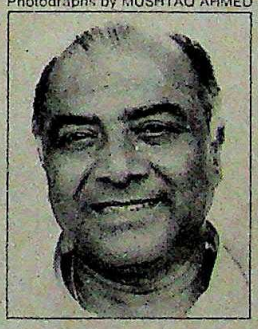
Petty Politics

ARRACK continues to dog politics in Karnataka. After Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde's Government has shrugged off the ghost of the major scandal that arrack bottling contracts had brought, the potent liquor has now had its effect on the Karnataka Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (KPCC-I).

In a letter to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the Congress(I) MP from Hassan, H.N. Nanje Gowda, has accused partyman and MLC, H.C. Srikantiah, of currying favour with Hegde to secure a lucrative contract for the bottling of arrack. According to the allegation, Srikantiah acted on behalf of Ravindra and Company, a distillery in Bidar, in which he has a vested interest. According to the economics worked out by Gowda, Srikantiah stands to gain Rs 20 lakh from the deal. Fumed Gowda: "The Congress(I) could not possibly level charges against the Hegde Government when the party itself harboured beneficiaries of shady liquor deals."

It was a serious charge and expectedly brought a sharper rejoinder from Srikantiah, who clarified that he had earned no benefit from the Rs 50,000 he had invested in the firm "to oblige a cabinet colleague". Instead, he accused Gowda of seeking Hegde's favour in securing an allotment of 40,000 litres of rectified spirit in the name of his wife's brother, Manju, who owned the Dolphin Chemicals in Mysore—a deal that was bringing in a cool Rs 1 lakh every month for the Gowda family.

Photographs by MUSHTAQ AHMED



Nanje Gowda; and (right) Srikantiah

The bickering over liquor deals was like the lighting of a fuse. And soon, charges and counter-charges were flowing merrily between the two Vokkaliga leaders. While Gowda accused Srikantiah of being Hegde's stooge, Srikantiah, in turn, complained bitterly about Gowda's "arrogance", "presumptuousness" and propensity for "mudslinging".

Finally, the Congress(I) high command had to intervene. Rajiv Gandhi has directed AICC(I) General Secretary R.L. Bhatia and Union Home Minister Buta Singh to probe the fusillade of allegations and submit a report within a month. At the executive committee meeting of the KPCC(I) on May 5, Bhagwat Jha Azad, another AICC(I) general secretary, warned that partymen would face disciplinary action if they quarrelled publicly.

Though this has slightly chastised the two warring Vokkaligas, party leaders believe that the slander has been triggered by the desire of the adversaries to emerge as the sole and unchallenged leader of their powerful community. But the squabbling has not benefited either of them. What is more, some of the mud has stuck to their party as well.

—ANITA PRATAP

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HARYANA

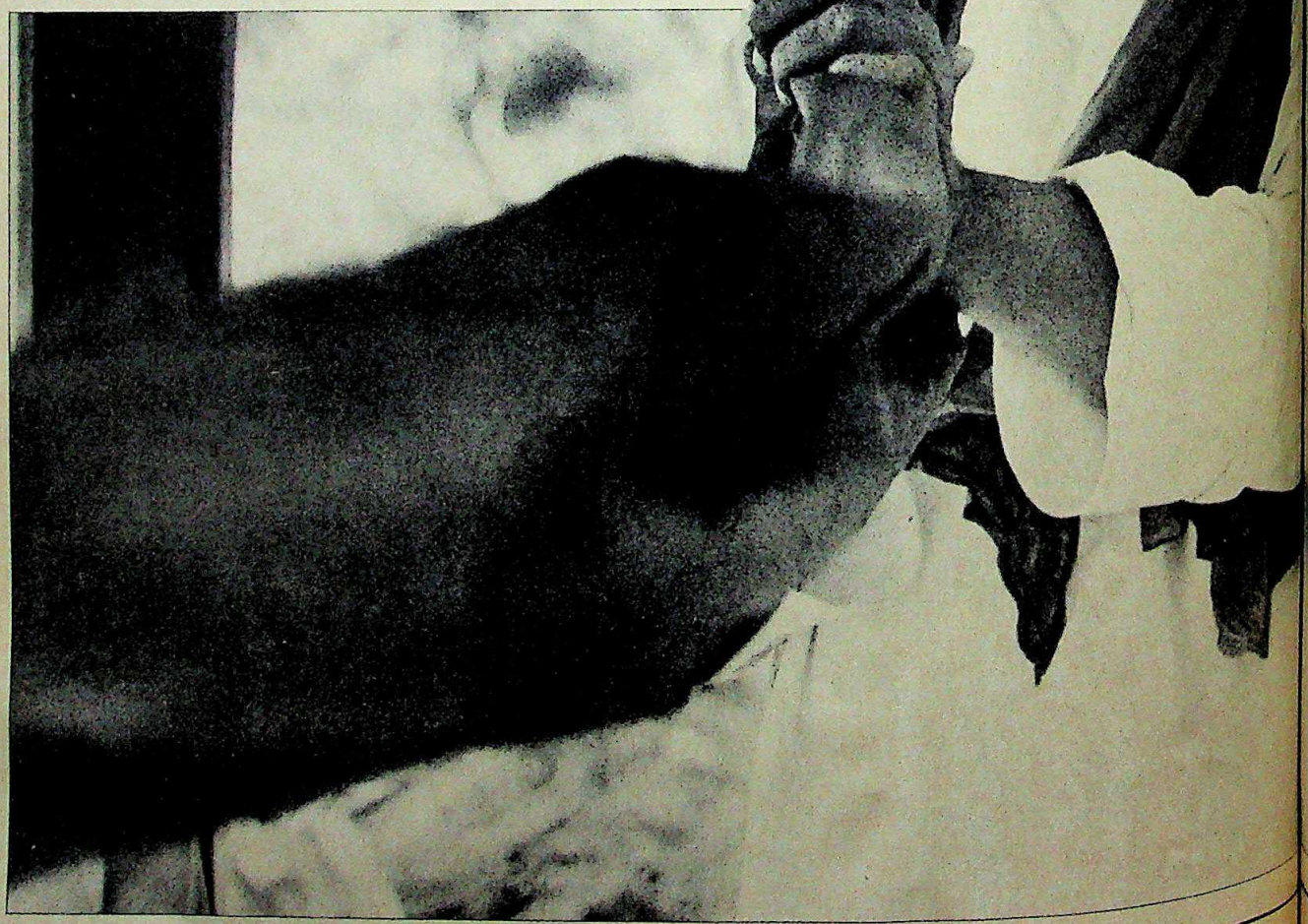
A Fortress Besieged

HARYANA has entered the nation's political lexicography as a word signifying the finale, indeed, a denouement of a political battle. Political pundits have long said that it is in this small state that the political fortunes of Rajiv Gandhi and his Congress(I) are destined to take a fateful turn. With the announcement of the elections to be held in June, and with the declaration of President's rule in Punjab which appears aimed at making electoral gains in Haryana, the state, its politics and people are now even more intensely floodlit. To assess the mood of Haryana, and the battle lines that are being drawn for what many refer to as the Fourth Battle of Panipat, Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR *extensively toured the state last fortnight and spoke to a wide cross-section of the electorate. His report:*

JO Devi Lal yahan se Congress ka ghanta bajaega uss ghante ki goonj pure desh me sunai degi" (The sound of the thrashing that Devi Lal will give the Congress will reverberate across the country). Thus spoke an unlettered Jat sarpanch in Karnal as he boarded a bus, along with several colleagues, for a government-sponsored trip to a worksite along the Sutlej-Yamuna link canal. Hundreds of such trips had been organised last fortnight as part of Chief Minister Bansi Lal's election strategy to counter Lok Dal chief Devi Lal's claim that the Congress(I) Government has been pussyfooting with the construction of the link canal which will green thousands of acres of Haryana's farmlands.

But the farmer's parting shot at a

Devi Lal is not just distant thunder but straddles Haryana's electoral skyscape like an ominous raincloud.



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government whose bus he was boarding, and at whose expense he had just eaten a sumptuous meal, witnessed a puppet show and sucked at a generously stuffed hookah, was a clear indication that Devi Lal is not just distant thunder. The aging Lok Dal leader has already straddled Haryana's electoral skyscape like an ominous raincloud threatening to unleash a political deluge that will rock the state from Sirsa to Gurgaon.

Even though final lists of party candidates have still not been released, Haryana, the prosperous agro-industrial gateway to the Hindi heartland has already become a veritable political battlefield. It is from here, Congressmen say, that the rejuvenation of their battered and beleaguered party will begin. It is precisely from here, opposition parties say, that the nation-wide rout of the Congress will start. "Haryana," said Lok Dal Secretary D.C. Tyagi, "is the first impregnable *garh* of the heartland. Ahead lie Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh." In pre-electoral popular imagery the Haryanvi Jat views the state as the land from where the Mahabharata and the battles of Panipat were fought. He is infused with the idea that who wins in Kurukshetra and Panipat is ultimately fated to rule from Delhi. And Devi Lal aggressively champions the slogan that Haryana is the battleground where the "corrupt *Dilli Durbar* and its puppets will be given a final burial".

Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

Even with the elections a month away, the Lok Dal has energised not only the Jats but also galvanised opposition parties into action. Where few have dared to challenge the suzerainty and supremacy of Bansi Lal in Tosham, his semi-desert home constituency in Bhiwani district, today seven opponents are ready to challenge him. Significantly, even the two Marxist parties have been meeting regularly with Lok Dal's senior representatives and asking to be accommodated within the Devi Lal spearheaded opposition alliance. (The CPI-M and CPI had all along condemned the Sangharsh Samiti's andolan and rasta roko tactics in opposition to the Punjab accord as an example of reactionary kulak politics). The panchayat from Meham in Rohtak district has already anointed Devi Lal as its candidate. Traditionally, a candidate appointed in this way in Meham need not even campaign. The panchayat ensures his victory. "It is like my hukumnama," said Devi Lal.

With elections a month away, the Lok Dal has energised not only the Jats but also galvanised opposition parties into action.

UNDER the seat adjustment plan being chalked out by the Lok Dal, it was expected to field between 60 and 65 candidates for the 90-member Assembly in which the Congress presently has 70 MLAs. The Lok Dal has surrendered 17 seats to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and placed their final selection in the hands of Rajmata Scindia. Six seats will go to the Janata Party, one each to the CPI and CPI(M), and two to the Congress(J). Early last fortnight when the Lok Dal had announced the names of 21 candidates and agreed to give 17 seats to the BJP, there were still a staggering 770 applicants for the remaining 50-odd seats. All the candidates are being screened by a five-member committee with the main criteria for selection being winning ability, loyalty, and clean image. The committee will then send a list of three finalists to Devi Lal who will then select the running candidate with the advice of the party's parliamentary board.

The Lok Dal, in order to drop its casteist image, is making a genuine attempt at broadening its base. "We are ready to make adjustments with all opposition groups and castes and give others seats even in constituencies where Jats constitute between 20 and 40 per cent of the population," said Tyagi, Lok Dal secretary, "except with the Ajit Singh faction. We do not want any Bhaskar Raos or Gul Shahs," he added. This was an obvious reference to the 1982 elections in which Congress won 36 seats but was able to form a majority through massive defections from the Lok Dal organised by chief minister Bhajan Lal. "Congress members disguised as Lok Dal candidates will not be allowed to mess things up this time because our selection system is foolproof," adds Tyagi.

Veteran observers believe that what is happening in Haryana politics is unique. A state where alliances seem to transcend all party barriers, and from where the phrase '*aya Rams* and *gaya Rams*' emanated, is now being vertically polarised between the Lok Dal and its Sangharsh Samiti partners and the Congress(I). This is largely because Devi Lal's andolan—in which lakhs of Haryanvis including Punjabis and Brahmins have participated—has projected him as a leader of the masses. It has also given a political character and dimension to regional issues which, first articulated in the context of the Punjab accord, have now coalesced into an anti-Congress movement. The declaration of President's rule in Punjab, and the death of the accord, Devi Lal said, makes no difference. "The Punjab issue was only one factor in our movement which has gained in maturity. The people will see President's rule in Punjab as just another way of fooling them. The Centre will be able to deliver only paper files. Only I will be able to deliver the river water," he promised. Against this force is pitted the Congress party, the feud between the Bhajan Lal and Bansi Lal factions and a bunch of defector MLAs who are increasingly viewed by the voters as buyable commodities. Even though the Lok Dal is also split, the Ajit Singh faction has so far failed to rock Devi Lal's political boat in the state.

The Congress(I) high command knows that even under the most favour-

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able circumstances it can hope to do only reasonably well. In a state in which Jats comprise more than 21 per cent of the population, the Congress(I) can only win by splitting the Jats—who enjoy absolute majorities in five constituencies and are more than 40 per cent of the population in nine others—and by hanging on to its traditional Schedule Caste and non-Jat Hindu vote banks. But even this formula has produced marginal success in the past. In the 1982 assembly elections, the Congress(I) won 36 seats, receiving 37.6 per cent of the total votes polled. The Lok Dal and independents who received 50 per cent of the vote won 47 seats and the BJP six seats with a little over 7 per cent of the vote.

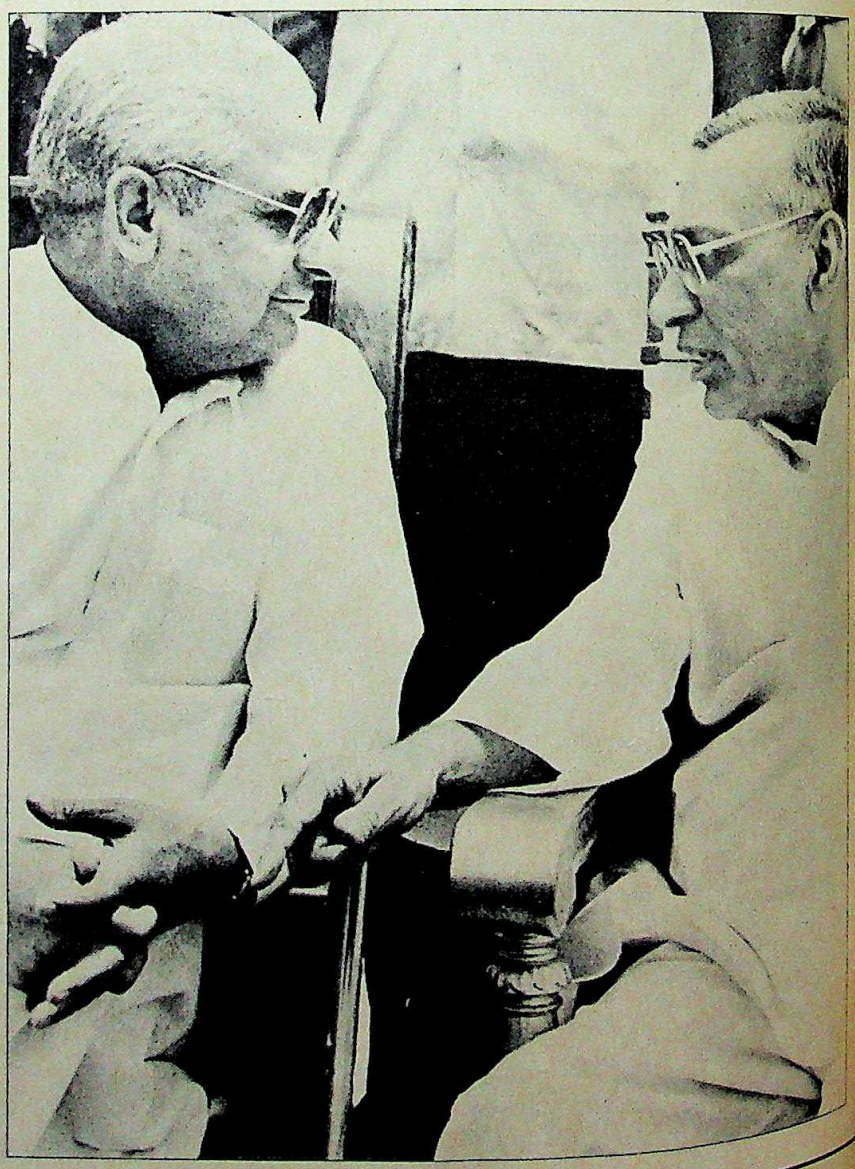
EVEN though Bansi Lal and Bhajan Lal confidently predict that the Congress(I) will win between 60 and 70 seats, officials in the high command think that a sweep of the polls under the present circumstances is but a pipe-dream. The Congress percentage of votes will surely be even lower than in 1982. But in order to prevent this from turning into an electoral nightmare, the prime task confronting the Congress(I) is to prevent the feud between Bansi Lal and Bhajan Lal from wrecking the state party. A total reconciliation between the two is unlikely. Ever since Bhajan Lal—a Bishnoi from Bhawalpur who had a humble start in life as a ghee merchant—was dropped from Bansi Lal's cabinet in 1972, he became a bitter enemy, organising party dissidents who later ousted Bansi Lal. The leadership question—ever since Bhajan Lal was shifted to the Centre in June 1986 and replaced in the state by Bansi Lal—has hung like a Damoclean question mark over the state party. Even though both the Lals say publicly that they will obey the directives of the high command, they tell confidants that if the candidates of one are favoured over those of the others, they will work for their own candidates who are likely to cram the various constituencies as independents.

Ramesh Mehta, former Youth Congress president, and now president of the bar association of Sirsa said: "If unity steps and seat adjustment plans within our own party are not implemented at the earliest, there could be total chaos. No one will know which candidate is standing with whose secret backing and whom to support and who not to."

Under an "adjustment plan" being discussed last fortnight, about 35 seats were to be divided among Haryana's leading MPs, with the rest being given to Bansi Lal to distribute. In addition, the MPs would also be given tickets to run from select MLA constituencies. In this fashion, Bhajan Lal would be given 15 tickets to distribute to his own men while he would be given a ticket himself from Adampur in Hissar district; Rao Birendra Singh, the Ahir leader from Mahendragarh would be given four seats, Choudhary Dalbir Singh from Ellanabad four seats, Harpal Singh of Kurukshetra 10 seats, and so on. "This way," a senior Congress(I) minister said, "these factional leaders will be busy in their own constituencies and won't have the time to meddle in other candidates' constituencies."

Some Congressmen like Lachchman Das, minister of state for tourism from Sirsa district, do not even concede that the Bhajan Lal-Bansi Lal feud will be a factor in the coming elections. A Bhajan Lal MLA himself, Das said: "The high command has decreed, so we are now loyal to our state party leader. All this opposition euphoria, present always during the early stages, will soon die down and people will vote for us because we have been able to deliver the goods. Devi Lal didn't lay even a brick during his two years of rule. What can he claim as his success?" Adds O.P. Jindal, the farm-to-industrial-riches multimillionaire whose Hissar-based steel works provide nearly 40 per cent of India's stainless steel, and who expects to run from there on a Congress ticket: "There's no question there will be a tough fight

Despite several reconciliation efforts by party officials, the feud between Bansi Lal and Bhajan Lal threatens to wreck the Congress(I).



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everywhere. But I think we will do well if the individuals are picked correctly and the tickets are distributed fairly."

Congressmen also note that the Government's development programmes—which have benefited the state uniformly—will also, ultimately, go in favour of the ruling party. In fact, ever since Bansi Lal was installed as chief minister he has been campaigning for his party to offset the Devi Lal andolan factor. His road building programme is rated as the best in the country. Of late he has organised widespread loan melas in which banks have been instructed to give backward communities loans of up to Rs 25,000 often with no collateral. Hundreds of copies of videotapes of Doordarshan's recent 'Focus' programme in which Devi Lal and Bansi Lal debated each other and in which Bansi Lal apparently bested his opponent, are being distributed for television screening in villages. And the state has organised free trips for thousands of villagers to worksites along the SYL canal.

Actually, the Haryanvi should have little to complain about his government and living conditions. In Haryana's 5,000 villages there is little of the grinding poverty seen in other parts of the Hindi heartland. The state has the second highest per capita income in the country and every village is electrified. Villages are all connected by pukka roads from the main highways that are maintained year-round in perfect condition. In 1966 Haryana imported foodgrains to feed its people. Today it gives more than 30 million tonnes to the Central pool, and its per capita use of improved seeds and fertilisers—already about the highest in the country—doubled during the past two years. The state's farmers are neither too rich nor too poor and most import their labour from Rajasthan, and even Mysore. The state's marketing structure ensures that the farmer walks—or rather rides on his tractor—no more than 7 km to the nearest mandi.

Bansi Lal's administrative ruthlessness has alienated the bulk of the state's public employees who recently struck work in protest.

The state boasts of decentralised mini-secretariats in the major districts where all the state Government's departments are available under one roof, working women's hostels, well-equipped leper care centres, sports stadia such as the massive Dronacharya complex in Hissar, and tourist complexes catering to all income groups (a non-vegetarian meal costs Rs 10) that have become the envy of and the models for the rest of the country. It also has the only Muslim Waqf Board in the country that is not just solvent but which has tripled its income during the past three years.

Industrially the state produces steel, textiles (Bhiwani is where Graviera Suitings come from), handloom products, tractors, small electronics and engineering goods (the road signs outside Ambala welcome the visitor 'to the land of mixis'), and soon, it plans to have a gigantic oil refinery in Karnal. Its towns—Kurukshetra, Sonepat, Hissar, Tosham, Fatehabad, Sirsa—in comparison with most in North India, are models of town planning with elaborate sewage systems, divided roads—there are flyways even in Kurukshetra and Hissar—greenbelts, primary medical centres, banks, petrol station complexes with toilet facilities, and public libraries. And despite the jostle and bustle of the omnipresent tractors and the constant throbbing of commerce, the thoroughfares are free of encroachments. There is a sense of order without regimentation.

To a large extent, the Congress(I), and in no small measure, Bansi Lal can take credit for the economic transformation of this small state and its 130 lakh people. He should be a winner on the strength of his and his party's achievements. One of the reasons he was brought in and Bhajan Lal ousted was to enable him to expand the base of Jat support (he is a Jat while Bhajan Lal is a Bishnoi) and at the same time cooperate with the Centre in implementing the now defunct Punjab accord in the face of Bhajan Lal's recalcitrance on the

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issue. But Bansi Lal, even his supporters say, because of his rudeness, intransigence, and abusive nature, has become his own worst enemy. In the short time he has been chief minister, he has been unable to wean Jats away from the Lok Dal and has also lost support among the traditional communities like the Punjabi Hindus, Muslims, and Brahmins. His is a classic case of how a single personality, in combination with other factors, can affect the politics of an entire region. There are several reasons why the Opposition movement has continued to gain momentum.

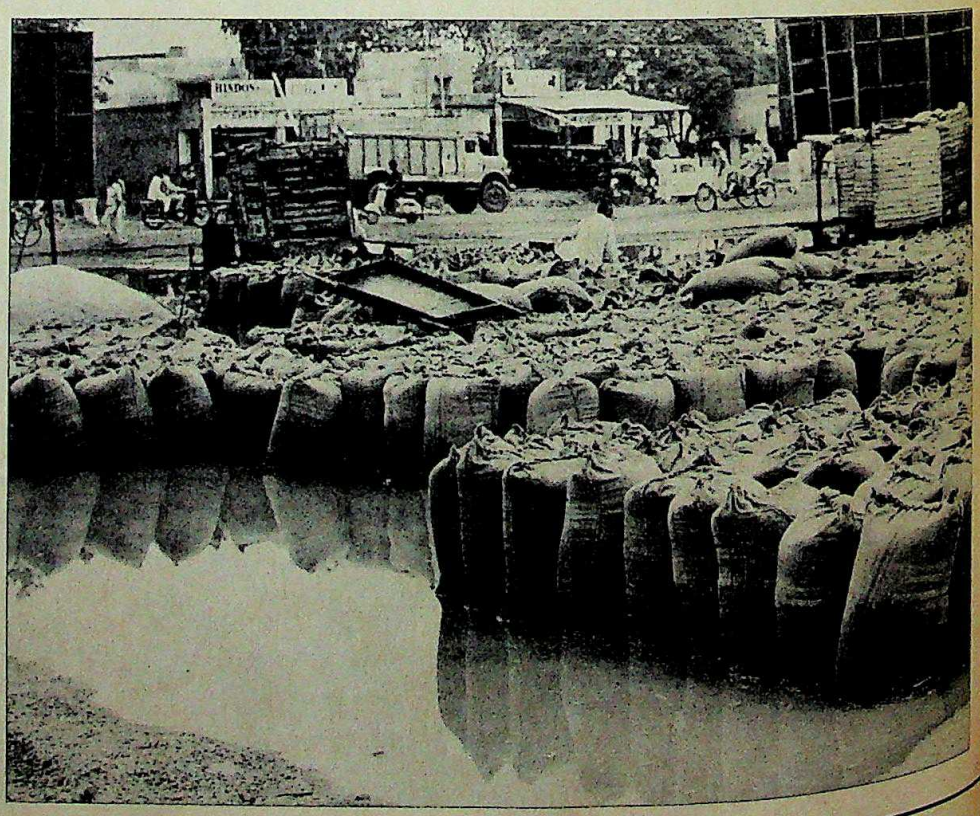
Bansi Lal's inaccessibility and ruthlessness as an administrator—his regime has been marked with incessant mass transfers and suspensions, very often of officials considered loyal to Bhajan Lal—has alienated the bulk of the state's 250,000 public employees, many of them Punjabis and Banias for whom opposing Bansi Lal has become a matter of do or die. They know that if he is returned he will simply crush them. During a recent two-day bandh organised by public employees that virtually paralysed the state, their leaders readily admitted that the agitation was aimed not only at redressing economic grievances but also against Bansi Lal's "dictatorship". Despite the talk of his having "mellowed" in recent times, Bansi Lal's Emergency-time image has not left him. His efforts to appease Jats by giving them job preferences have not only failed to produce the desired results but has alienated other Hindu castes who have started flocking to the broad-based Sangharsh banner offered by Devi Lal.

The Jat, by nature rebellious and irreverent, looks for camaraderie and bonhomie in his leader. The typical Jat will insist that his MLA join him for a swig of Jagadhri number one—a popular brew. Persuaded by his history that the Jat is a destroyer of governments and seats of authority, he likes in his leaders the same kind of irreverence and social intercourse. An authoritarian figure like Bansi Lal, who has devalued even his own ministers and MLAs through his own inaccessibility, is hardly the person to fire Jat imagination when an alternative mass leader like Devi Lal, who can hop from *chaupal* to *chaupal* joking, cursing, and smoking the hookah with his fellowmen is on the scene.

THE Haryana voter, who is getting increasingly more articulate and politicised, also senses a growing weakness at the Centre because of corruption issues. As one of them observed: "We like to keep abreast of everything. From Fairfax to fairsex." Even in small villages, inhabitants talk about a weakened Centre and the pointlessness in voting for a party that would support such a Centre. "If Rajiv Gandhi has nothing to hide in Bofors," said Raj Singh in Hissar, "then why doesn't he turn his files over to the President?" The Central corruption theme plays right into the hands of Devi Lal who began his Sangharsh andolan two years ago on August 9 (the day the Quit India movement was launched in 1942) with a 'Quit Corruption' slogan in which he described the All India Congress Committee as the All India Corrupt Corporation. Today, his sloganeers roam the villages proclaiming: "Our creed is '*bijli pani lao, brahshtachar hatao*,' but the Congress cry is, '*brahshtachar lao, bijli pani hatao*.'"

And lower level corruption—rampant during Bhajan Lal's time—and still prevalent, continues to taint the image of the state's ruling party. In Kalsami village, in the Sikh-dominated Shahabad district, Channan Singh, whose community has always voted for the Congress(I), grumbles that his MLA has never visited the area. The Sikh community here is more interested in local issues than anything that happens in Punjab. The Government is now sinking the first tubewell in Kalsami. But the residents dismiss this as an election ploy. "The real story here is that nothing moves without bribes to local officials," said Channan Singh. It is the same story in Dabra, a small village outside Hissar. "The Congress is anti-farmer. The prices of fertiliser, pesticides and seeds have tripled but we get the same price for our produce," said Pratap Singh, an ex-serviceman who had voted Congress in 1982. "But we don't even get the seeds and fertilisers," adds Bansi Singh. "We have to buy them in black or pay bribes. We have educated children but they can't get jobs because we have to pay Rs 10,000 in bribes just to even enlist them in the army. Our wheat has been damaged by the recent rain and hail but the Government hasn't even sent out inspectors to assess the damage and pay compensation." And Daljit Singh, a

Unseasonable rain not only dampened the wheat harvest but also the Government's reputation for failure to take timely salvage measures.



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Village inhabitants speak of corruption and a weakened Centre and the pointlessness in voting for a party that supports such a Centre.

young farmer said: "I'm a Jat. But I'll vote Lok Dal not because of caste but because this government has taken us for granted."

Despite criticism of Devi Lal's two-year tenure as chief minister, Haryana's farmers remember him for instituting the first compensation programme for damaged crops and floods, providing levy reliefs for small farmers, building Harijan *chaupals* throughout the state, and creating the work-for-food schemes. Among his current electoral promises which include flat rates for electricity, matching state grants for school construction and old age pensions, the most catchy, and the one that has swept people off their feet is the promise that he will forgive all the outstanding loans farmers owe to banks and cooperative institutions. When his opponents say that this is a wild and irresponsible promise which will never be implemented, Devi Lal answers: "I'm not forming a government simply to become another goat-herd."

Also for different reasons, communities that traditionally voted Congress are beginning to shift gears in other directions. The Punjabi Hindus either because of their sympathies with public employees or with the BJP which is now a firm Lok Dal electoral ally have, notwithstanding the dumping of the Punjab accord, at this stage, begun to ditch the Congress(I). The Brahmin vote for the ruling party will be seriously jeopardised by the defection of former Congress(I) chief minister and undisputed Brahmin leader Bhagwat Dayal Sharma who has cast his lot with Devi Lal. Even though Ahir leader Rao Birendra Singh is with the Congress(I), his son Ajit has joined the Lok Dal signalling a split even in this community. The trading community, usually a bellweather for electoral shifts in the state, is looking cautiously in the direction of the Lok Dal. Mohan Lal Garg, secretary of the traders' association of Ladwa grain mandi, one of the largest in the state with an annual turnover of Rs 35 crore said: "My partner is trying for a Lok Dal seat because we don't think the Lok Dal will harm our interests." These traders, again, see a weakness at the Centre and in a possible shift, they see as their protector, Banarsi Das Gupta who will contest on the Lok Dal ticket from Bhiwani.

Ambala, with its strong Harijan and Punjabi voters has traditionally been a Congress stronghold. But even here officials are predicting a life-and-death struggle for the ruling party. Hori Lal, president of the city's Balmiki Sabha and an old Congress social worker, said: "No one has done anything to help us get out of our ghetto. There are no jobs even for our educated. We feel Bansi Lal is anti-Balmiki. He doesn't even talk to us. He is disdainful of us. Now he is trying to give us loans but it is only for the elections. Our younger people are now criticising us old Congress workers for not voting independently. Voting is our dharma but this time we will not vote blindly and sell out."

The voice of protest of this old Balmiki may not reflect the entire voice of so varied a state as Haryana. But it cannot be dismissed as a straw in the wind. There are too many such straws floating in the political currents of the state, which if knotted together are likely to form a tightrope on which will teeter the political fortunes of the ruling party.

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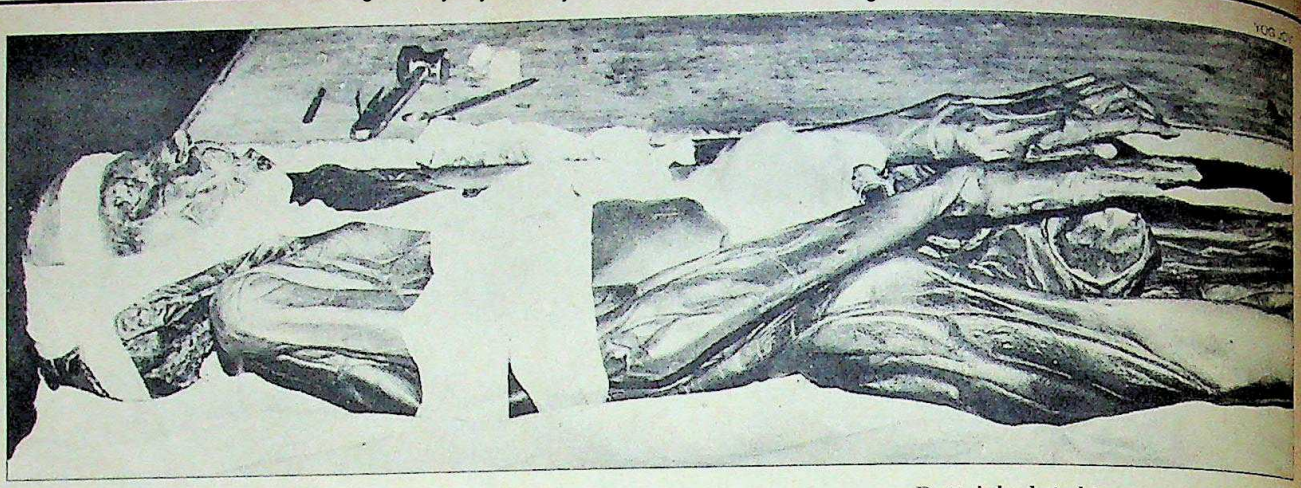

Datta's body in his room: macabre events

CHANDIGARH

The House of Horror

FROM the outside, the palatial, pink-washed house in Chandigarh's Sector 8 looked no different from its neighbours. But inside, was a world even more macabre than a Stephen King horror story. The body of a man dead for the last two years. A family whose blind faith caused them to believe he was still alive. A *tantrik* who succeeded in fuelling that faith, and has now been charged with the man's murder. It was a world of shadows and superstition and only last week was the outside world allowed a glimpse into the bizarre happenings at the Datta household.

Thick pink curtains kept out the sunlight and prying eyes in the sprawling drawing-room in which the family clung to each other, and its faith. A strange cloying smell—death mingled with incense—hung over everything. The dead man's wife, Kamlesh Datta, surrounded by her five children, spoke as if she were in a kind of trance and seemed unable to answer questions that were not related to the 22 months she had lived believing her husband to be alive.

The day before, her husband's body had been forcibly taken away by the police and cremated. But nobody mourned, nobody grieved and nobody had lost faith. "He was alive. I know that. I felt his pulse and his heartbeat. I was with him every night. I know. They took him away without asking for my permission," says Kamlesh. The children recalled how they used to come back from school or college in the evenings and sit and talk to their father about what had happened. The eldest, Mohita, 20, said: "He seemed to listen, although he never responded, and we believed that he was alive." The same view was shared by Datta's mother, Shanti Devi, who said the Government had no right to interfere.

But in the pink drawing-room, there were some non-believers too and promi-

Kaushal, Baldev and Daljit being arrested

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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cent among them was Kamlesh's mother, Bimla Devi, who shrieked at her daughter and grandchildren every time they said anything about the guru, Amir Chand Kaushal, who had convinced them that Datta was alive. "This man has destroyed our family. He knew that my son-in-law was dead. He told me this himself. I don't know what he has done to my daughter, who was so intelligent, so educated. He has destroyed these children," she said.

The bizarre story of the death and after life of Shri Ram Datta, assistant conservator of forests in Himachal Pradesh, began on June 18, 1985. Datta had come to Chandigarh to visit his wife and children who were staying with a former colleague and close friend, Baldev Singh and his wife Daljit Kaur. Daljit had become 'pregnant' after several miscarriages at the age of 45 and needed someone to run the house. Since she kept poor health so the Dattas moved in. Datta had also developed a painful boil on the back of his neck and had done nothing to treat it. He had been, for nearly two years, under the spiritual influence of guru Amir Chand Kaushal and had foresworn all medication, putting his faith instead in the power of the guru to cure anything. Kaushal's believers are not allowed to touch any medicine.

The boil, however, refused to heal and that night (June 18, 1985) he collapsed into what appeared to be a coma. Said Kamlesh: "He stopped breathing and there was no pulse. So I telephoned guruji and he said have faith in god and all will be well." Baldev says that he thought at first that Datta was dead. The boil had caused his back to swell and tauten so that all his veins seemed to be sticking out. According to Kamlesh, her husband's skin then turned black in the next few days and swellings came up all over the body. After that, what she describes as 'blood', but what doctors feel was fluid flowed out of Datta's body for three or four days. Then, she says, the skin returned to its normal colour and there were few changes for the next two years, other than the lengthening of his hair and nails.

LIFE in the house in Sector 8 continued pretty much as normal with Datta lying 'sick' in his bedroom adjoining the large drawing-room. Twice a day his wife would sponge him with water and at night she and the children slept in the same room as him without once feeling that he was dead. Although Datta did not seem to be getting any better he did not seem to get any worse either and their guru continued to reassure them that all would be well one day.

Now the guru, in an interview after his arrest last week for murder, claims that he knew the truth but could not destroy the family's faith. Says Kaushal: "I never examined him closely. It was Mrs Datta who told me that she could still feel his pulse and his heartbeat and I just couldn't shatter their faith." Apart from the guru, Kaushal, Chandigarh police have also arrested Baldev Singh and Daljit Kaur on charges of murder and conspiracy to murder on a complaint filed by Datta's brother, Anil.

Kaushal's followers, however, believe that their guru was capable of bringing Datta back to life. The followers, who requested anonymity, claim that Kaushal has cured over a thousand victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy and that he has submitted a list of 160 people whom he has cured of fatal diseases.

It was Kaushal's alleged healing powers that first drew Baldev and Daljit, who has been miraculously 'pregnant' now for 64 months, into Kaushal's innermost circle. Singh claims that his alcoholism was cured instantly when he met Kaushal eight years ago and so was a disease of the lungs, which doctors said would kill him in six months. Then, there is his wife, who has also been charged with murder. When she became 'pregnant' and there were no signs of a baby after nine months, Kaushal told her that her husband would have to gain control over his temper for the baby to be born. Further, the baby would only come when his mission was complete and that this would be the day when Datta would also be cured.

Interviewed on the day she was due to be produced in court, she said wearily: "I don't know anything any more. Everything has gone wrong. Guruji used to say I didn't have enough faith. For my part, I have done all I could. Now it is upto god."

The man at the centre of this macabre nightmare looks more like an overweight attendant in a ration shop than a spiri-

Family around the empty bed: blind faith

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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tualist or a healer. By profession, Kaushal is a schoolteacher, who till two years ago taught English and Social Studies at a school just outside Chandigarh. The cult that he created centres around the belief that one should not believe in any religion. He denies being a *tantrik* but admits that he performed moonlit ceremonies in which hundreds of candles would be lit ("just for decoration") and prayers would be chanted to the *parmatama* (god). His followers obey his every word, as if they were under some form of hypnosis. According to Baldev, the inner circle consists of only about 50 people but there are thousands of other followers, mainly the rich and the powerful.

The authorities only discovered the Datta case on May 1 when Deputy Superintendent of Police Desraj Sharma arrived at the house to enquire into the health of Datta, who had been absent from work on the basis of a series of leave applications submitted regularly by his wife. He reported what he had seen but the police took nearly six days to finally remove Datta's body.

When a team of doctors from Chandigarh's Post-Graduate Institute examined Datta's remains they found that a process of 'natural mummification' had taken place. All his organs were intact inside his body but they had shrivelled and dried up. According to a senior doctor involved in the post-mortem examination: "There is nothing miraculous about what happened. Such cases have been recorded in medical science, although they are extremely rare. We think this could have happened because he died in June when the weather is hot and dry and lends itself to mummification."

When asked to comment on the family's contention that his hair and nails grew and that his pulse could be felt, he said it was virtually impossible for laymen to distinguish a pulse that was faint and there was no question of nails growing, but hair could have grown when the skin shrank. It was not possible to ascertain what had actually caused Datta's death but doctors believe that the pus that had collected in the boil could have spread through the body and killed him. He could have been saved had he been given proper medical aid. So what remains to be decided, in what could turn into as bizarre a legal case as it is a medical one, is whether guru Kaushal and his friends did indirectly cause Datta's death.

—TAVLEEN SINGH in Chandigarh

DHANBAD

Mafia Maze

FOR years now, under the garb of being trade union leaders, khadi-clad politicians and contractors, Dhanbad's mafia bosses have ruled the area, extracting and amassing money at will. They demonstrated their apparent invincibility once again last fortnight just when the legal noose seemed to be tightening around them. Dhanbad's Superintendent of Police Vishnu Dayal Ram, who had teamed up with Deputy Commissioner Madan Mohan Jha to legally pin down six top mafia bosses was transferred and asked to leave town within 48 hours.

The transfer literally torpedoed the efforts of the two young officials who were said to have Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey's support but which failed at a crucial juncture. They had painstakingly built up a mountain of evidence against these six leaders—Suryadeo Singh, Sakaldeo Singh, Raghunath Singh, Navrangdeo Singh, Satyadeo Singh and Vinod Singh. In a relentless operation extending to well over a year, Jha and Ram had sifted through official files, criminal complaints, harassment charges and extortion claims.

The task was certainly not an easy one. Political patronage was all too evident. Records had been tampered with and evidence doctored. Said Jha: "In seven to eight cases against Suryadeo Singh, records were missing from even the court." The only plus factors going for the two officials were their zeal and Dubey's backing.

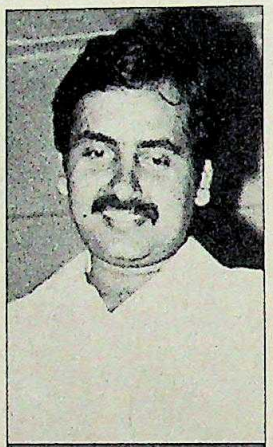
Their zeal paid results and a total of 40 cases were compiled, including:

► Twenty-one cases against Suryadeo Singh. With his estimated 75,000-member trade union, Suryadeo's word is the law in the area. He has been a member of the Legislative Assembly since 1977.

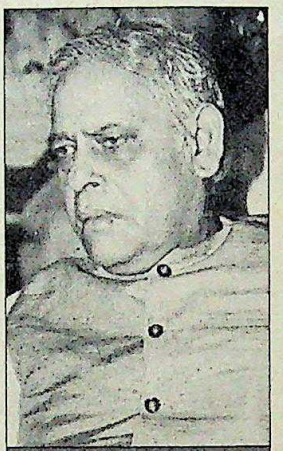
► Fourteen cases against Sakaldeo Singh. Initially working with Suryadeo Singh, Sakaldeo later turned against his former mentor. He even joined hands with Raghunath Singh and pledged to kill Satyadeo Singh and his elder brother Shankar Dayal Singh, who is an MP. However, his arrest in mid-1985 under the National Security Act (NSA) prevented a possible gang-land killing. He might well have entered the Assembly during the 1985 elections except that Dubey had his name axed from the Congress(I) list. He contested as a rebel candidate and lost.

► Eleven cases against Raghunath Singh, the most dreaded of mafia leaders, who is at present cooling his heels in the Gaya prison. He has the reputation of being a killer.

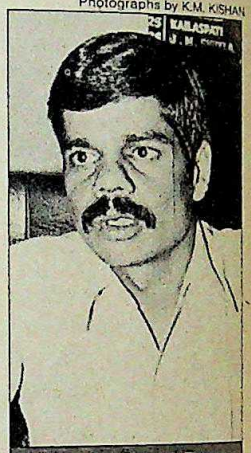
Photographs by K.M. KISHAN



Madan Mohan Jha



Bindeshwari Dubey



Vishnu Dayal Ram

Dhanbad's Superintendent of Police V.D. Ram and Deputy Commissioner M.M. Jha, who are said to have Dubey's support, have failed at a crucial juncture in their legal fight against the mafia.

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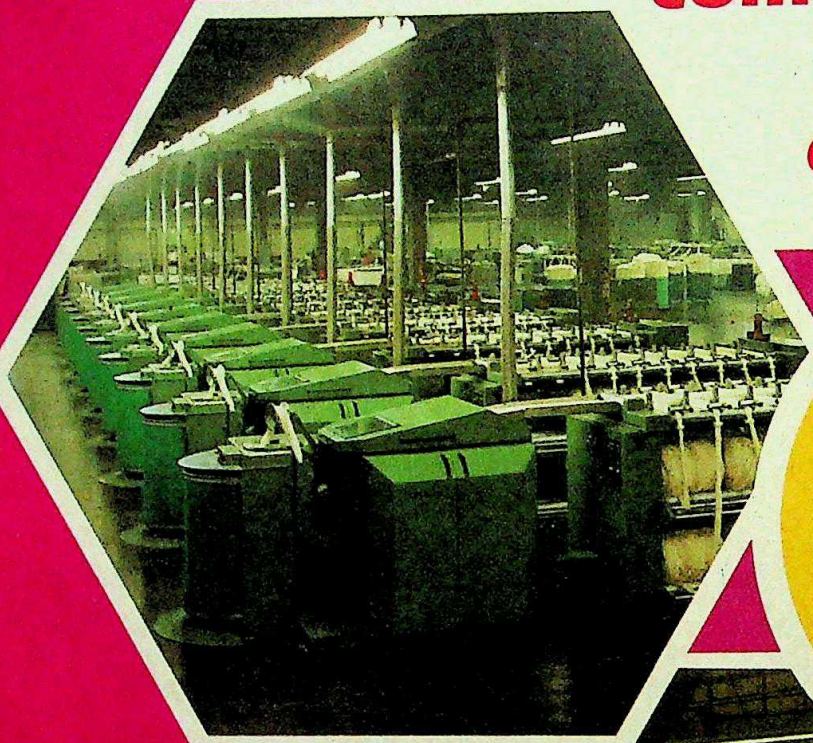

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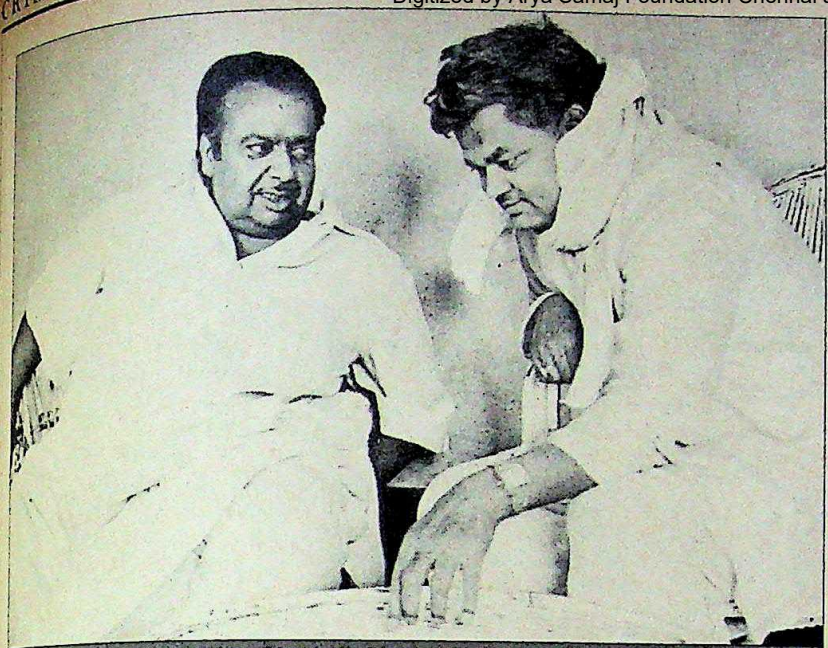

Satyadeo Singh (left) and Suryadeo Singh

Navrangdeo Singh

The mafia leaders are resisting any interference with their power or prestige, and have already drawn first blood by securing Superintendent of Police Ram's transfer.

▸ Eight criminal cases against Navrangdeo Singh and another eight against his brother Ram Chandra Singh. The two brothers, who had come from Aurangabad in search of employment, had ended up as the musclemen of B.P. Sinha, the legendary Dhanbad mafia chief who was believed to have been gunned down by Suryadeo Singh's marksmen. Later they changed their line and today are among the top contractors of Dhanbad. The most prestigious contracts seem to come their way. In 1985, Ram Chandra had secured a Rs 80-lakh medical college building contract despite the heat that was turned on him during the anti-mafia drive. Both have adopted political garbs. Navrangdeo Singh was a Congress(I) general secretary till the 1985 elections. But when his name was dropped from the list of prospective candidates, he rebelled and fought the Assembly elections on the Janata ticket. His brother too contested for the same party from Dhanbad, but both lost.

▸ Three cases against Satyadeo Singh. A leader who is both feared and respected, he became an independent member of the Legislative Council after being removed from the post of zilla parishad chief last year.

▸ Seven cases against Vinod Singh, who is Raghunath Singh's brother.

The first of these cases is scheduled to come up for hearing on May 25 and concerns the murder of Gurcharan Singh, a sand transporter, in 1982. The accused include Sakaldeo Singh, Vinod Singh and Raghunath Singh. Interestingly, Sakaldeo Singh and Vinod Singh, who were held under the NSA, were released by the Patna High Court on "technical grounds" on the very same day that the trial date was announced. Officials fear that the two mafia leaders may now terrorise and intimidate witnesses, thereby affecting the cases against them.

EARLIER, Suryadeo Singh, who was to be arrested on April 10, had successfully evaded arrest. Evidently tipped off in advance about the impending action, Suryadeo Singh suffered a "heart attack". He was hospitalised and had to go to Delhi for "treatment". Later, he went on to attend the Bangalore session of the Janata Party, neutralising the administration's efforts to arrest him.

This was not the only case where the district administration's attempts had been thwarted. Last year, a move to raid the establishments of the mafia dons by men of the Directorate of Revenue had been mysteriously shelved. The raids were to have been organised following a detailed and thorough study of the business dealings of the coal mine leaders and the illegal and benami wealth accumulated by them.

However, the question that haunts officials is: how far will their efforts succeed? Understandably, the mafia leaders will resist any interference with their power or prestige. They have already drawn first blood by securing Ram's transfer. And officials fear that more trouble may be in store for them.

But Jha is determined to carry on. Arrangements have been made to protect witnesses. Special prosecutors have been appointed and close surveillance is being maintained on the mafia chiefs. Efforts are also on to get the high court stay orders vacated.

Officials say that even if the accused are made to merely stand in the dock, it will break the myth that the dons are more powerful than the state. This is the essential aim and if some convictions result, officials say that will be an additional bonus.

With the stage set for the final battle, many people in Dhanbad are keeping their fingers crossed. Even a single success will sharply boost the morale of a district administration that has watched criminal activity continue untrammeled for decades.

—FARZAND AHMED

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Repressing Reform

VISHWANATH Pratap Singh has finally started hitting back at his detractors in the Congress(I). Consequently, the battle between the reformers and the 'old guard' in the party has broken out in earnest. In the past two months, Singh has been accused of virtually everything, from overstepping his authority as cabinet minister to being a CIA agent bent on destabilising the Government.

But these charges do not explain one puzzling feature of this campaign. The normal reaction, in the Congress(I), to the exit from government of a powerful minister with a large following should have been to minimise the importance of his departure and to underplay the reasons for it. Why is a large section of the party doing the exact opposite? Why is Singh being attacked day in and day out, more than a month after he left the Cabinet?

The answer is that the target of attack is not V.P. Singh the individual, but what he has come to represent in the party and the country. Over the last two years, the mysterious alchemy of public perceptions has turned him into the leading crusader for reform within the Congress(I) and in the Indian political system itself. The reforms were, in fact, initiated by Rajiv Gandhi, whose very first act was to weed out a large number of sitting MPs, many with dubious reputations.

To the prime minister, V.P. Singh, with his somewhat unworldly morality, proved invaluable. Singh had already earned a daunting reputation for his ruthless drive against dacoits in Uttar Pradesh. When he brought the same messianic spirit to the enforcement of the Government's tax and foreign exchange laws, he succeeded in convincing the people of India that Rajiv's Government was serious about turning a new leaf in Indian politics.

The real goal of those who want to destroy V.P. Singh is to abort Rajiv's campaign for reform within the party and the political system. From the beginning of the Fairfax affair in mid-March, their unswerving aim has been to drive a wedge between Singh and Rajiv, and by stages push the minister right out of the party. When this is done, Rajiv will become fully identified in the public mind with the corrupt system that he originally set out to reform. Any further attempt at reform by him will fail to carry conviction, and will have to be given up.

Who are the persons against the campaign for reform and why do they feel threatened? The front-runners in the attack on Singh are well known: some 30 or more MPs, a handful of ministers and ex-ministers, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh, and party managers like Kalpnath Rai. But the identities of the individuals are of far less importance than the concern that binds them together. It is not the reforms Rajiv has already carried out, which are few enough and incomplete to say the least, but what they presage for the future.

> "The real goal of those who want to destroy V.P. Singh is to abort Rajiv's campaign for reform within the party and the political system and protect the power base of the political-cum-business elite that has ruled the country for two decades."

The prime minister's programme for cleaning up electoral finance and removing all unnecessary controls in the economy threatens the power base of the political-cum-business elite that has ruled this country for the past two decades, if not longer. This power base has been built through the systematic exploitation of an economy of shortages. Controls on production, on access to foreign exchange, on expansion, on take-overs, on access to institutional finance and on the location and shifting of industry, have given the Government a thousand levers of power over business and trade. Each has been systematically exploited by individual politicians, by parties at the state level and by the central high command to extract funds. Before 1968, the lion's share was probably obtained in white money, but after the ban on company donations enacted that year, all of it came from black money. A whole new class of intermediaries emerged to carry out the liaison between the money givers and the money takers, of whom the 'agents' who arranged kickbacks on foreign contracts were only the last additions.

The campaign of reform in the Congress(I) threatens this entire class. The repeal of the ban on company donations can shift the balance in party financing back towards white money, weakening the political system's dependence on the black money generating sector of industry, and above all, on the middlemen who strike deals on their behalf. Worse still, since controls became the means for perpetuating shortages, their removal could introduce genuine competition and threaten the de facto monopoly enjoyed by the already well established industrialists.

Rajiv's own marked distaste for entertaining special pleas from MPs and chief ministers on behalf of favoured supporters, has further increased the insecurity of this established class. But it was V.P. Singh's campaign against tax offenders that proved the final straw. It threatened to demolish the privileged status, above the law, that the members of this class had created for themselves. The revelation that the Government had hired agents to probe into accounts held abroad by some of them may have bred the claustrophobia that triggered the attack on Singh and what he stood for.

In theory, Rajiv now has a choice. He can go along with the attack on V.P. Singh, eventually expel him from the party and give up the campaign for reform. By doing this, he can buy peace and relative security within the party, but at the expense of losing his remaining charisma for the people. Alternatively, he can seize the initiative back from Singh, by pushing ahead vigorously with the programme for reform. But this will make a showdown within the party unavoidable in the near future. The choice is an unenviable one, but a moment's reflection will show that Rajiv has no real option but to push ahead.

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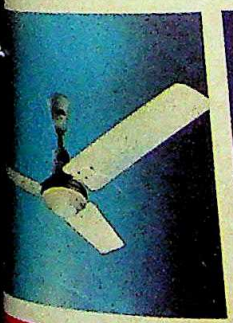

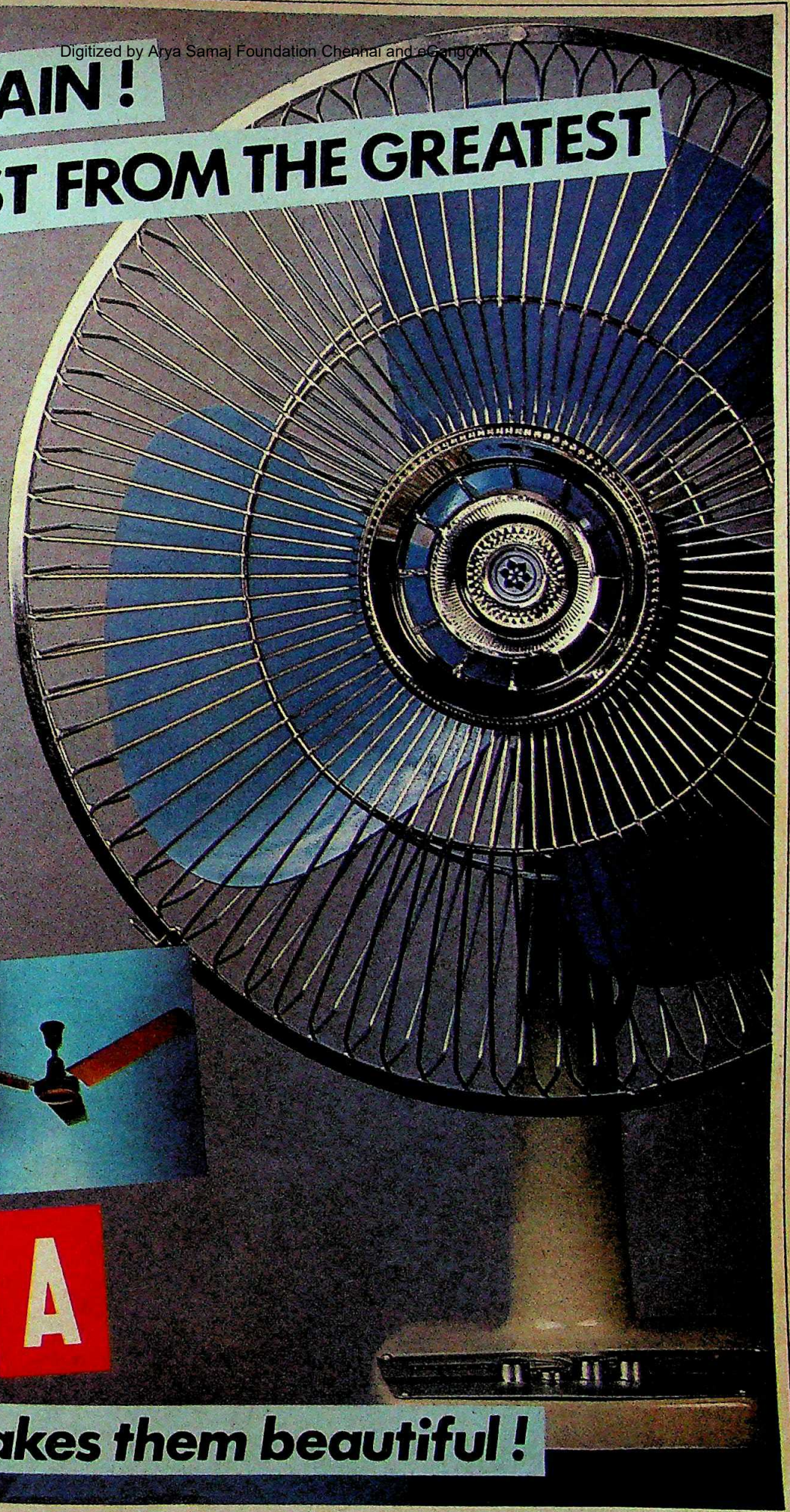

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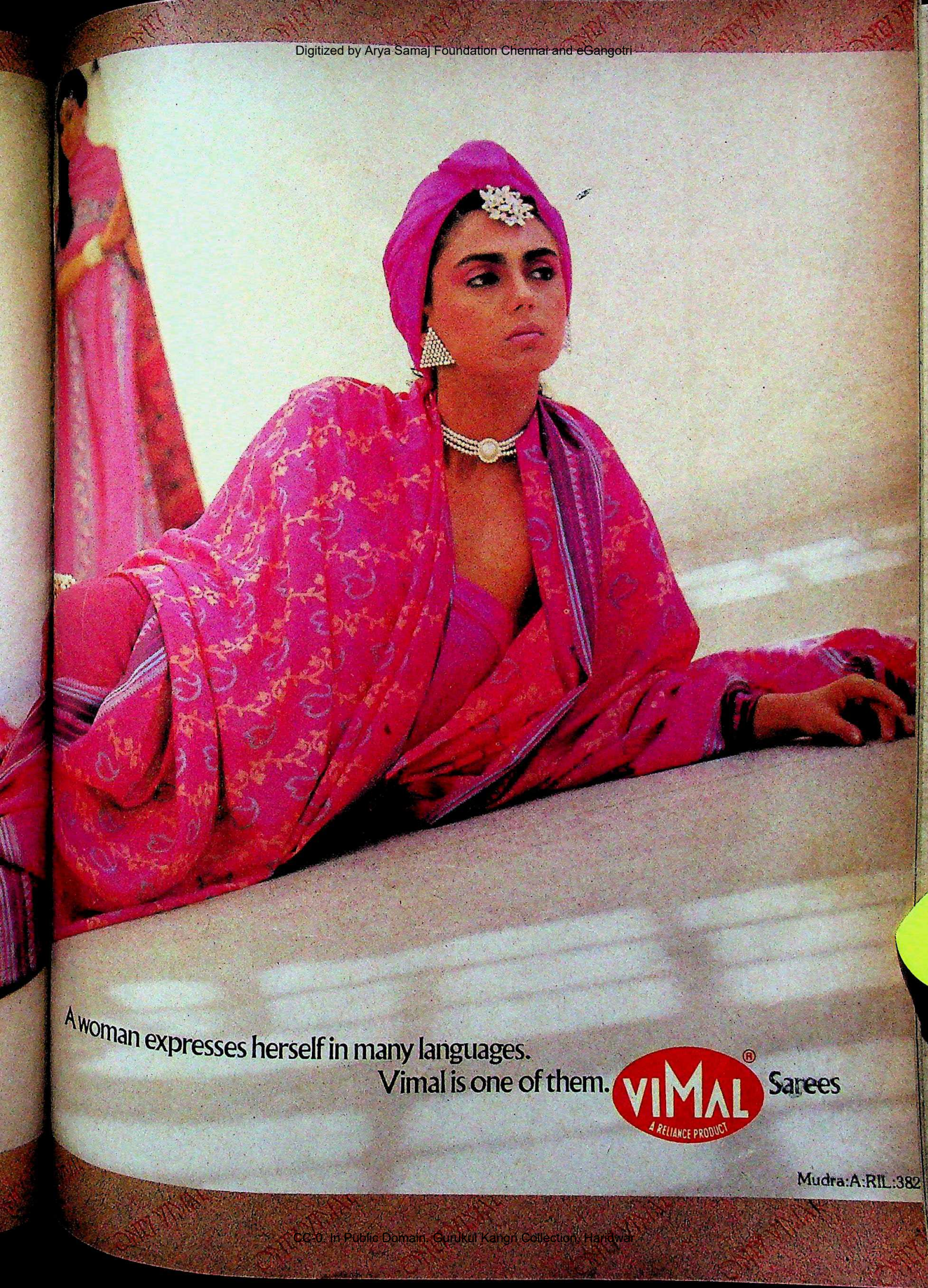

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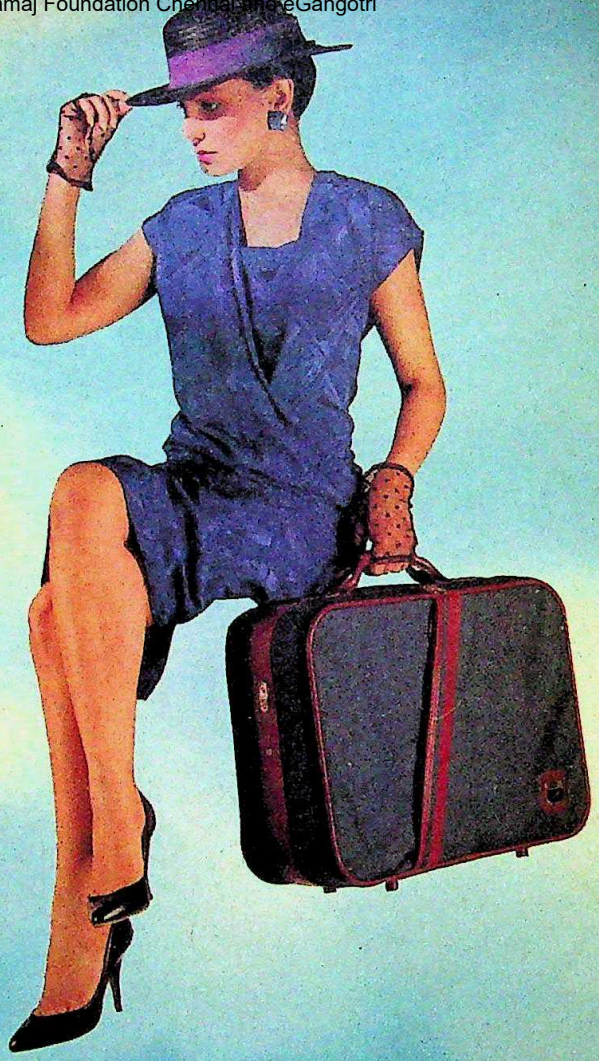

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Popular Exercise

"PADYATRAS" and "Abhiyans" are probably the most popular form of political activity these days. The latest to join the long line of political walking champions is Bihar Assembly Speaker Shiv Chandra Jha. Last fortnight, he embarked on—and completed—a 100-village "public consciousness campaign" and in the process became the country's first speaker to do so.

Though Jha asserted that the padyatra was not political in nature, not many Congress(I) leaders believed him. One objective of the expedition, it is believed, was to buttress his claim for chief ministership, because Jha, a Mithila Brahmin, significantly chose Madhubani district, the heart of Mithilanchal, for his campaign. The other aim was probably to take the battle into the camp of former chief minister Jagannath Mishra, during whose chief ministership Jha was a hardcore dissident. Mishra had staged a successful rally in Bhagalpur, Jha's constituency, as part of his Jana Jagaran Abhiyan. Jha's itinerary, in turn, took him through Jhanjharpur, Mishra's constituency.

KRISHNA MURARI KISHAN

Jha: varied objectives

The speaker's venture also ended up embarrassing the state Government. Said Jha on his return: "Mithilanchal has not seen the light of development and if adequate steps are not taken immediately to redress people's grievances, the situation might turn explosive any day."

Repeat Cancellation

IT was billed as a mini-Apna Utsav. The "Adivasi Nritya Mela", the first-ever festival of tribal dances at Dumka—in the heart of Bihar's tribal region—was to have been a gala affair until the state Government suddenly ordered its cancellation last fortnight. This was the second cancellation in a row—the first happened in December '86—and the official explanation was a lame one: the non-availability of Union Human Resources Development Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, who was to inaugurate the function.

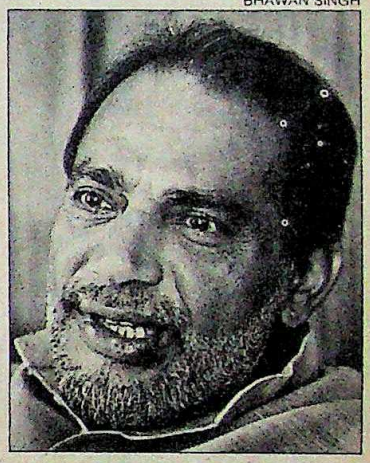
But by the time the Government decided to put off the mela, most artistes from outside the state had already arrived or were in the process of doing so. A three-part stage decorated with tribal art, high voltage electric cables and accommodation for about 700 participants were all nearly ready. Half the Rs 10 lakh sanctioned for the show had already been spent.

The experience was particularly dismaying for the enthusiastic tribals who for long have felt that *dikus* (outsiders and exploiters) have destroyed their culture. And though the Minister of State for Culture, Arjun Vikram Shah, made assurances that the idea had not been abandoned, the cancellation did reflect poorly on the state Government.

Overseas Attack

KARNATAKA Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde evidently does not like to cry halt to his attacks on the Congress(I) and its leader Rajiv Gandhi. Even while in Frankfurt, on the first leg of his month-long Non-Resident Indians' wooing-cum-personal health trip, Hegde has reportedly gone on record saying that Rajiv Gandhi has lost the goodwill of the people. The comment expectedly has raised a storm back home.

BHAWAN SINGH



Hegde: upsetting remarks

The voluble Congress(I) leader of the opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Council, T.N. Narasimha Murthy, lashed out angrily: "Hegde has crossed the limit. It is most unbecoming of a small state chief minister, when he is abroad, to belittle the prime minister." Demanding that Hegde be recalled for denigrating the country and the prime minister, Murthy asked: "Have you ever heard any visiting foreign dignitary, even if he be an opposition leader, criticise his government or country when he is in India?" He had a point. Opposition attacks on Hegde are likely to mount when he returns.

Decisive Contests

KERALA's Left Democratic Front (LDF) faces its first major test on June 2, when elections to the Kottayam and Vamanapuram assembly seats take place. Countermanded due to the death of independent candidates when the elections were held in March, the contests are generating considerable political interest in the state.

Ramakrishnan: high stakes

The stakes are particularly high in Kottayam, where T.K. Ramakrishnan, the Marxist cooperation minister, and T.Radhakrishnan, former Youth Congress(I) president—and now one of the state general secretaries of the Congress(I)—face each other. Not surprisingly, the LDF leaders are taking no chances. The

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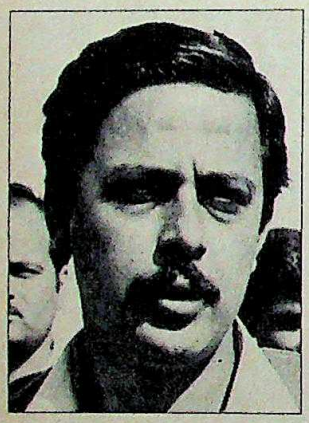
entire Nayanar Cabinet is camping in Kottayam.

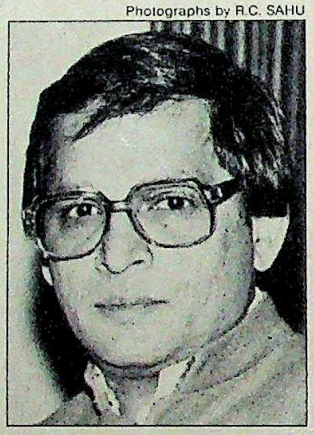
The Opposition too has hurled its full machinery into the attack. Says P.C. Chacko, the Congress(I) leader: "If Radhakrishnan defeats Ramakrishnan, the number two in the Nayanar Cabinet, it will definitely boost the image of Congress(I) in the state." The Congress(I) campaign is mainly built around the fact that Ramakrishnan, who is from Ernakulam district, is an outsider. Accusing the LDF of misusing official machinery, Congress(I) leaders are also charging the Marxists with whipping up caste feelings by hinting that Ramakrishnan, an Ezhava, is a likely candidate for the chief minister's job in the future. The LDF hints are apparently aimed to smooth the ruffled feelings of Ezhavas, the largest community in the state. The wooing of this group is important in view of the fact that it has not forgotten how the Marxist leadership ditched K.R. Gouri for Nayanar at the last minute over the question of chief ministership. Says a former Congress(I) minister: "The Marxists are panicky; they fear an Ezhava backlash in Kottayam."

Keeping to Tradition

POLITICIANS in Madhya Pradesh appear to have a penchant for acquiring newspapers. Former Union minister V.C. Shukla controls Bhopal's ailing *Hitavada*. His elder brother and former chief minister Shyama Charan Shukla has interests in Raipur's *Mahakoshal*. Chief Minister Motilal Vora's family owns a flourishing Hindi daily, *Amrit Sandesh*, at Raipur. And now, Union Communications

Photographs by R.C. SAHU





Ajay Singh (left) and Patel: striking a deal

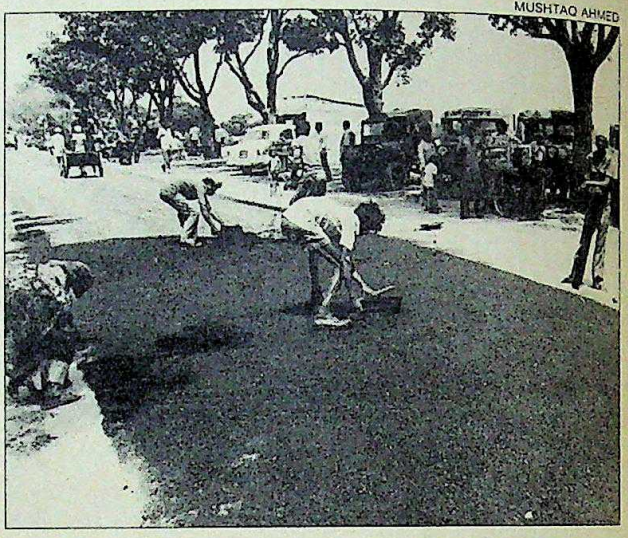
Minister Arjun Singh's family is said to be keen to acquire financial interests in the proposed Bhopal edition of *Naveen Dunia*, a Hindi newspaper currently published from Jabalpur. The paper is controlled by Congress(I) MLA and beedi-magnate Shravan Kumar Patel, a member of the erstwhile Arjun Singh cabinet in Madhya Pradesh.

"This is news to me," exclaimed Singh, when asked about the venture. But it certainly wasn't news for Patel, who confirmed in a telephonic interview from Jabalpur that negotiations had taken place to float a new publishing company at the state capital. "But this is just an idea and not a single step has been taken in this direction," he hastened to add. Meanwhile, it is learnt that *Naveen Dunia* has applied for allotment of government land at concessional rates in Bhopal. Vora too is understood to have okayed the proposal. And the person who is following up the case on behalf of *Naveen Dunia* is none else than Ajay Singh, Congress(I) MLA and Arjun Singh's son.

Belated Fallout

'OPERATION Face-lift' that spruced up Bangalore for the November 1986 SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit seems to have had its inevitable pimples. The one revealed recently involves purchases made by the health wing of the Bangalore Municipal Corporation for the summit. According to allegations levelled by BJP member Suresh Kumar—and interestingly, supported by Congress(I) and Janata Party members—36,000 baskets for garbage disposal were acquired for Rs 4.70

MUSHTAQ AHMED



Preparations for the summit: misused finances

each as against Rs 1.50 for which they are available; 1,200 pickaxes came for Rs 56 each as against Rs 15; and 20,000 litres of phenyl was bought at Rs 10 per litre although the corporation already had a similar quantity in stock. The shopping spree set the corporation back by Rs 4.3 lakh.

Though Mayor B.V. Puttegowda has ordered a three-member house committee to probe the purchases, Suresh Kumar has not been satisfied. He has now added a fresh charge against corporation officials: one of buying inferior quality tar for asphalting roads.

Holding Up Rambo

RAMBO, the superhuman US ex-Marine might be invincible on the screen but last fortnight a group of—appropriately—leftist raiders proved that he was not unstoppable. At least for some time that commercially successful one-man army did not know what hit him.

On May 2, a group of about 60 young men attacked a Calcutta movie theatre, The Globe, and stopped the screening of the film. They entered the hall at 2.30 p.m., just as the matinee show was about to begin, and told the Manager, D.Nariman, to stop the screening of *Rambo*. Not satisfied with Nariman's explanation that the show must go on since tickets had already been sold, the raiders manhandled him and went on a rampage, smashing plate-glass doors, fixtures and showcases. Before the police could appear, they fled. The police believe that the raiders are supporters of some radical left group. For, immediately after stopping *Rambo*, they proceeded to the United States Information Service's library. Fortunately, the watchman there prevented the raiders from closing down even this Uncle Sam's show.

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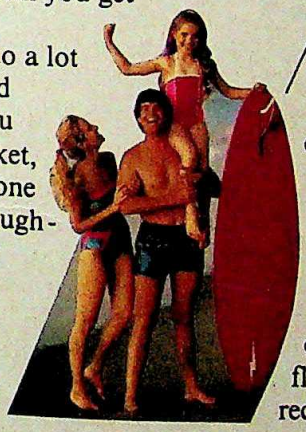

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MARUTIS

A Brash New Culture

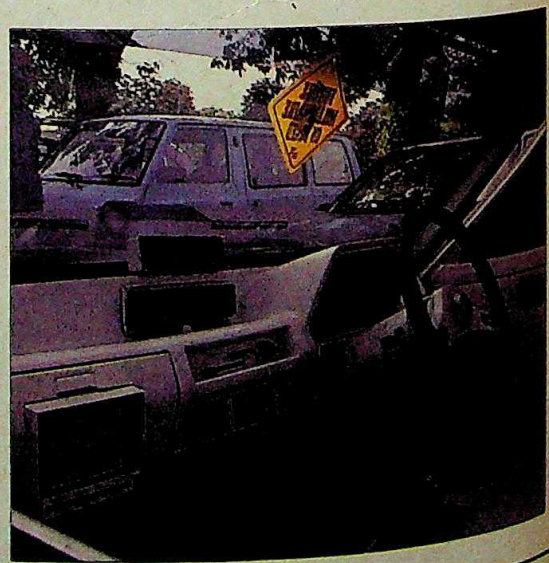
WHAT is small, shapely, reckless, hides behind dark glasses and raises people's blood pressure? No, not Lolita. The answer is Maruti, the peppy superbrat which other car owners love to hate. But super or brat, the Indian spin-off of the Japanese Suzuki has transformed the Indian automobile scene like nothing else and, in the bargain, spawned a brand new culture.

There are already enough Maruti jokes to fill a book. Some of the latest examples: what is common between a Maruti and a haemorrhoid problem? The answer: sooner or later everyone gets it. Or, why is a Maruti like virginity? One bang and it's never the same again.

But on a more serious level, the ubiquitous Maruti is becoming the fast forerunner of a new breed of drivers and changing attitudes, driving habits and even life-styles. It has already established itself as the predominant status symbol of the middle class, or, more specifically, Indian Yuppies. Nothing demonstrates the Maruti's effectiveness as a social symbol more than the story of a Karol Bagh chaat shop owner who was finding it difficult to get his son a proper bride. But no sooner had he bought him a new Maruti that he received a flood of marriage offers. The Maruti Marriage Bureau has a host of other successes to its credit as well. A prosperous Sikh businessman's wife looks forward to the day her only son will get married. She plans to hand her daughter-in-law the keys to a new Maruti as "mooh dikhai".

Apart from everything else, the Maruti has ushered in a new craze among Indians for splurging on car accessories. There was only so much one could do with an Ambassador. One example: the misspelt handwritten signs stating 'Power Break'. But the possibilities in a Maruti are limitless. Take young Sanjay Passi, 19, son of the Maruti dealer in Chandigarh who admits he has spent about Rs 60,000 in "customising" his Maruti. That meant repainting the car completely white, inside and out; adding an air-conditioner; a 280-watt stereo with six speakers which would probably blow the windows out if used even to a fraction of their full power; a miniature TV in the dashboard; alloy wheel rims and wide-track radial tyres; a sun roof; power windows for all the doors; large, road-hugging skirts back and front; spoilers on the bonnet and back; fog lamps; three kinds of horns; a neon light inside the cabin; reading lights with a dimmer switch; a dashboard computer which calculates the average speed, fuel consumption and engine performance; and a laser disco which flashes different colours in time to the music. Plus minor trinkets like a compass and artificial horizon which gives the alignment of the wheels. The piece de resistance, however, comes each time he jams the brakes—the car cabin and passengers are bathed in a bright red glow. Passi's only problem is that, with all the special gadgetry, he has to change his battery every three months.

One of Delhi's biggest accessory dealers, Vinod Handa, says every new Maruti owner spends at least Rs 3,000 on basic accessories—a stereo system is considered standard equipment these days. Sons of rich parents spend as much as



Passi with his car (left); and its interior: flashy gadgetry

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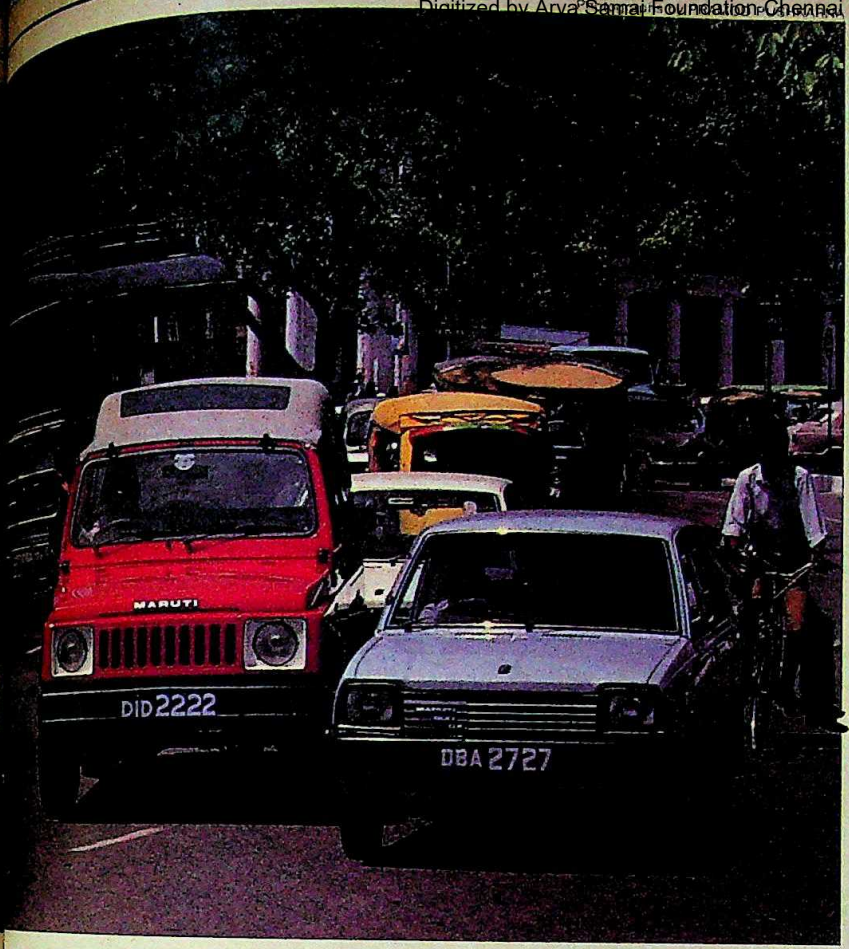


Iranian student in Delhi University has fitted a TV, VCR, fridge and a bed at the back of his high-roof Maruti van. In fact a number of Maruti owners have installed sun roofs and bars in their vans ignoring the fact that drinking and driving or watching TV while driving is an invitation to disaster.

To many Maruti owners, the car has become an extension of their personality, a medium of expression. This yen for automotive expression had lain dormant in most Indians till the peppy little wonder arrived on the scene: the chunky, unresponsive Ambassador and Premier evoked no effusiveness, no hankering for speed. The nearest likeness to a sporty car the Indian customer had seen was the low-slung Standard Herald, but dreams of speed vanished when one let in the clutch. It did not roar ahead, it whimpered.

The Maruti has now spawned a brash culture symbolised by the new breed of young drivers who display a suicidal disregard for traffic rules and their own lives. Roads aren't what they used to be before the peppy little hornet arrived. Neither are driving habits, nor traffic safety. Or, for that matter, car repair bills which have bestowed new wealth on car mechanics who put up signs saying 'Maruti repairs undertaken here' and charge twice the amount for repairing a Maruti than any of the older cars. With an estimated two lakh Marutis on the roads—the equivalent of the number of Fiats manufactured in the last 10 years—the little car has already given birth to a number of minor industries.

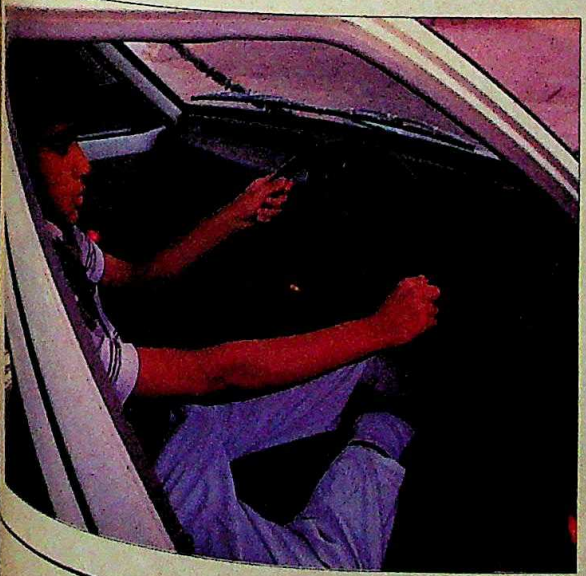
But the less desirable aspect of the new Maruti culture is the irresistible urge in the driver to speed—testified to by the large number of crumpled Marutis awaiting face-lifts at most workshops. Fun, for

Rs 30,000 to Rs 40,000, half the price of the car, on fancy, smuggled equipment like 150-watt stereo systems with six speakers, including two fitted in the headrests. One out of every 10 Maruti owners now wants a TV set on his dashboard. Handa's biggest customer, the owner of Hindustan Breweries, spent Rs 80,000 (more than the cost of the car) dolling up his Maruti.

Sanjay Sikand of Delhi's Modern School, whose Maruti is virtually a mobile discotheque said: "We have seen movies with young people riding fancy cars. Now that there is a responsive, sporty-looking car available, we want to do it too." After seeing one such movie *Night Rider*, he cut away small sections of his car's steering wheel which now resembles an aeroplane's U-shaped control column. An

Sikand's cut-away steering; and (right) green striped windows: new craze

PRASHANT PANJIAR



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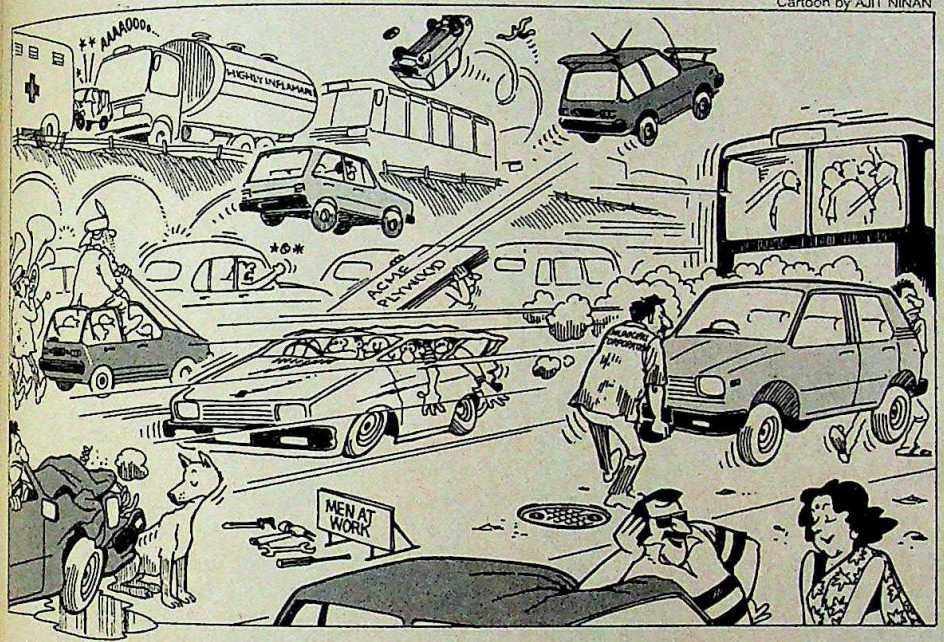
most youngsters who own Marutis, means driving fast and impressing their girl-friends. Most youngsters tend to soup-up the engine, giving the car even more zip—and adding to the problems of other drivers. Delhi police have decided to fight fire with fire. Their traffic police are now equipped with the Maruti Gypsy. Notwithstanding that, younger Maruti-owners continue to spread chaos and confusion on the roads and have earned the little car the sobriquet of "superbrat", while its light-weight body has also termed it a mobile death-trap.

car, easy to handle and park and far more dependable than its unpredictable forbears. More women can be seen on the roads today than were visible four years ago.

In fact, the Maruti has involved the entire household. Family members take pride in washing and polishing it. Upholstery colour and accessories are decided on the basis of consensus, because every individual identifies with the car. To take delivery of a new Maruti, families often bring along marigold garlands and sometimes even a band.

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



Maruti Udyog Managing Director R.C. Bhargava, however, insists that the last label is unjustified and that the car is built to crumple on impact, so that the driver and passengers are not hurt. "The chances are greater that you will walk out of the bang-up in one piece," says Bhargava, challenging the popular misconception that the thicker its sheet metal the safer the car.

The new Maruti culture in fact starts right at the factory in Gurgaon, which is a world of discipline and equality. In the best Japanese tradition, the floor manager leads his team through a routine of physical exercise to get them to limber up before the day's work begins. The managing director and his peon wear the same overalls or uniform, whether on the shop floor or in the executive offices, and they all eat from the same canteen. That culture has slowly spread to other factories as well.

The most visible symbol of the changes wrought by Maruti is the sharp increase in the number of women behind the wheel. They say it's a woman's

Even more remarkable is the fact that some new Maruti owners have undergone a near-total personality change. "The personality of a scooter-riding army officer underwent a complete metamorphosis after he received his Maruti," says S.M. Khanna, general manager of Competent Motors, Delhi's oldest Maruti dealer. "His whole outlook changed: he looked and behaved more assured and confident. He felt more important."

Though such examples are rare, what the Maruti has certainly succeeded in achieving is a new mobility, specially among the middle class. On most week-ends, Marutis crowd the highways and families that were earlier wary of driving long distances in the more unreliable Ambassadors and Fiats are now spending more week-ends away from home.

More than any other place, Delhi is Maruti country. Its estimated 60,000 Marutis have changed dating habits. Couples are no longer forced to go to movie houses or dimly-lit restaurants. They now merely drive around in their Marutis with dark tinted windows which provide adequate privacy or park in quiet lanes with the stereo on. "It's contributing to a new permissiveness," says Khanna.

Rajinder Anand, an accessories dealer of Connaught Place, is the stereotype of his own best customer. His last Maruti had a TV in the dashboard. How could he drive and watch TV at the same time? "Apnay aap vich confidence hona chahida hai" (one should have confidence in oneself), he says, thick gold chain showing through the deep V of his half-unbuttoned shirt. He claims to have imported from Dubai the execrable green striped windows often seen on Delhi Marutis. The imitation greenery on the window panes was too much even for the desiccated Arab environs. But Anand recognised the bonanza waiting for him if the green stripes proved a hit with his attention-hungry Delhi customers. If green stripes come can white and blue be far behind? They weren't and all three varieties now obscure the side vision of an increasing number of Delhi Maruti drivers.

But perhaps the most significant change the Maruti has ushered in is a new sense of consumerism, a more discerning attitude towards automobiles which is a major difference from the cavalier, take-what-you-get attitude that existed just a few years ago. Last fortnight, a group of Maruti-owners were engaged in animated discussion about whether they should sue Maruti Udyog for the faulty clutch some Marutis seem to have. Conveniently forgotten was the fact that for over four decades, Indians have been happily buying cars in which nothing worked from day one, and without a whimper of complaint.

Bhargava disagrees that the car is a status symbol. "It is a middle class necessity. Social status comes from how much you have jazzed up your car." And this is precisely what sets the Marutis apart. Those who don't have the money for expensive gadgetry make do with stickers, like the ones which proclaim: U-R-4-ME,—or—U-R-OK,—or—G-U-R-NICE—or—I-GO-4-U. But if someone were to design a sticker to express the feelings of envious Premier and Ambassador owners, its message to the pesky Marutis would only be: U-R-A-PAIN.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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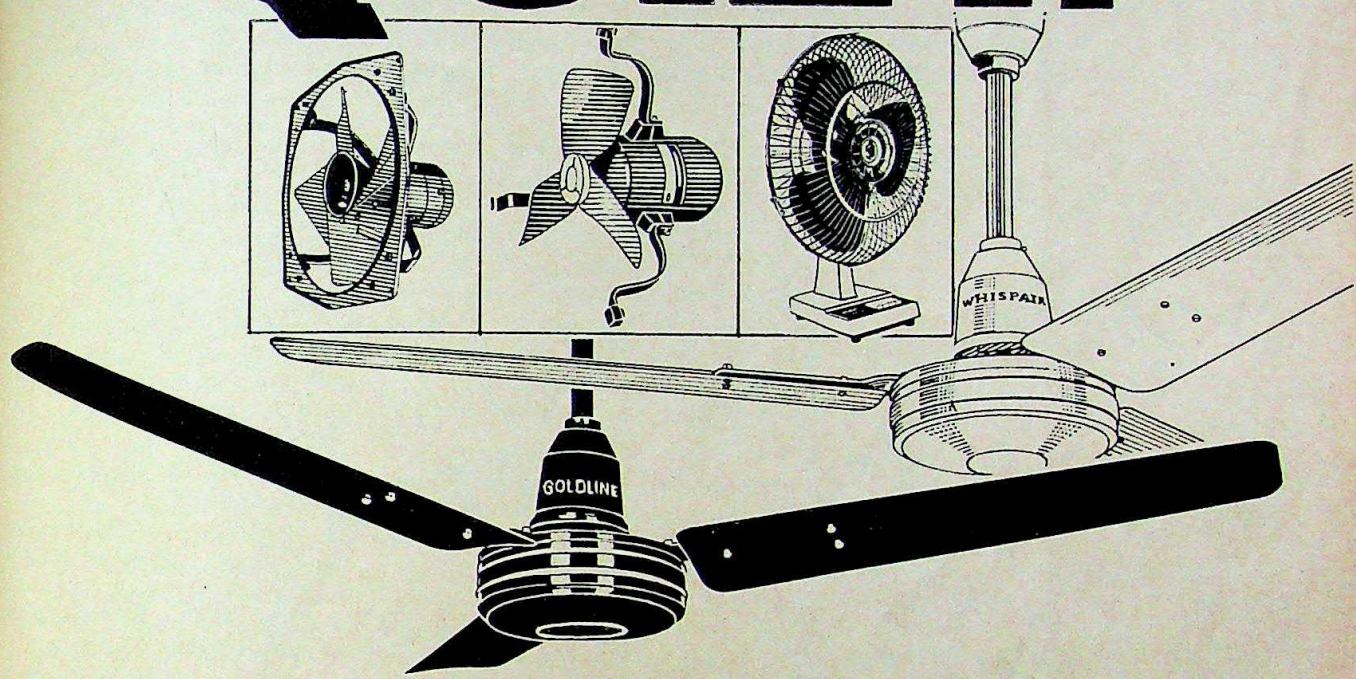
QUIET.



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BUSINESS

Heading for Trouble

FOR three straight years in a row, Indian industry has lived through happy times, and companies have prospered under the benign gaze of a government that has sought to liberalise the business environment. Suddenly, however, there are problems in a host of sectors, and industrial production has dipped unexpectedly. Government spokesmen make light of the problem and welcome the new, competitive environment, but there could be cause for worry. A report:

A financially crippled man-made fibre company in Bombay has sold half its head office and is hawking some of its production units. A moped company in Bangalore, helpless despite a prestigious French collaboration, has closed shop and is also up for sale. A New Delhi company making light commercial vehicles with Japanese collaboration is losing money, and its share is now available at a quarter of the price that prevailed three years ago. And a fertiliser manufacturer in Rajasthan complains that he is forced to sell his accumulated stock at huge discounts because there is a glut in the market. He too is losing money.

In the Central Secretariat, one of the Government's most influential policy-makers on economic issues listens to the litany of problems and says: "I am not at all surprised. This kind of a shake-out in fact bears out the success of government policy of allowing open competition, of moving from shortages to surpluses." And in Udyog Bhavan, an Industry Ministry official argues likewise: "We are aiming at gearing policies towards adequate production and reasonable prices. We want a buyer's market, not a seller's market. Aren't we achieving these goals?"

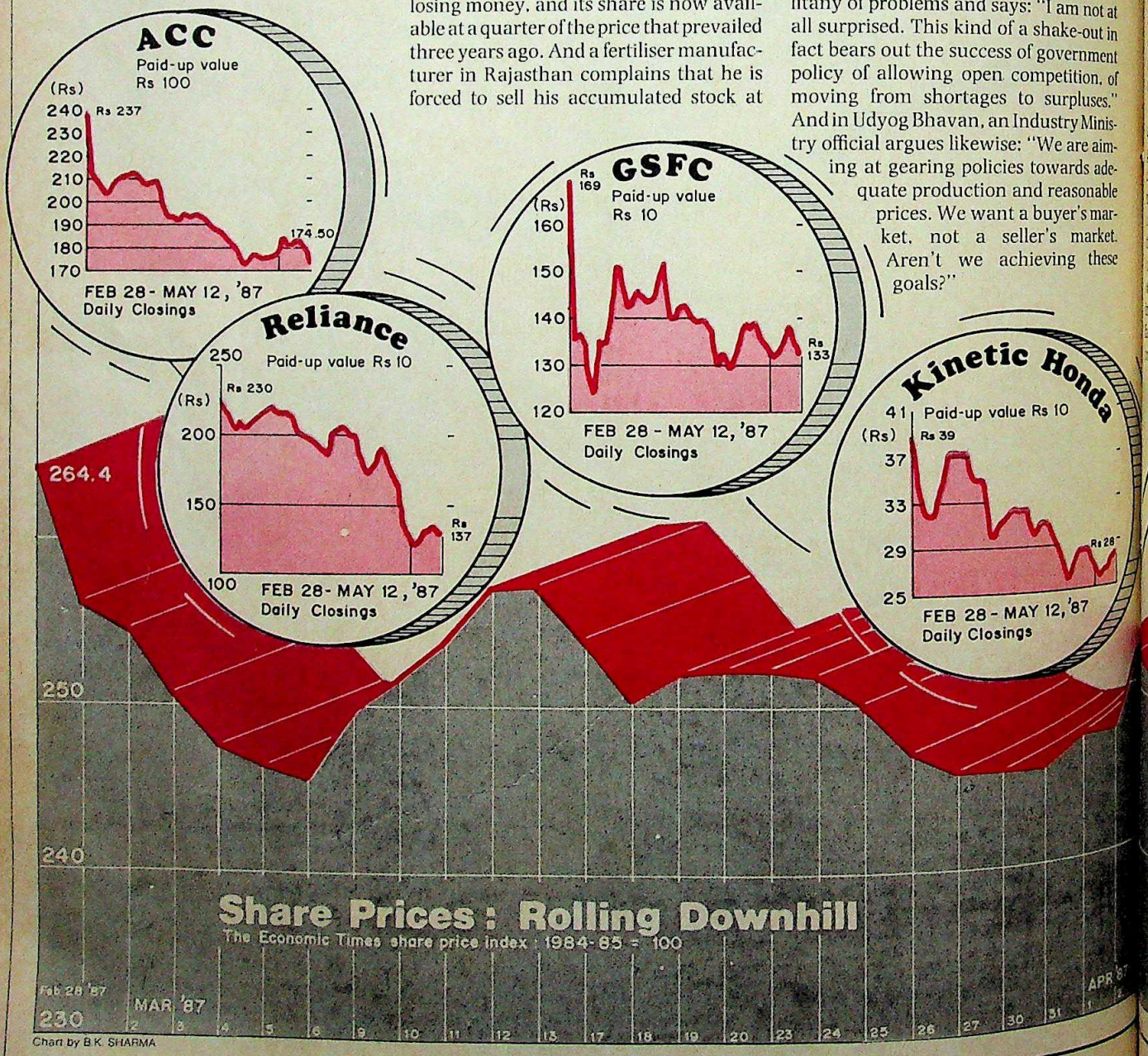

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

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From the other side of the fence, however, the grass doesn't look quite so green. As one sector of industry after the other rushes head-on into problems in production, pricing or marketing, as companies send out balance sheets with reduced profits or unalloyed losses, and as even the most rapidly growing sectors start applying the brakes, the mood in corporate offices is unmistakably worried. The crashing stock-market reflects that worry, and Surendra Paul of the Apeejay group (which has interests in tea, shipping, steel, hotels and several other sectors) declares: "There is always a time-lag between business feeling the pinch and the Government realising that there is a problem." Adds H.P. Nanda, chairman of Escorts (which had a poor 1986): "A buyer's market does make people more quality conscious, but it is also causing a corporate slump and underutilisation of capacity."

It isn't a case of industrial recession, or at least not yet. The economy is still growing at a reasonably healthy 4 per cent, industry has decelerated but has nevertheless been growing at over 6 per cent, and as S.S. Nadkarni, chairman of the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI), points out: "There is no slackening of investment intentions, nor a reduction in the demand for power. These and other factors certainly do not speak of business conditions causing concern."

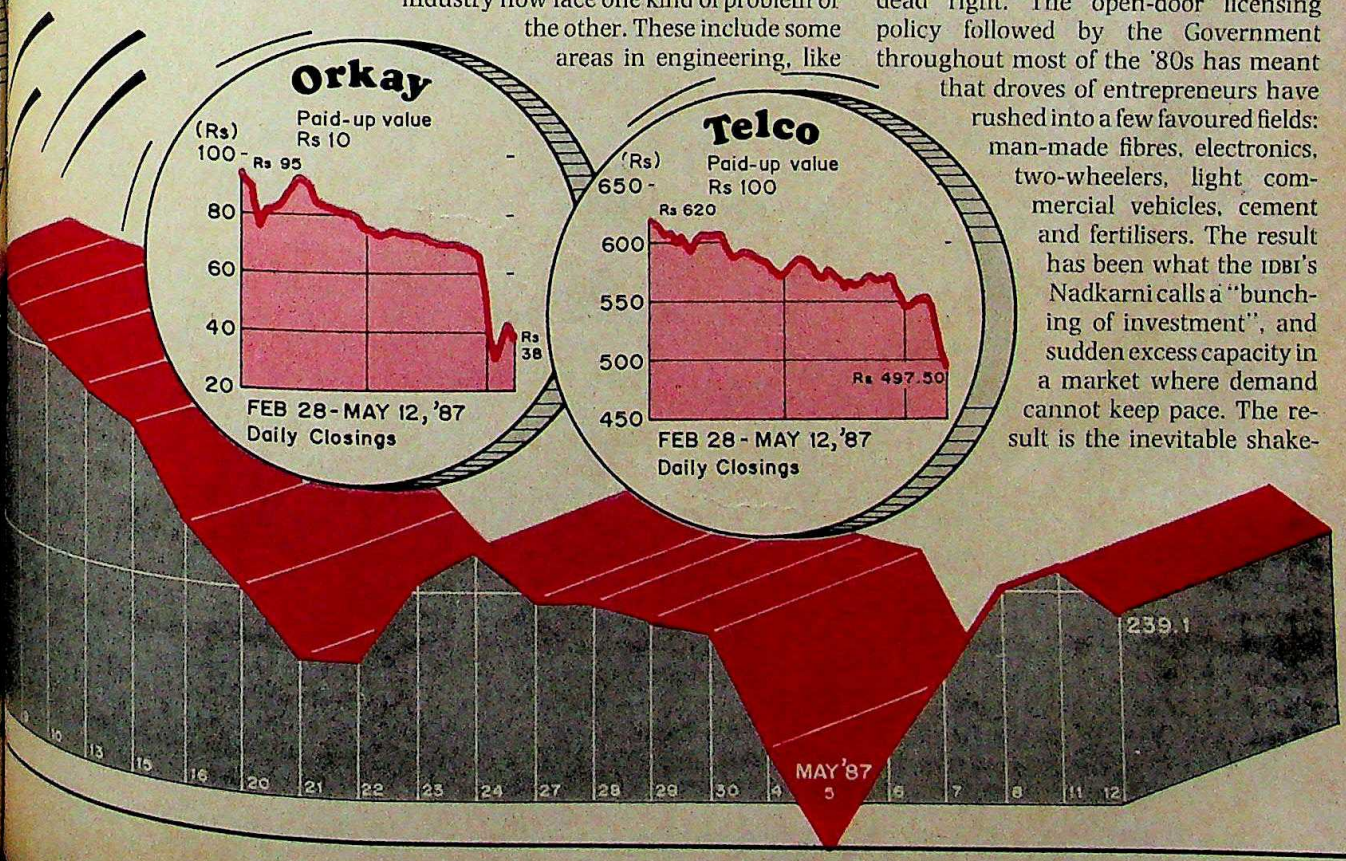
But the fact also is that the Government's official index for manufacturing output—after adjustment for seasonal variations—shows a dip in production for both November and December (the latest months for which data are available). Though almost every official spokesman insists that things are just fine, there is little doubt of trouble brewing on the horizon.

INDEED, the storm signals can be read quite easily—not just in the nervousness on the stock market, and not just in the troubles consuming high-flying companies like Reliance Industries. Apart from the unexpected dip in the industrial production index in November and December, there is the dramatic drop in the number of companies approaching the capital market with share and debenture issues in recent months—a sure reflection of the investment climate changing (*see box on page 106*). There is also the fact that as many as 51 of the 141 industrial sectors that are monitored by the Government have shown a drop in production in 1986-87 (till December). Several other sectors have managed only marginal growth. Even where there has been substantial growth (as in man-made fibres and two-wheelers), supply has outpaced demand and resulted in several of the weaker companies going under.

According to the chairman of one of Bombay's monolithic financial institutions, fully half the sectors of Indian industry now face one kind of problem or the other. These include some areas in engineering, like the capital goods sector (which faces lack of demand), fertiliser (where a glut in the market has resulted from indiscriminate imports), cement (a drop in open market prices has slashed profitability), all sectors of the automobile industry (half the manufacturers of commercial vehicles, cars and two-wheelers have cut back production or fallen miles short of sales targets), most of the electrical sector, shipping (where numerous companies are dropping below the Plimsoll line), tractors and refrigerators. Among the basic metal industries, problems are faced in steel itself (with Tata Iron and Steel reporting lower profits and mini-steel units mostly losing money) and in aluminium (where production has fallen). Most sectors of the chemicals industry have shown only marginal growth, and the paper industry continues to be deep in trouble. The list can go on.

Several agro-based industries are doing moderately well (textiles, sugar, tea, vanaspati, even jute), and the petrochemicals sector also has few problems. But increasingly, such examples are proving to be the exceptions.

"I told you so," says Freddie Mehta, the Tata group's chief in-house economist and a director of Tata Sons. "Three years ago I predicted that 1987-88 will see the slaughter of Indian industry, and I have been proved right. Competition with a capital 'C' has come to India, and industry has to face it." He is of course dead right. The open-door licensing policy followed by the Government throughout most of the '80s has meant that droves of entrepreneurs have rushed into a few favoured fields: man-made fibres, electronics, two-wheelers, light commercial vehicles, cement and fertilisers. The result has been what the IDBI's Nadkarni calls a "bunching of investment", and sudden excess capacity in a market where demand cannot keep pace. The result is the inevitable shake-



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RELIANCE INDUSTRIES

Stumbling Giant

THROUGHOUT most of 1986, Reliance had been dogged by reports of trouble on the profitability front. And throughout most of the year, the Ambanis who run this corporate juggernaut had declared that there was nothing to worry about. The year would see both sales and profits "on target", they had declared; changes in duty levels, higher interest and depreciation charges, lower price realisation: nothing would hurt the company, the Ambanis had said.

In explanation, they argued that Reliance had protected itself by going into high-value yarn, that the company enjoyed unique economies of scale, and that some of the extra financial burden would be comfortably borne by additional production. Finally, the promise had been held out that "dividend distribution will also be better than in the past".

Last fortnight, those promises returned to haunt a company that suddenly seemed vulnerable. For, while sales had increased by a handsome 23.3 per cent (to Rs 904 crore), this was well short of the expected Rs 1,000 crore. And the net profit was disastrously down, plunging from Rs 71.34 crore to Rs 14.17 crore—the company's lowest since 1980.

The dividend was halved to 25 per cent, a promised issue of bonus shares was postponed, and projects that should have been commissioned by now were admitted to have been delayed—once again belying the company's reputation for implementing projects in double-quick time.

The worst part of the news was the fact that only six months earlier, the company had claimed a half-yearly net profit of Rs 22.56 crore. Reliance's founder-Chairman, Dhirubhai Ambani, had claimed for good measure that the second half would be even better than the first. Yet, the figures now showed that the company had incurred a net *loss* of Rs 8.39 crore in the second half of the year—perhaps unprecedented in the company's chequered history.

On a shell-shocked stock-market (where both Reliance and Ambani have demi-godlike status), the company's share crashed to its lowest level in three years, dropping from Rs 277 some weeks ago to as low as Rs 110 before beginning to climb back—helped by a couple of quick government decisions on import curbs and duty reductions.

But for the first time on the market, both Reliance and the Ambanis now faced a credibility problem. For, in November last year, when the company approached investors with a Rs 400-crore debenture issue, no indication had been given of the trouble that Reliance was in.

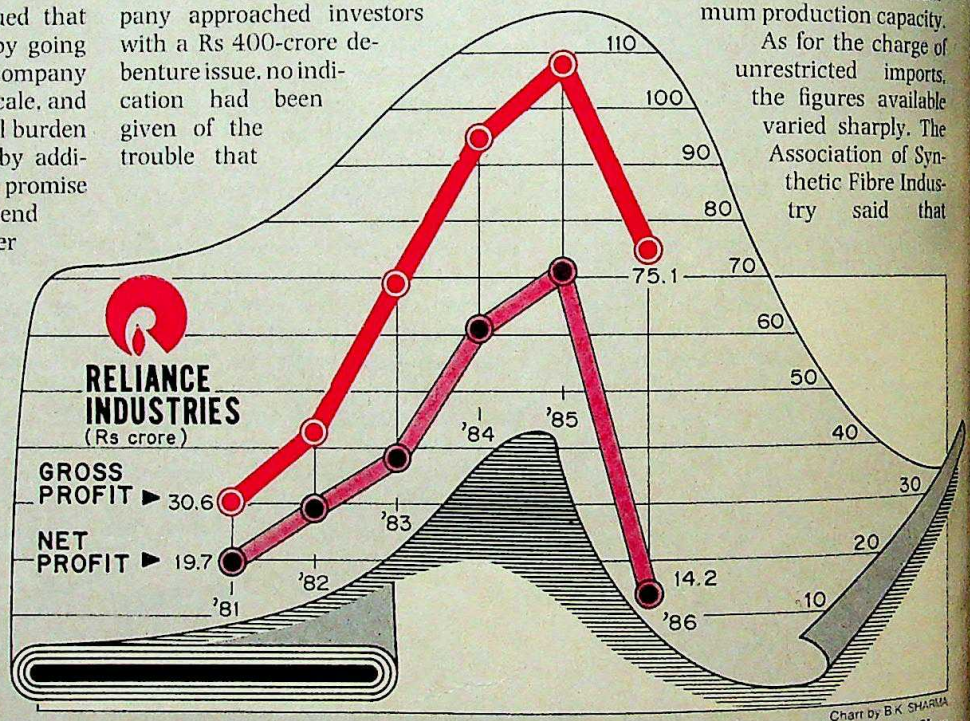

Chart by B K SHARMA

Dhirubhai's sons Mukesh and Anil—both executive directors of Reliance, and normally accessible to the press—now chose to play hide-and-seek. Finally tracked down, Mukesh professed that there was no problem at all: "We said that our operating profits would be good, and they are good," he declared blandly before blaming an additional Rs 35-crore interest burden on the then finance minister V.P. Singh's decision to ban the conversion of non-convertible debentures into shares last June. Yet, Anil Ambani had contemptuously dismissed calculations of a higher interest burden last year as "the stock-market brand of arithmetic".

If the tune throughout 1986 was that profits would not be affected by the problems that the company faced, the Reliance press release last fortnight spoke of four reasons for the slump in profits: unrestrained smuggling, unrestricted imports, higher duties and the extension of relief to polyester fibre to the disadvantage of polyester yarn.

But critics of the company pointed out that smuggling was not a new phenomenon, that the higher duties on its main raw material (purified terephthalic acid, or PTA) had been compensated by a drop in import prices, and that the tax favour to polyester fibre would have benefited Reliance more than anyone else since it had the maximum production capacity.

As for the charge of unrestricted imports, the figures available varied sharply. The Association of Synthetic Fibre Industry said that 24,000 tonnes of polyester staple fibre had been imported last year (five times the level two years earlier). In sharp contrast, figures with the textile commissioner's office showed that imports during the first 11 months of 1986-87 were up by less than 1,000 tonnes, to just 3,887 tonnes—a tiny fraction of the domestic production, which has grown by leaps and bounds.

Meanwhile, there were several other factors that could have helped cause the profit slump, including the additional interest burden and the plain fact that, with production capacity in the industry as a whole going up rapidly, competition in the market-place has acquired a new

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...ge. Inevitably, profits are going to ...—as they have done for all Reliance's ...polyester rivals too.

Orkay Silk Mills, for instance, saw sales in 1985-86 drop 20 per cent (to Rs 150 crore), and profits by 25 per cent to Rs 18 crore). Century Enka had

Dhirubhai Ambani: setback

The sharp fall in profits, halving of dividend, below-target sales and the failure to live up to promises have suddenly made Reliance look like a vulnerable giant.

...her sales, but profits dropped almost ...per cent on a pro rata basis, to ...10.95 crore. And Petrofils found its ...tax profit crashing unceremoni-...—from Rs 36.1 crore to Rs 12.6 ...re. Even in comparison with these ...formances, however, Reliance did ...rly on a profits-to-sales ratio. But the ...kay share slumped even more dra-...ically than did Reliance, going from ...35 to as low as Rs 30 before beginning ...mild recovery.

Orkay may also have kept Reliance ...mpany in trying to suppress the bad ...s for as long as it could. For Orkay too ...e no indication of a sharp drop in ...its last year, just before its own debenture issue. And shortly afterwards, Orkay Chairman Kapal Mehra sold his options on the debentures at a staggering premium of Rs 27-crore. Soon after that, the company's share price began dropping. Said a leading stockbroker in Bombay: "There should be stringent penalties imposed on company managements that mislead investors."

As for the future, Reliance's fortunes may be on the upswing again, helped by what seemed to be an end to last year's flood of bad news from New Delhi. Polyester yarn prices have been ruling higher this year than in 1986 (caused, says the grape-vine in Bombay, by the fact that the producers have formed a price cartel), the Government has just taken polyester fibre off the open general licence (thus restricting its imports), and the import duty on Reliance's main raw material, PTA, has been reduced. Following these decisions, the company stopped offering discounts on its quoted prices last fortnight, thus improving its net price realisation on polyester fibre.

Reliance will also be able to register substantial growth in sales this year. Its polyester fibre unit has overcome the initial technical problems, and its new PTA and linear alkyl benzene units (raw material for detergents), representing a combined investment of nearly Rs 500 crore at the giant Patalganga complex, should be commissioned this year. The official projections for 1987 are a turnover of Rs 1,200 crore, a growth of over 30 per cent. And if the additional depreciation on the new plants does not prove too heavy a burden, net profit too should improve.

Nevertheless, the era of super-profits in operations may be well and truly over. And the forecast that Reliance had made two years ago, of a gross profit of Rs 400 crore in 1987 on a turnover of Rs 1,500 crore, is now hopelessly out of reach. Indeed, the drop from those ambitious levels indicates the kind of problems the company has run into in commissioning its projects and maintaining its profit margins.

Perhaps in tune with this, the company's next annual shareholders' meeting will not be held in an open-air field (as it has been in the last two years because the crowds of enthusiastic investors have been much too large for any auditorium). Instead, the shareholders will meet in the confines of Bombay's Shanmukhananda Hall.

—T.N. NINAN

out, with the inefficient companies dropping out of the race.

There would be little to worry about if the matter ended there. And what Government officials argue is that there is indeed nothing more to the present situation, and that the transitional problems being seen in some areas constitute the price of changing from a protected industrial environment to a more open, competitive system.

But what businessmen across the country point to now is a more broad-based problem, with worrying contours. In several sectors, demand has quite simply not come up to the projected levels—as in commercial vehicles. Said R. Seshasayee, executive director of Ashok Leyland: "Road transport has become unviable, so transport operators are not replacing their old vehicles, and the state transport corporations don't have money." Ashok Leyland Chairman Mantosh Sondhi adds that commercial vehicle production dropped 11 per cent last year, to 55,000.

DEMAND has been a constraint in cement too, with sales last year totalling only 36 million tonnes, against the expected 40 million tonnes. Prices crashed, as a result, and Y.K. Modi of Modi Cement argued that "new cement units are losing as much as Rs 350 per tonne".

In other areas, costs have gone through the roof because of changed taxation policies and the rapid devaluation of the rupee. DCM-Toyota is one example, and its Executive Director Vivek Bharat Ram argues: "The price of my vehicles has gone up from Rs 1.4 lakh (which is what we had planned) to nearly Rs 2 lakh because the Government has raised taxes and allowed the rupee's value to fall by 50 per cent against the yen. My production this year is half of the 8,000 that I had planned." Bharat Ram's rival, Vikram Lal of Eicher Mitsubishi, adds gloomily: "Many units will be forced to close down if the Government does not give us reliefs. We are selling half of what we had expected, and there is no hope of breaking even just now." And says Bharat Ram with a foreboding of doom: "We are only seeing the beginning of the recession."

Taxation policy seems to be the villain of the piece elsewhere too. D.D. Borwankar, executive director of the Steel Furnace Association of India, says that mini-steel units are now forced to sell below cost partly because tax changes have gone against them; and Sunder Vachani, man-

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SHARE MARKETS

Shell-shocked Stocks

WHEN stock-market news reaches the front pages of the daily newspapers, the news is either very good, or very bad. Unfortunately for millions of investors, many of them anxious neophytes watching helplessly as share prices crashed resoundingly all around them, the news wasn't good at all last fortnight. By one estimate, Rs 3,000 crore worth of stock value has already disappeared, many small fortunes have been wiped out, and many more great hopes shattered.

If Rajiv Gandhi's Budget on February 28 set off a selling wave in a market full of disappointed investors, a steady flow of company profit-and-loss reports since then talked of lower profits, squeezed margins and even outright losses. In the resulting mood of anxiety, the growing political uncertainty did not help, and the disastrous profit figures announced by Reliance Industries (*see page 104*) did the rest. The bottom virtually fell out of the stock-market last fortnight.

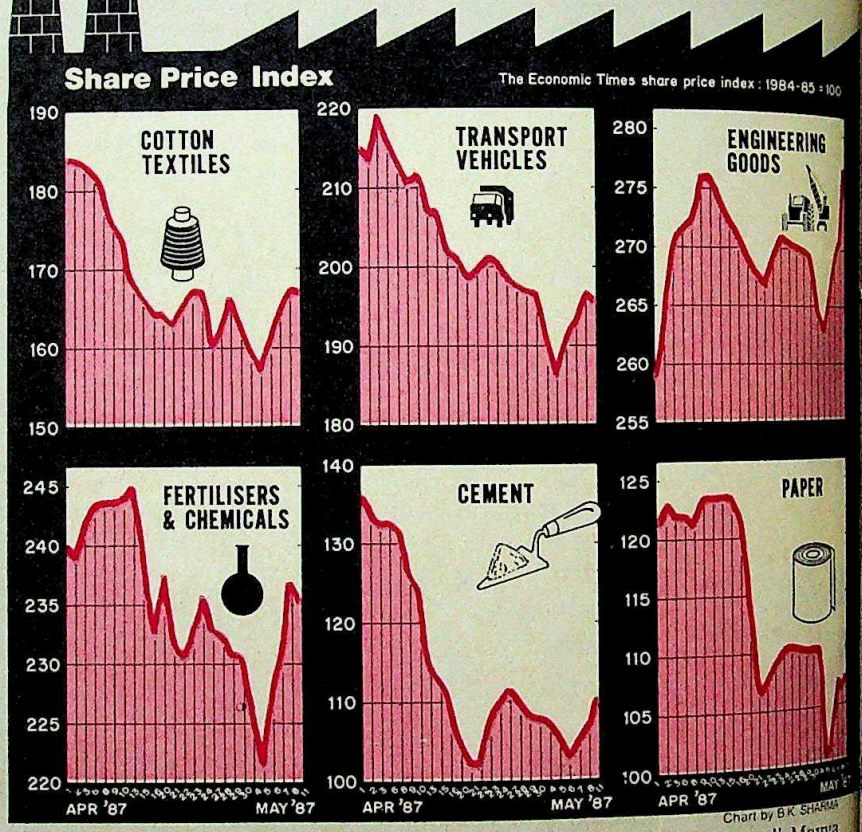
For weeks before that, the authorities in charge of regulating trading in the stock exchanges across the country had tried to stem the tide, without success. Whether they will have greater success in the future is anybody's guess. But the experts were united in their opinion last fortnight that the bullish, speculative boom of the last two years was well and truly over, that the market had entered a new 'bear phase', and that many investors, who had been frightened away by unexpected losses, might never return.

The rush of investors (totalling an estimated 7 million in 1985) had led to an unprecedented stock exchange boom two years ago, and changed the face of the capital market beyond recognition. But now things seemed to be changing once again, this time for the worse. Said Mahendra Kampani, president of the Bombay Stock Exchange: "Ups and downs are normal in the market. But we are worried today because there is a total change in the psychology of the investor." Added S. Ramaswami, president of the Madras Stock Exchange: "The new issues market has got completely shattered."

Certainly, the rapidly dropping prices on the stock-market seemed to bear that out. Several shares have lost half their value or more in the last year. The redoubtable Reliance itself, ruling at over Rs 350 last year, was now down to less than Rs 150. That drop alone cost investors a staggering Rs 1,000-crore. And Orkay Silk Mills crashed from Rs 190 two years ago to barely Rs 30 at one stage. Other leading scrips, like Tata Steel and Bajaj Auto, also lost ground. One expert's detailed analysis of share price movements showed that out of 63 shares studied, five had lost more than 40 per cent of their value during March and April alone, another seven had lost more than 30 per cent, 20 had lost over 20 per cent, and 17 had lost more than 10 per cent. In all, 60 of the 63 companies had lost ground in varying degrees.

In the process, millions of unwary and somewhat naive investors got their fingers badly burnt. Quick-buck operators had floated dud shares on the market, lured unsuspecting investors into their traps and then either disappeared or quite simply left shareholders in the lurch. M.R. Mayya, executive director of the Bombay Stock Exchange, estimated last fortnight that fully one-third of the companies floated in 1985 are no longer quoted on the stock exchange—because they have no buyers at all—and another 25 per cent have their shares quoted at less than their face value (so that the initial investors have lost money). "We have tightened the scrutiny of companies wanting to be listed on the stock exchange," Mayya added; but that amounted to locking the stable door after the horse had bolted. And in Calcutta, all that the local stock exchange President Dilip Khandelwal could say was: "Yes, it is true that many of the new companies took investors for a ride."

Capital market experts forecast last fortnight that the quantum of money raised by companies through share and debenture issues would now shrink, in a sharp reversal of the trend throughout the current decade. In 1980-81, only Rs 134 crore had been raised from investors in shares and debentures. By 1985-86, as new investors flooded the market, this shot up to an astronomical Rs 2,500



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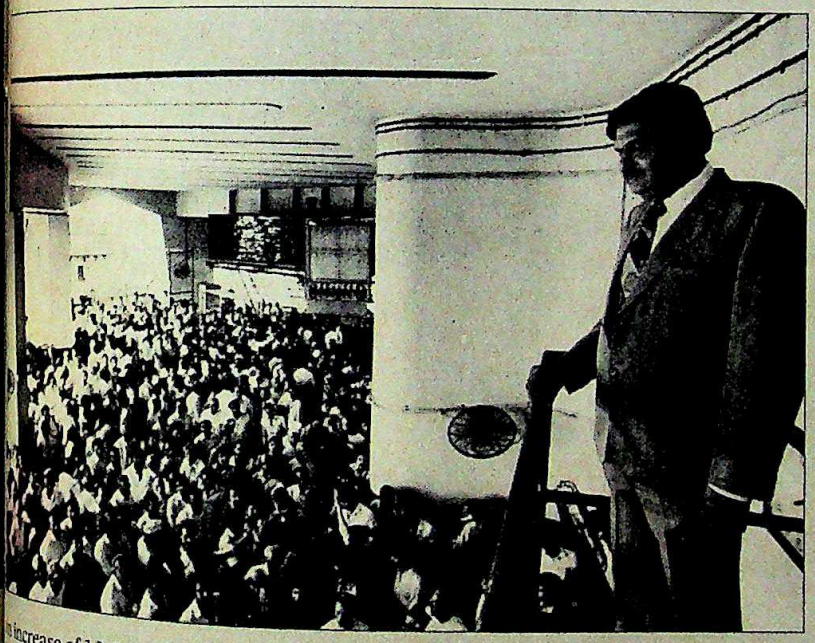
...ore, and then further to Rs 4,000 crore ...ast year. But the curve is now dipping. As ...the stock-market rage subsided through ...1986, the number of companies floating ...their stock dropped from 190 in the first ...quarter to 138 in the second, 120 in the ...third and just 78 in the final quarter. Said ...Kampani: "Today we have just seven or ...eight companies coming to the market ...every month. Many companies are post-...poning their share issues because they ...are not sure of the response."

A major part of the problem has, of course, been that business itself has been ...going through difficult times, with a ...general squeeze on profit margins mak-...ing balance sheets look much less attrac-...tive than a year ago. Detailed analysis of ...recent company balance sheets by ...Aridhi Investment Consultants showed ...that while sales on average had shown ...an increase of 13.5 per cent, gross profit ...had actually declined by 7.4 per cent, ...while net profit had dropped even more, ...by 11.6 per cent. Said Aridhi's Ram K. ...Paraiya: "The stock-market crash is a ...backlash to the poor company results." ...Added Delhi stockbroker Harish Bhasin: "Too many companies promised the ...moon and then failed to deliver."

In part, of course, the market has ...been helpless in the face of major politi-...cal tides ebbing and flowing. The spark ...that lit up the stock-markets in 1985 was ...provided by Rajiv Gandhi, who set off a ...wave of unprecedented optimism with ...his new approach to economic policies. ...But that mood has long since changed. ...Said P.C. Jain, president of the Delhi Stock Exchange: "People expected too much from the market after the Government's liberalised policies."

The new sobriety that has been born out of bitter disappointment could now have far-reaching implications. On the one hand, investors will be more choosy about what they put their money in. On the other, companies themselves will have to offer especially attractive propositions if they are to pull in investors.

The stock-market boom of the last two years is over. Many fortunes have been wiped out and today's investor is scared.



Kampani at the Bombay Stock Exchange

In the ultimate analysis, however, a revival of the stock-market is essential if companies' investment plans are not to get affected. Brokers mostly argue that the Government must take measures to boost the capital market once again. But with millions of investors having run away after getting mauled by both bulls and bears in the stock exchange jungle, the real corrective action may have to come, not from the Government, but from the stock-markets themselves.

—T.N. NINAN with TANIA MIDHA in Bombay and bureau reports

aging director of Weston Electronics, adds that the higher duties on TV sets in the last budget have cramped demand at a time when excess capacity has already been built up. "The production capacity is 4 million, demand in 1990 will be no more than 2 million." Complains Vipin Luthra of Televista: "The Department of Electronics licenses television units freely, but the Finance Ministry treats it as a luxury item and taxes it."

Even in a reasonably comfortable sector like textiles, former Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) president D.C. Kothari complained that raw cotton prices had shot up by 35 per cent because of exports, while FICCI Secretary General D.H. Pai Panandikar argued that "there is a demand constraint".

The two-wheeler market has seen the maximum amount of action, with units closing down, stopping production, introducing new models and slashing prices. Lohia Machines and Kinetic Honda have both slashed prices in recent months, Enfield India plans to launch a new model because some of its existing ones have failed, while Lohia, Girnar Scooters and Automobile Products of India have already launched the Trident, Prince and Polo, respectively. Meanwhile, several companies and models have fallen by the wayside: Andhra Pradesh Scooters, Chamundi Mopeds, Kelvinator's Avanti, Scooters India. Companies that commanded hefty premiums (like Ind-Suzuki) now have a problem in selling. And even today's leaders, like Hero Honda, are barely out of financial trouble. Said Hero Honda's Managing Director Ramankant Munjal: "We hope to just about break even in 1986-87."

There will now be a comparable scramble in the field of man-made fibres, where supply will outstrip demand although the seventh plan's consumption targets for 1980-90 are already being achieved. Reliance's sharp drop in profits in 1986 was partly the result of the change in the demand-supply balance, and there will be still fiercer competition in the coming months. Said Harsh Goenka, whose India Polyfibres recently went into production: "We have entered a field where there is excess capacity, and we know that the inefficient will fall out of the market."

One company that has already caved in is Nirlon Synthetic Fibres and Chemicals, which took the disastrous course of investing in diversification and expansion when prices were falling, and was quickly caught in a financial bind. The company

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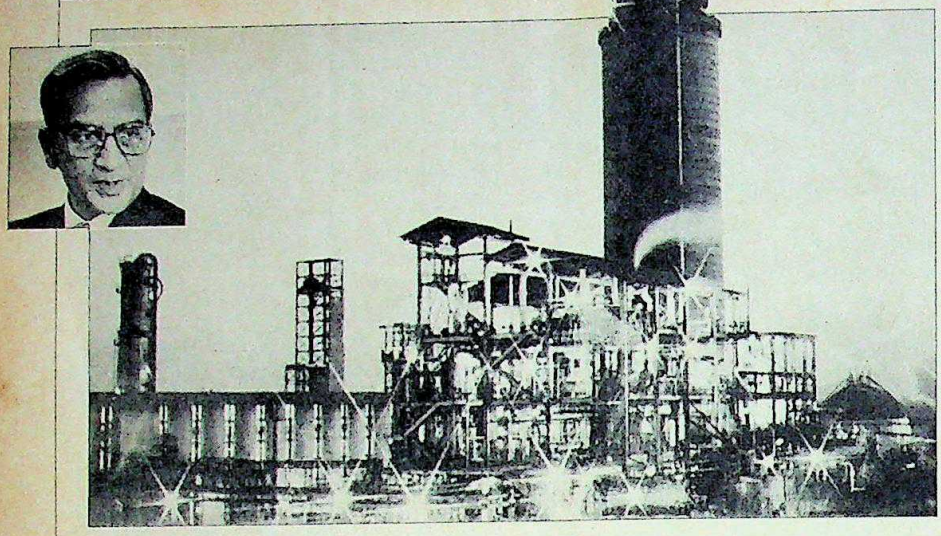
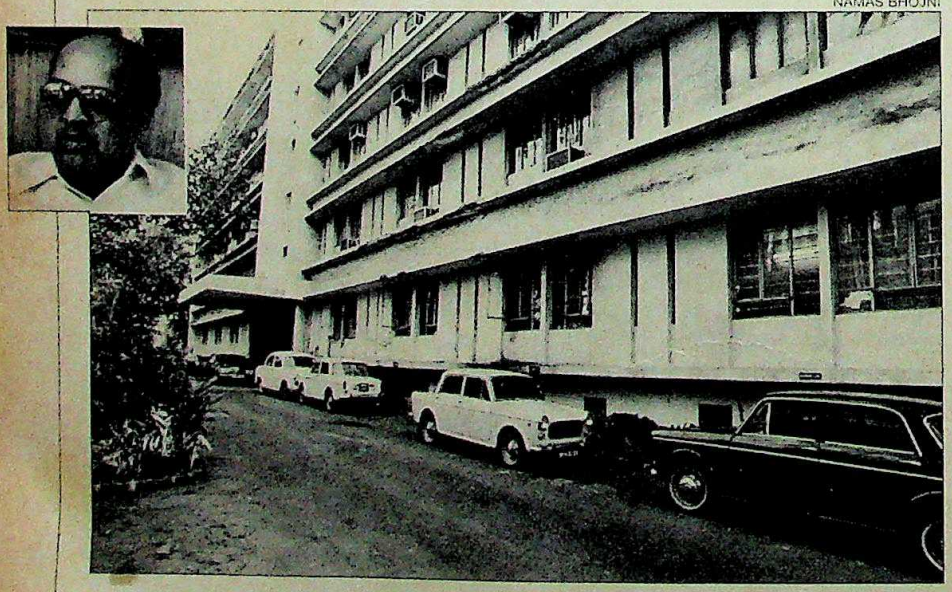


Bansi Dhar (inset) and DCM's fertiliser plant: losing money

Munjal (inset) and Hero Honda motorcycles: market glut

NAMAS BHOJNI



Sagar (inset) and Nirlon House: sold to raise cash

recently sold half its headquarters building in Bombay's Worli area, and some of its production divisions too are now up for sale. Said Managing Director Virenchee Sagar: "Frankly, we should have been more cautious. We are trying to jettison some divisions, and textiles is now a losing proposition for us. If the Government does not reduce duties, the future is bleak."

Perhaps the most avoidable problem of them all has been caused in the fertiliser industry, where excessive imports have resulted in a stockpile of some 3.5 million tonnes, which in turn has forced domestic manufacturers to offer discounts of up to 20 per cent of the normal selling price. Said Pratap Narayan, executive director of the Fertiliser Association of India: "All the fertiliser companies put together have lost Rs400 crore last year by being forced to give such discounts." Added the Chairman of DCM Bansi Dhar, whose fertiliser unit in Kota has been one of the victims of the prevailing market situation: "I am giving discounts that are more than my net realisation; I am losing Rs 200 on every tonne of fertiliser that I sell. But if I close down my factory, I will lose still more."

In engineering, the problem is the familiar one of lack of orders, and a resulting cash crunch. Said J.P. Choudhury, chairman of Titaghur Steels in Calcutta: "The liquidity problems have become serious; companies are not getting enough orders, and there are delays in payments by even public sector companies." Imports are yet another problem. Choudhury adds. "The Government must see to it that indigenous industry is not destroyed, because international companies are dumping their goods here as they are short of global orders."

Engineering, fertiliser, cement, man-made fibre, automobiles, steel, electronics: there are problems on all these and other fronts; problems ranging from cost increases to inadequate demand, and from tax burdens to imported competition. Some of the problems are certainly part of the transition from a shortage-oriented to a surplus-oriented economy, and those that are going under are the ones that cannot face up to the competition. But in all too many sectors, the problems go beyond this. And if correctives are not applied, or the monsoons fail again and depress all-round demand, Indian industry is in for hard times.

—T.N. NINAN with TANIA MIDHA, SURAJEET DASGUPTA and bureau reports

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GOING INDIAN

ABBOTT Laboratories will become the first multinational drug company in India to reduce its foreign shareholding from 40 per cent to 26 per cent. An application has been filed with the Controller of Capital Issues for selling 14 per cent of the stock with Abbott's American parent company to one of the companies owned by Nusli Wadia, chairman of Bombay Dyeing. Whether control of the company's day-to-day management will also change is as yet unclear, but observers in the pharmaceutical industry are reasonably sure that although Wadia is not buying into the company purely as an investor, Abbott of the US will not give up all control immediately. Abbott's voluntary dilution of its foreign shareholding to 26 per cent had been preceded by several other drug companies voluntarily diluting their foreign shareholding to 40 per cent. But these were in order to escape the restrictions of the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act. The dilution of its foreign shareholding to 26 per cent by Abbott Laboratories does not have any such advantages.

REJECTED CASE

THE Government has turned down an application by—believe it or not—the Delhi-based *Hindustan Times* to diversify into the leasing and hire purchase business. The K.K. Birla-owned media outfit sought to set up a new division for the purpose and had applied for clearances under the MRTP Act. But at MRTP Commission hearings, company officials failed to furnish information on certain investment and financing details. The Government subsequently sent the company a reminder last December but received no response. So it concluded that the company was not interested in pursuing the application and rejected it.

SYNTHETIC SUITORS

IN the race for acquiring different units of Nirlon Synthetic fibres and Chemicals, there are unexpected entrants and drop-outs. The latest entrant is the London-based Abdul Shamji, who is obviously bounding back into business after running into problems earlier. But with the synthetic yarn industry turning out to be singularly unattractive, other suitors are dropping out, like the Mafatlals. Among those still in the running are R.P. Goenka and the Singhanias. Goenka has a polyester fibre unit going on stream shortly, and the Singhanias are already prominent in the field of synthetics. The Ruias are also in the race, but may not find favour with the financial institutions.

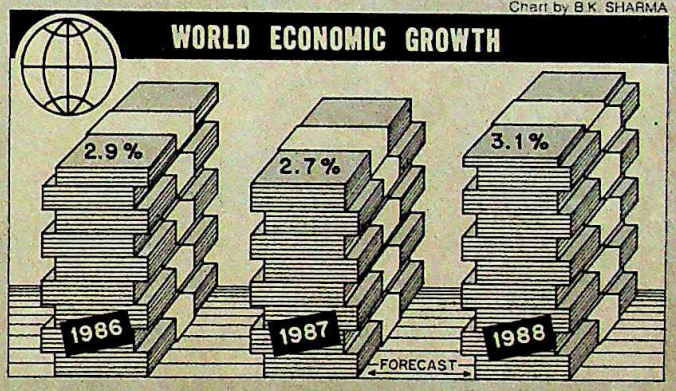
DIVERSIFYING PLANS

THE Nirma group (four companies that turned out washing powder worth Rs 200 crore last year) now plans to diversify into another consumer goods field: toiletries. Karsanbhai Patel, the man behind the Nirma success, proposes to start manufacturing toothpaste and other items—and presumably give Colgate-Palmolive a run for its money in the same manner that he has in the case of Hindustan Lever. Patel's other proposed diversification—for the manufacture of 50,000 tonnes annually of linear alkyl benzene—is still pending with the Government. Meanwhile, the newly introduced Nirma detergent cake has already cornered a substantial chunk of the washing market. As a result, turnover in 1987 is expected to be Rs 350 crore.

SLOW GROWTH

THE outlook for the world economy is not as rosy as might have been expected. According to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) latest assessment, overall economic growth is expected to be no more than 2.7 per cent, down from the 1986 figure of 2.9 per cent (which itself was something of a disappointment, given the dramatic drop in oil prices). However, the IMF expects 1988 to see an improvement in growth, with a 3.1 per cent growth in global economic activity.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Developing countries are expected to suffer a relatively greater set-back in 1987, with growth dropping from 4 per cent in 1986 to around 3.5 per cent. But 1988 is expected to witness a more than 4 per cent rate of growth.

MEDICAL MOVE

LARSEN and Toubro, which had its proposal to manufacture video cassette recorders turned down a few months ago, is now making plans to enter the field of medical equipment. A Rs 25-crore project will turn out electro-cardiograph machines, as well as X-ray and ultra-sound equipment.

Medical equipment is largely imported (few big outfits manufacture it with the exception of Siemens) and the area is therefore viewed as a business opportunity. Meanwhile, the company (which reported lower profits last year) has surrendered its licence for tyres because this is no longer seen as a good investment, and is now looking around for other investment opportunities.

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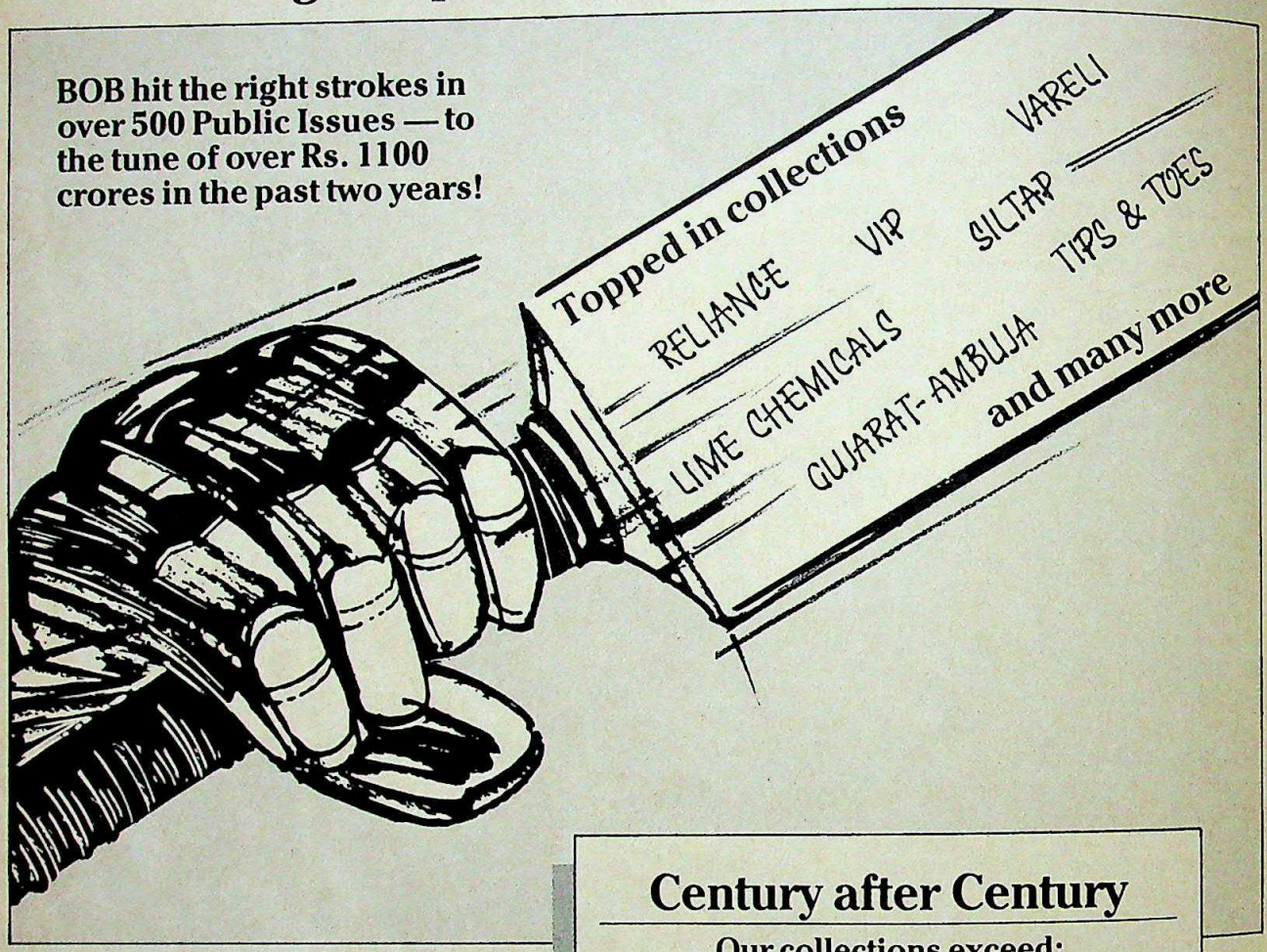

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PHARMACEUTICALS

Bitter Pill

SIX years ago, the big pharmaceutical companies in India got a shock when the Government fixed a host of drug prices at levels that the companies thought were unreasonably low. The companies went to court, armed themselves with stay orders and went ahead with charging what they wanted for their products. Along the way, they even got a favourable verdict from the Delhi High Court.

Now, in 1987, they have got an even bigger shock: they are being asked to pay for their past sins. In a stinging verdict, replete with indictments of the industry, the Supreme Court has charged the companies with 'profiteering', asked them to roll back prices to the levels which the Government had fixed, and (worst of all) to pay the Government the extra cash that they had meanwhile collected from customers.

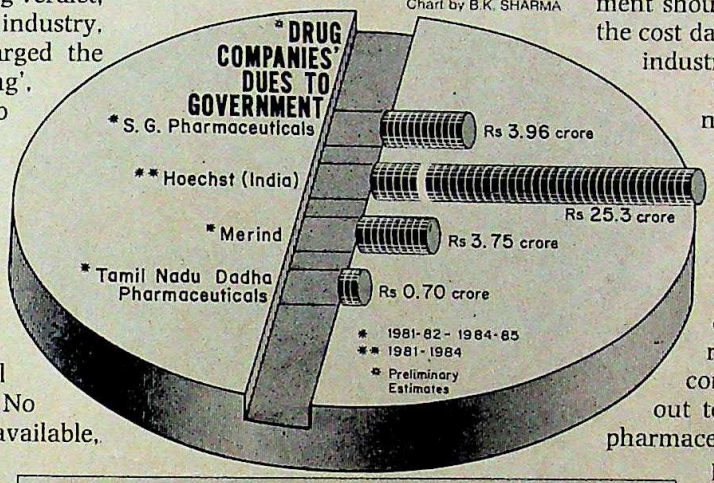
For an industry already squeezed by low and shrinking profit margins, the total bill may be impossible to bear. No authenticated estimates are available, but going by government calculations, Hoechst alone could be asked to pay up over Rs 25 crore—more than its annual profits and financial reserves. The total bill for the industry could be anywhere between Rs 50 crore and Rs 100 crore. Companies like Glindia (formerly Glaxo Laboratories) could end up skipping their dividend altogether, and the Sarabhai-owned S.G. Pharmaceuticals could also find itself in an unexpected financial bind.

Inevitably, the pharmaceutical companies were virtually paralysed last fortnight. The few that managed to pick up the courage to appeal to the Government for mercy got an angry rebuff from officials, and on a panicky stock-market the shares of drug companies plunged dramatically. Only late last fortnight, were there any indications that the Government might decide to soften its stand—perhaps in an effort to avoid further litigation in the form of a review petition.

In at least some cases, the drug companies had, of course, been unconsciously fleecing the consumer. Hoechst, for instance, was charging Rs 24,735 per kg of Baralgan Ketone, a bulk drug used to make an anti-spasmodic formulation, when the government-fixed price was no more than Rs 1,010. In fact, the company wanted from the Government a price that was less than Rs 9,000 per kg. Yet it continued to charge Rs 24,735 throughout the pendency of the court case.

Other companies may be less guilty, and their financial implications therefore, may also be less than cataclysmic. Cyanamid India, for instance, was the first company to go to court on the pricing issue, and maintained its Director for Finance R.C. Jhaveri: "We are still studying the implications of the verdict. We don't feel that we will have to refund any money."

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



The Supreme Court's stinging verdict, asking drug companies to cut prices to the government-fixed levels, and pay up the extra cash collected, may be too large a burden for the industry.

The Supreme Court verdict specially forbids companies from going back to court, and asks them to go to the Government with petitions for reviewing the prices fixed. And Pfizer Director Dilip Shah admitted that "going by the judgement, we cannot ordinarily challenge government-fixed prices in a court of law". But if the companies don't get the prices that they think are essential to carry on their business profitably, they might go back to the court nevertheless. Said Harish Chawla, Cipla director: "Companies will have no alternative but to go in appeal to a full bench. Otherwise they are doomed. Their right to go to court has been snatched away."

Many people in the industry feel that the court has been less than fair to the companies. One example cited is the judges' observation that the central issue was a fair price for the consumer, and the industry's need for a minimum economic price was a subsidiary objective. Following this, the court did not consider the industry's costs while upholding the government-fixed prices, and left this task to the Government. The court also declared that, price-fixing being a 'legislative' activity, no principles of natural justice need be followed. This was in sharp contrast to the earlier judgement of the Delhi High Court, which had maintained that the Government should give the drug companies the cost data on the basis of which the industry's prices were being fixed.

The drug companies' effort now is to minimise the damage, partly by claiming set-offs against the otherwise large sums that may be due, and partly by pointing out that the industry cannot survive and provide medicines if they can't get a fair return. Spokesmen for the companies have also pointed out to the Government that the pharmaceuticals industry's pre-tax profits have slumped from 15.47 per cent of sales to 4 per cent last year. And Pfizer has written to the Government, that it closed its last accounting year with profits of just 0.5 per cent of its Rs 68 crore sales. It added that, at current prices, the company would make a net loss this year, even though it has already discontinued the production of some 20 loss-making drugs.

What will finally happen to a troubled industry remained to be seen. But in one sense at least, the consumer might not benefit from the Supreme Court's concern. The extra money he has paid over the years for his drugs will be deposited by the companies into a government account. What is more, the Government is about to announce new drug price-control regulations, and several drugs will be freed from the price-control basket. If these include the drugs the court has dealt with, the manufacturers will be free once again to charge what they wish—without fear of being forced into the sick bay.

—TANIA MIDHA

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ORIENTAL FINANCE

Smooth Scam

CAN Kerala's once-booming non-banking finance companies be depended on? Last fortnight, there were no prizes for answering that question after Sajan Varghese of the high-profile Oriental Finance and Exchange Company sought anticipatory bail, fearing arrest by the Madras police for cheating his depositors. When the sessions court at Madras rejected the bail application, Sajan simply disappeared.

The sensational bursting of the deposit bubble shocked countless depositors of Kerala's "blade companies"—so called because of the cut-throat interest rates they charge. The closure of all 20 branches of Oriental was not all. Five other companies in the business also closed shop last fortnight. Among them was Samarias Financiers, once a leading name, which shut down all its 11 branches located within the state and outside.

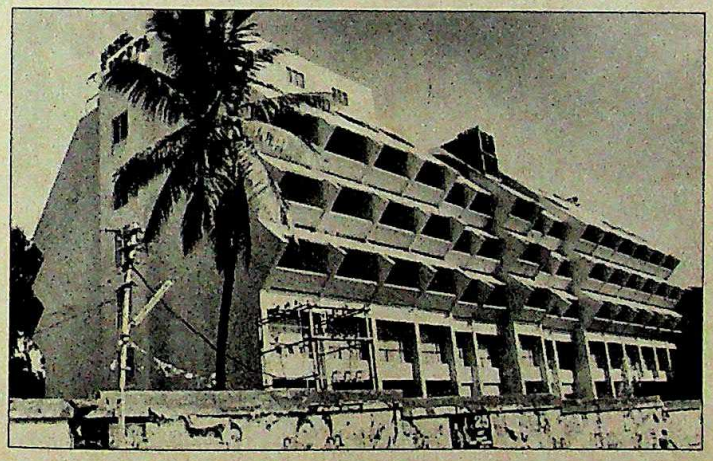
When the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had asked for financial statements of all the companies in the business towards the end of 1985, Oriental had claimed that up to August 1985 it had only 1,830 depositors with accounts worth Rs63.31 lakh. But senior RBI officials feel that Sajan collected over Rs 15 crore from 40,000 depositors, big and small, in the last four years.

Sajan's success story in the early '80s is the stuff of which best sellers are made. Rising from relative obscurity as manager of one of the early "blade" companies, Sajan started his own company and soon grew into one of the most well-established names in the business.

His life-style was the envy of even film stars in Kerala. At one time, he had three Mercedes Benz, two Toyotas and a Honda. He built an air-conditioned mansion in Kottayam at an estimated cost of Rs 35 lakh and bought a Trivandrum hotel. According to Muthoot Pappachan, a leading private financier, "Sajan's life-style fooled everybody. His depositors were so awed by his style that they forgot to ask how he managed to give them a 33 per cent interest on deposits."

Pappachan and other financiers allege that Sajan did not loan out his deposits at all. His modus operandi in the last four years was simple—he issued full-page and half-page advertisements in leading newspapers promising to give 33 per cent on deposits, and this lured greedy investors in droves. Argued Pappachan: "If Sajan was paying 33 per cent when we were giving 18 per cent to 20 per cent, he should have made loans at 46 to 48 per cent to make a profit." Bankers in the state feel that no businessman could have afforded these rates. The theory, therefore, is that Sajan was paying his depositors from the principal itself, and diverting the rest of the money into film production, real estate and lavish living.

The closure of the Oriental Finance and Exchange Company, following Varghese's disappearance, has shocked Kerala's depositors.



Sajan Varghese's hotel: high profile

Flush with funds, Sajan started making films in 1983. He produced or distributed as many as 13 Malayalam films and five Tamil films, but most of them bombed at the box-office. The only real success was *Avanazhi*, the I.V. Sasi-directed thriller.

The proverbial last straw was Sajan's latest production, *Kadathanadan Ambadi*, an action-packed Malayalam fantasy. The film overshot its Rs 50-lakh budget to reach the Rs 1-crore mark. To raise money to complete the film, Sajan planned another deposit mobilisation scheme.

But early this year, the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC) took notice of his methods and restrained Oriental from issuing any more advertisements. Sajan tried to use posters instead, but the commission came to know about it and directed the Madras police to stop him.

In desperation, Sajan started borrowing from Marwadi financiers in Madras to keep himself afloat. The inflow of deposits was reduced to a trickle and, amid rumours of an impending crash, some large depositors withdrew their balances. Sajan's cheques began bouncing and finally, on a complaint by J.M. Ranjithan, a retired additional superintendent of police who was one of his depositors, the Madras police registered a case of cheating against Sajan and his partners, his brother and father.

Several of Sajan's depositors in Kerala have formed associations, but it is unlikely that they will get their money back. Samarias' depositors too have formed an action council and demanded a probe into the activities of private financing firms. Said a senior RBI official: "The crash of Oriental and others in the last month has made the people aware of the risk involved in blade companies. A run has started on the remaining ones and very few are likely to survive."

The Government too has sat up and taken notice. Said Viswanatha Menon, the new Marxist finance minister: "We will be amending the laws to counter the 'blade' menace though, at present, there is no legal provision to deal with them effectively."

Meanwhile, a massive manhunt has been launched by the Madras police to track Sajan down. An enterprising producer has announced a film based on the life and times of Sajan Varghese. Mammooty, Kerala's top star, will play the title role. Film or not, Kerala is unlikely to forget the man for a very long time.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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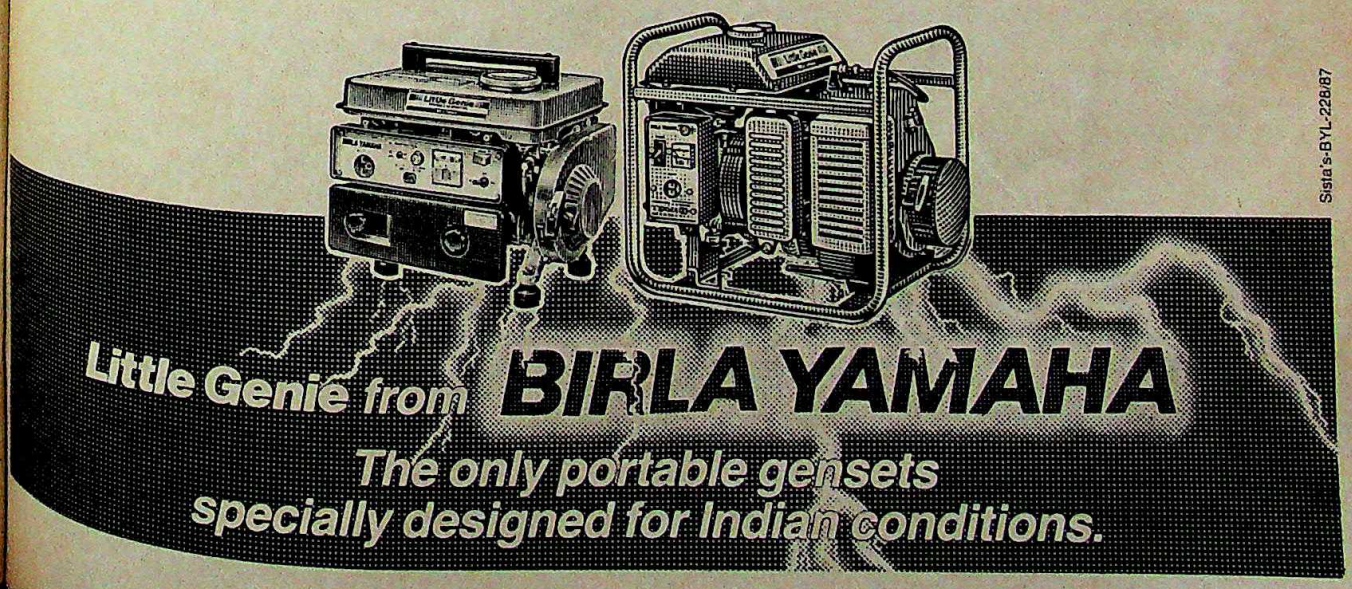

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UCIL

Curious Closure

THE Bhopal gas tragedy claimed another industrial victim last month when Union Carbide India Ltd (UCIL) announced the closure of its profitable petrochemicals plant in Bombay, thereby losing its second plant. Three years ago, Carbide had agreed to sell the plant to Reliance Industries, which, however, backed out after the Bhopal disaster. Other problems then dogged the plant—new safety needs, huge claims and a court case—till the management finally applied for closure to the Maharashtra Government.

The announcement came a full year after UCIL shut down the plant, called Chemco within the corporation, ostensibly to implement the recommendations of the R.K. Garg Committee set up by the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board to evaluate safety systems in hazardous industries. Curiously, the decision also came exactly four months after UCIL announced a phased restarting of Chemco last December. But just four days after the company made public its plan to make the plant fully operational by June, the Supreme Court gave its landmark judgement in the Shriram Foods and Fertilisers' oleum gas leak case, setting rigid standards of liability for those running hazardous industries.

This judgement had sent UCIL's top management scurrying for legal advice, only to confirm the worst fears of Chemco workers. Faced with criticism, even within the corporation, that the Supreme Court judgement was being used as an excuse to implement an earlier decision, UCIL Managing Director V.P. Gokhale issued a 20-minute videotape to all employees explaining the company's stand. "It is in the interest of everybody that Chemco should run," said the suave Gokhale. "But according to legal opinion, we cannot afford to restart the plant. So we decided to sell, and the only solution was for Chemco to be taken over by a public undertaking."

UCIL was agreeable to Chemco's take-over by the Government, with the money to be kept in escrow until the Bhopal case was decided. But with the Supreme Court ruling of "absolute liability", and with the state Government putting Chemco on a list of seven companies to be shifted out of the heavily polluted Chembur area of Bombay, both UCIL and the Government are caught in a double bind. If the state Government refuses UCIL permission to close the plant, then it will have to share responsibility in case of a mishap. But if the plant is allowed to close down, more than 900 employees will go jobless.

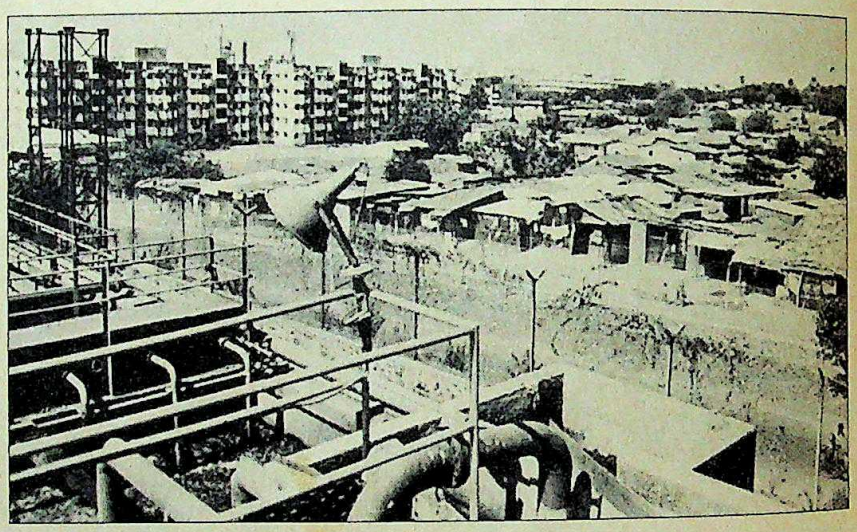
Though Chemco was shut down for maintenance a year ago, all employees have been retained on full wages. UCIL claims it lost Rs 9 crore in 1986 on repairs and wages, a figure it also flaunts as proof of its resolve to re-start the plant until the court judgement swept the ground from under its feet. But the workers remain un-convinced. "They were just preparing a case on how to close down Chemco permanently," says K.S.S. Narayanan, general secretary of the employees union. "There is a planned move to liquidate UCIL, and it is the parent Union Carbide in the US which decided to shut Chemco down. A time will come when UCIL will be left with only a skeleton staff fighting the Bhopal case."

While state government officials decline comment on the case, Gokhale insists the company explored all avenues before asking for closure. Before it was shut down, Chemco contributed more than a quarter of UCIL's annual turnover of Rs 244 crore, and controlled nearly 80 per cent of the market for wire and cable LDPE (low density polyethylene). Besides housing India's oldest naphtha cracker, the 26-year-old plant also has an olefin complex and an organic chemicals unit. But with a production capacity of just 20,000 tonnes per annum of LDPE, its future became bleak when the giant public sector Indian Petrochemical Complex began marketing 80,000 tonnes of LDPE from 1979, and began constructing a 300,000 tonne ethylene unit near Bombay.

UCIL has, in the last two years, tried to save Chemco by asking the Government to either allow it to shift and expand capacity or allow a technology change from the riskier high pressure process to the safer low pressure one. The Government turned down both proposals. In fact, the feasibility study on a possible plant shift from Chembur, which UCIL commissioned Engineers India Ltd to prepare, put a capacity of 80,000 tonnes as an economically viable size.

Until the Supreme Court judgement, UCIL was also pressuring the state Government to allow Chemco to remain in Chembur, with a change in technology and a 200-metre buffer zone. However, not only has the state Government refused to do anything about the hutment and housing colonies that have sprung up around the plant, but, as if to underline its total lack of a cohesive policy, a state minister even inaugurated a school last August just outside Chemco's boundary wall. Now, faced with the demand for closure of the plant from UCIL, the state Government appears bereft of ideas on saving the plant and the jobs that go with it. "Workers have just become pawns," complains Narayanan. "The average age of Chemco workers is 38 years, and at this stage what chance do we have of finding alternative jobs?" With neither UCIL nor the state and Central governments coming up with an alternative plan for Chemco's future, the employees appear more or less resigned to the prospect of unemployment and the closure of India's oldest petrochemicals plant.

—M. RAHMAN



Carbide's Chembur plant and surrounding slums: hazardous

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TETRA-BRICK DRINKS

Fresh Flavours

SUDDENLY this summer, the trickle has turned into a flood. Where Parle's Frooti and Appy had ruled for well over a year, rival companies are rapidly flooding shop shelves with a spectrum of juices, flavoured milks and soya milk-based drinks—all packaged in revolutionary new 'tetra-bricks' or laminated boxes.

Last fortnight, the Godrej-backed Noble Soya kicked off a range of soya milk-based drinks in Bombay under the Great Shake label. Not to be outdone, the Tamil Nadu Cooperative Milk Producers' Federation unveiled a chocolate-flavoured milk called Goodness in Madras, with more flavours to follow. Others too are vying for the consumer's attention: Amul's flavoured milks; the Gujarat Agro Industries Corporation's Jive (a mango drink); and Volfruit mango and orange juices and drinks, the offshoot of a venture between Voltas and the Punjab Government.

So far, most of the new liquids are flourishing in the marketplace. Parle turns out 300 Frooti packets a minute and is furiously readying to commission four more plants round the country. "Frooti sales are booming," chuckles Parle Chairman Ramesh Chauhan. And Voltas was sufficiently buoyed by the success of Volfruit in Lucknow and Kanpur last June to launch the juices and drinks in Bombay, Pune and Delhi three months ago. Says R.N. Mukherjee, general sales manager of Voltas' consumer products division: "Volfruit is moving so fast it hardly has any shelf-life." Even the Tamil Nadu Federation hawked 2 lakh packets in the first four days after its chocolate milk was launched, ringing up sales of Rs 5 lakh—although a 200 ml packet at Rs 2.50 is priced at 90 paise more than its bottled chocolate milk.

Most market observers believe the going will only get better. Says Ravi Sheth, Noble Soya's vice-president for finance: "The market will grow by leaps and bounds." Echoing the point, Mukherjee of Voltas predicts that the Rs 10-crore market will balloon to Rs 50 crore over the next three years. Indeed, such estimates could be conservative. Goodness alone will add Rs 9 crore to the Tamil Nadu Federation's Rs 100-crore sales turnover when its plant runs to full capacity. "No one really knows how much the market will grow. We had not expected the response we got," confesses Mir Khayam Ali, the Federation's marketing manager.

Several factors have combined to bring about the boom. For one, the Government relaxed food machinery import procedures two years ago, permitting entrepreneurs to bring in packaging machines (some 29 have been imported from Tetrapac, the Swedish packaging company). Then, the Government jacked up the excise duty on carbonated drinks in the last budget, from around 30 paise to 50 paise a bottle, while leaving milk exempt from excise duty and the 10 per cent *ad valorem* tax on juices untouched. That pushed up the price of fizzy drinks, narrowing their price edge over juices and milk—provided these were packaged right. Luckily enough, the seven-layered laminate required for tetra-brick packets was readily available and no longer had to be imported: a National Dairy Development Board concern makes it in Gujarat.

Throw away tetra-bricks offer consumers, retailers and manufacturers several advantages over glass bottles. They are convenient to carry, unbreakable, take up little shop space, have a shelf-life of up to six months, and retailers and consumers do not have to deposit money for them. What is more, some 40,000 packets can be packed into a truck as against around 6,000 bottles, offering manufacturers obvious cost benefits. Adi Godrej, chairman of Noble Soya says: "Bottled drinks have a fundamental problem of transportation and are available within a given radius around city bottling centres. Tetra-bricks will change all that."

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

A spectrum of juices, flavoured milks and soya milk-based drinks, packaged in new tetra-bricks, has suddenly flooded shop shelves.

Tetra-bricks and the new drinks could change more than that. In theory at least, they could cut into the Rs 400-crore annual sales of fizzy drink manufacturers. "Beverages packed in tetra-bricks could eat into bottled drink sales—that's what we're aiming at, now that prices are on a par," says Javed Merchant, an executive from the Tamil Nadu milk outfit. Quick to recognise the edge the new packaging enjoys, Chauhan concedes the point: "They have not so far, but they might."

For all that, even the most optimistic do not quite believe that the new drinks will wipe out their bottled brethren. Argues Sheth: "The bottle era will not end with the new packaging. The new drinks will affect the carbonated drinks market only to a certain extent." Quite simply, the economics weigh heavily in favour of bottles. Bottles are reused some 20 times, effectively cutting their cost to less than 25 paise each. In contrast, each tetra-brick costs manufacturers almost 75 paise, the printing included. And with a profit of under 5 per cent, tetra-brick drink manufacturers cannot afford to cut prices.

"If the Government slaps additional tax on us, we're sunk. The costs are so tight that there is no room for price cuts," says an industry executive. Still, such fears could be premature. Amid a new-found awareness of the food industry's importance, the Government is unlikely to nip a growing business in the bud. For the moment, the industry is feverishly gearing up to jack up production levels. As the executive puts it: "We think these drinks will catch on."

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI and M. RAHMAN

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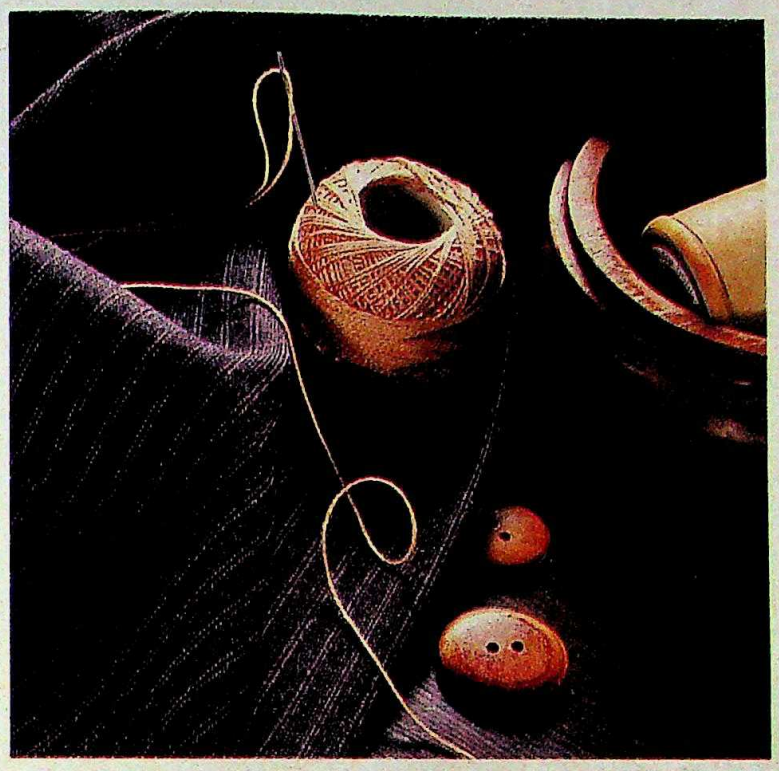

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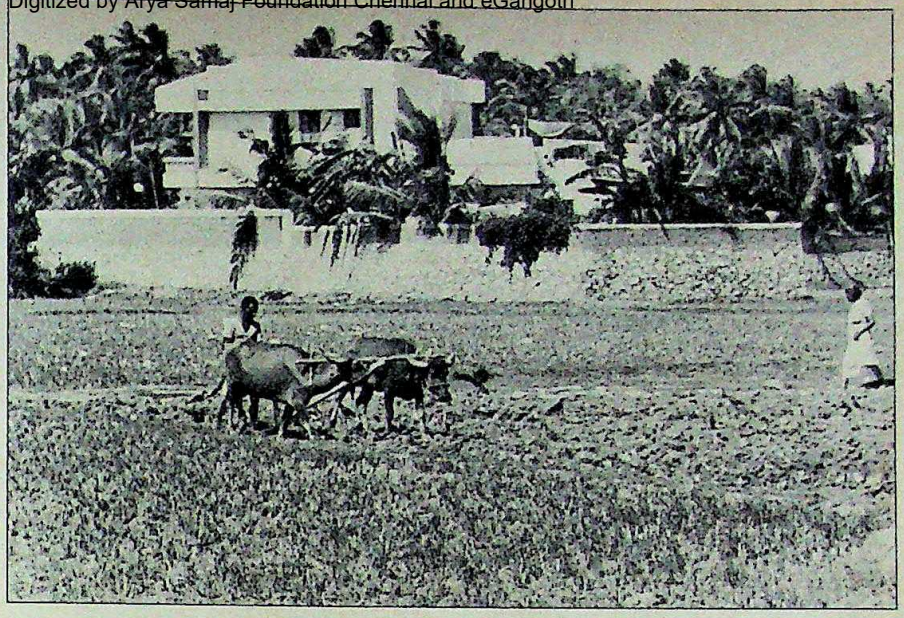
RICE

Staple Decline



The latest economic survey by the Kerala state planning board says that 52,098 hectares of paddy land were converted last year into coconut plantations or reclaimed for housing purposes.

AT a luncheon meeting with the Trivandrum press corps last fortnight, Kerala Chief Minister E.K. Nayanar made clear his preference for typical Kerala-style fish curry and rice. Echoing the sentiments of millions of Keralites, he said: "At least once a day I need my quota of rice to keep me going." Indeed, rice is associated with Kerala even more than coconut palms.

Yet, paddy cultivation is now on the decline in the state. Increasingly, wet paddy lands lie fallow or are put to other uses. The acreage under paddy has fallen steadily over the years, and in the state's volatile real estate market, the price of paddy land has risen much slower than other kinds of property. The result is that, despite an increase in productivity per acre, and despite substantial investment for irrigating paddy land, Kerala's rice production today is noticeably lower than it was a decade ago.

The latest economic survey by the state planning board says that 52,098 hectares of paddy land were converted last year into coconut plantations or reclaimed for housing. This was partially responsible for a 6.6 per cent drop in rice production during the year. But the more worrying fact for state planners is that the decline in both acreage and production is part of a longer trend.

In 1975, the state had 8.81 lakh hectares under paddy; by 1986 this had fallen to an all-time low of 7.07 lakh hectares. A state Agriculture Department official predicted last fortnight that the figure would soon drop to 5 lakh hectares. A decade back, Kerala's rice production amounted to 1.33 million tonnes. Last year the figure was down to 1.23 million—less than a third of the state's requirement.

The experts point to several factors accounting for this unexpected phenomenon: the high price of farm labour (as much as Rs 40 per day—more than double the rate in neighbouring Tamil Nadu) resulting from widespread unionisation and protective laws, the continuing prevalence of absentee landlords (with thousands of Keralites moving to other states or overseas in search of a living), the surge in demand for house-hold land as non-resident Keralites have sought a base back home, and the spread of urbanisation in a state with the highest man-land ratio in the country.

Before the shift away from paddy cultivation began, in the mid-1970s, there were vast paddy fields on either side of National Highway 47, which links Trivandrum to Cochin. Today, the paddy fields are still there, but they are interspersed with concrete hotels, hospitals and shopping complexes. The paddy fields around Trivandrum have been swallowed up by a spreading city. And in Tiruvalla, part of the Kuttanad rice bowl in central Travancore, palatial houses have emerged in the middle of paddy fields, most of them built by non-resident Indians. Said Nandakumaran Nair, a farmer in Tiruvalla: "Rice cultivation is no longer profitable. Our paddy fields have been given to private builders. We will use ration shop rice at home."

As Dr P.G.K. Panicker, former director of the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) in Trivandrum said: "Rice cultivation in Kerala is not viable because the cost of production is increasing steadily, while the price of paddy has remained more or less static." Added Dr K.P. Kannan, associate fellow at CDS: "The Gulf boom and the consequent rise in real estate prices have forced many people to convert wet lands into house sites, especially near the cities."

Some economists believe that this change is a social necessity in a state with an ever-exploding population. The state Government had in fact sought to preserve paddy fields a few years ago by passing the Kerala Land Utilisation Act. This made it impossible to convert paddy fields into land for housing, but the law has remained ineffective. Agriculture Minister V.V. Raghavan admitted that in most cases district collectors have been asked not to thrust the Act on farmers.

As an incentive to paddy cultivation, the state Government has been providing substantial subsidies to the farmers at nearly Rs 1,100 per hectare for pumping, fertilisers and plant protection. And Agriculture Minister V.V. Raghavan emphasised: "We will continue to cultivate rice on the existing land, and to attract unemployed youth we are planning to provide free tillers." But a state Agriculture Department official warned that paddy cultivation could decline still further, and that this would have serious repercussions on milk production as the straw required for cattle comes from paddy cultivation. Already, a common sight on the state's highways is trucks coming from Tamil Nadu laden with hay. But unmindful of such macro-economic developments, Kerala's rice cultivators have their eye on lucrative real estate projects rather than their traditional staple diet.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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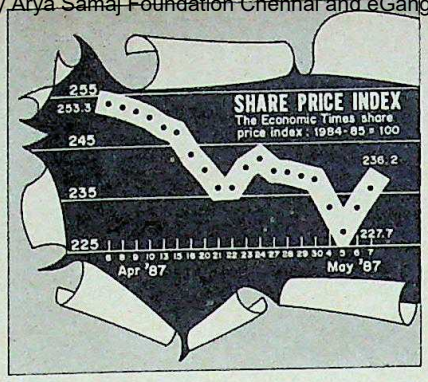
THE MARKETS

Dramatic Drop

LAST fortnight belonged to Reliance Industries on the stock-market—in a rather unhappy manner. The belated announcement of the company's results, with a dramatic drop in net profits and a halving of the dividend to 25 per cent, sent the market crashing downward in shock and sympathy. In the process, Rajiv's tax concessions—announced in winding up the Finance Bill debate—were scarcely noticed.

The market rallied weakly at the end of the fortnight, but it was not clear whether this was more than a temporary adjustment caused by bears covering their positions and by investors looking for good buys at the low prices. The mood in the trading ring through the fortnight did not spell hope. What might just do the trick, however, was the announcement that polyester staple fibre was being taken off the open general licence for imports, and that the duty on both purified terephthalic acid and dimethyl terephthalate had been reduced. Both will help Reliance and the synthetic yarn, fibre and textile industry. But despite pulling up from the unofficial low of Rs 110, Reliance was still ruling at barely half the year's peak level of Rs 277, symbolising the troubled times that the company and the stock-market have been going through.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



The Economic Times share index reflected the selling wave, dropping from 247.5 at the start of April to as low as 227.7 on May 5 before curling upward again. Several scrips touched their lowest point of the year. Reliance and Orkay dipped dramatically, as did Tata Steel, Bajaj Auto, Tata Engineering and National Organic. Orkay, however, virtually sank to the floor, halving its value in one fortnight and closing at Rs 35 amid reports that its management had been trying to shore up the price and had finally over-stretched itself. Financiers who had funded some of the purchases decided to liquidate their holdings, provoking the crash of a share that once ruled at Rs 190.

The financial institutions, some of which had begun to make selective purchases earlier, wisely chose to stay away, since none of their interventions could have helped stem the tide. Whether they and other investors will now return to the market, sensing good pickings at the present deflated prices, is now the key question. While several leading sectors of industry face a squeeze on margins and problems in the marketplace—reflected in the mixed flow of corporate results—the economy remains sound, and industrial growth at over 6 per cent is not bad. But the balance may be swung by the fact that money which had flowed into the stock-markets from other commodity markets may have started going out again—especially into the booming bullion markets.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1987 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 7.5.87	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	35.50	28.00	32.00	3.00 +
Associated Cement	241.50	172.00	181.00	9.00 +
Atlas Copco	150.00	105.00	118.00	4.00 +
Asian Paints	272.50	207.50	250.00	2.50 +
Avery India	169.00	145.00	145.00	6.00 –
Bajaj Auto	4925.00	3950.00	4350.00	200.00 –
Baroda Rayon	260.00	205.00	233.75	3.75 +
Bata India	160.00	120.50	136.00	11.25 +
Bayer	785.00	600.00	765.00	17.50 +
Bharat Forge	75.00	63.00	71.00	4.00 +
Birla Jute	50.75	45.00	48.00	1.50 +
Blow Plast	126.00	92.50	103.00	8.00 –
Bombay Dyeing	75.00	40.50	71.00	6.50 +
Brooke Bond	101.00	77.00	94.00	4.50 +
Ceat Tyres	70.00	48.00	65.00	2.50 +
Century Spinning	810.00	665.00	685.00	10.00 +
Chloride India	148.00	80.00	85.00	0.50 +
Colgate	391.25	327.50	362.50	18.50 –
E.I. Hotels	56.00	41.00	42.50	0.50 –
Eskayef	247.50	171.25	220.00	3.75 –
DCM	39.00	23.00	23.00	2.25 –
Dunlop	77.75	71.25	72.50	0.25 –
Elecon	125.00	86.25	100.00	8.75 +
Escorts	84.00	46.00	48.00	0.75 +
Finolex Cables	182.50	114.00	177.50	12.50 +
Food Specialities	188.50	140.00	151.00	8.00 –
Garware Polyester	97.00	69.00	76.00	4.00 +
G.E. Shipping	22.50	16.00	18.00	1.00 +
Gujarat St. Fertilisers	183.50	120.00	135.00	3.00 +
Grasim Ind.	95.00	80.00	90.50	2.50 +
Hind. Aluminium	126.00	71.00	108.00	4.00 +
Hind. Cocoa	262.50	205.00	215.00	12.50 –
Hindustan Lever	212.00	165.00	186.00	6.50 –
Hindustan Motors	35.35	22.70	24.25	0.25 +
Hind. Dorr	407.50	295.00	390.00	nil +
IEL	61.50	45.00	50.00	3.50 +
Indian Organic	78.00	51.00	57.00	1.50 –
Indian Rayon	76.50	51.00	54.00	4.00 –
Indrol	510.00	215.00	240.00	15.00 –
Ingersoll-Rand	350.00	272.50	340.00	nil
ITC	78.00	40.00	44.00	2.50 +
J.K. Synthetics	93.50	47.00	54.00	4.00 –
Kinetic Engineering	312.50	220.00	242.50	7.50 –
Kirloskar Cummins	95.00	67.00	92.50	2.50 +
KSB Pumps	375.00	220.00	361.25	6.25 –
Larsen & Toubro	100.00	67.00	71.50	0.50 –
Lipton	79.50	60.00	71.50	1.00 +
Lohia Machines	32.00	13.00	15.50	0.50 +
Madura Coats	73.00	66.00	72.50	1.50 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	47.50	38.00	44.00	0.50 +
Motor Industries	400.00	342.50	357.50	7.50 +
National Organic	577.50	435.00	450.00	22.50 –
Nirlon	26.00	11.00	14.00	1.50 –
Orkay Silk Mills	115.00	30.00	35.00	35.00 –
Peico Electronics	57.25	36.00	40.00	2.50 +
Otis Elevator	215.00	155.00	205.00	6.00 +
Ponds	375.00	295.00	310.00	10.00 –
Premier Auto	30.00	21.00	24.00	1.50 –
Ranbaxy	135.00	85.00	87.00	3.00 –
Raymond	79.00	64.00	68.00	nil
Reckitt & Colman	200.00	160.00	167.00	nil
Reliance Industries	277.00	118.00	136.00	44.00 –
Shriram Fibres	36.00	24.00	28.00	2.50 +
Sandoz	140.00	75.00	80.00	1.25 –
SPIC	53.50	36.50	41.00	nil
Tata Steel	1207.50	945.00	1025.00	7.50 +
Telco	665.00	530.00	555.00	15.00 –
Vulcan Laval	57.50	45.00	55.00	5.00 +
Siemens India	144.50	69.00	73.00	2.00 –
Mukand Iron	80.50	63.50	76.50	3.00 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.0269	8.9478
Austria	Schilling	100	100.1480	100.6368
Bahrain	Dinar	1	33.9772	33.8980
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.5330	42.4086
Canada	Dollar	1	9.4837	9.4097
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.8942	1.8803
Egypt	Pound	1	9.5110	9.4836
France	Franc	1	2.1253	2.1052
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6250	1.6136
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0770	0.7000
Iran	Rial	100	18.1182	18.0963
Italy	Lira	100	0.9900	0.9800
Japan	Yen	100	9.15	8.95
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.8000	0.7900
Kuwait	Dinar	1	47.2442	47.1922
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1449	5.1004
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.9999	0.9700
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.5900	0.5700
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.3224	6.2797
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7520	0.7400
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.9761	5.9276
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1090	1.1000
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4400	0.4300
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.0358	2.0271
Switzerland	Franc	1	8.6789	8.6160
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.2300	0.2200
Thailand	Baht	100	50.6100	50.6000
UK	Pound	1	21.2780	21.1438
USA	Dollar	1	12.6175	12.5400
UAE	Dirham	1	3.5100	3.5003
USSR	Rouble	1	20.2000	20.1132
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.1174	7.0621

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 8.5.87.

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The prestigious American aviation magazine Air Transport World has named us 'Airline of the Year.' We're both delighted and proud to accept the award. Our passengers can be sure that this is one laurel we certainly won't be resting on.

BRITISH AIRWAYS

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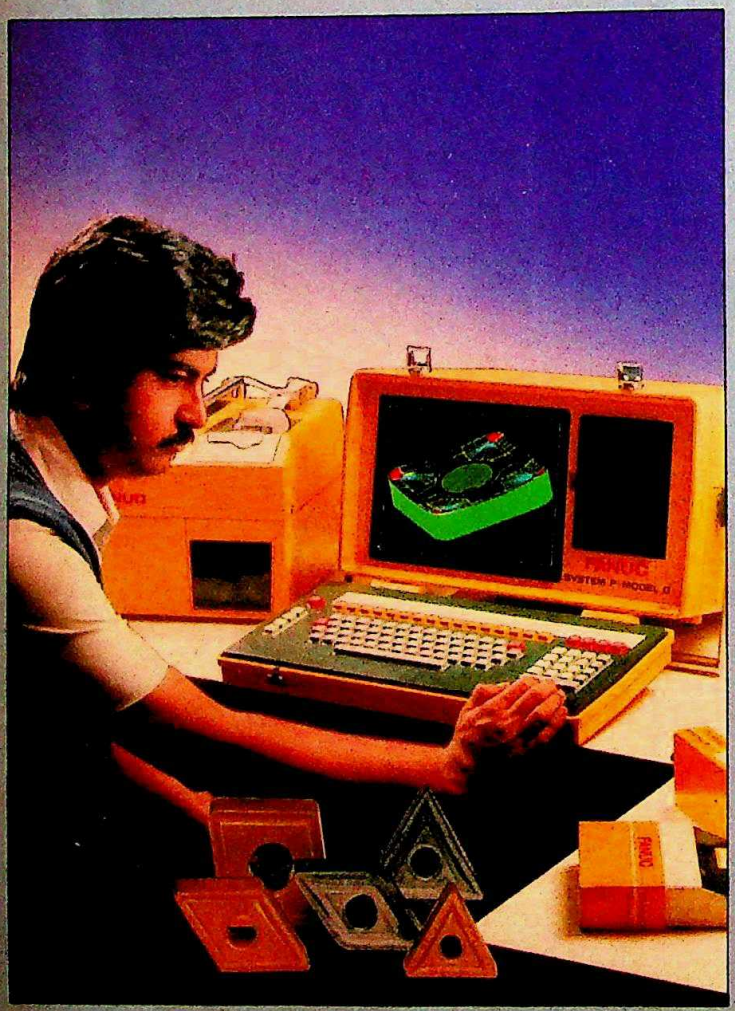
R & D to make 'the impossible' possible

A WIDIA IDEA FOR PACESETTING



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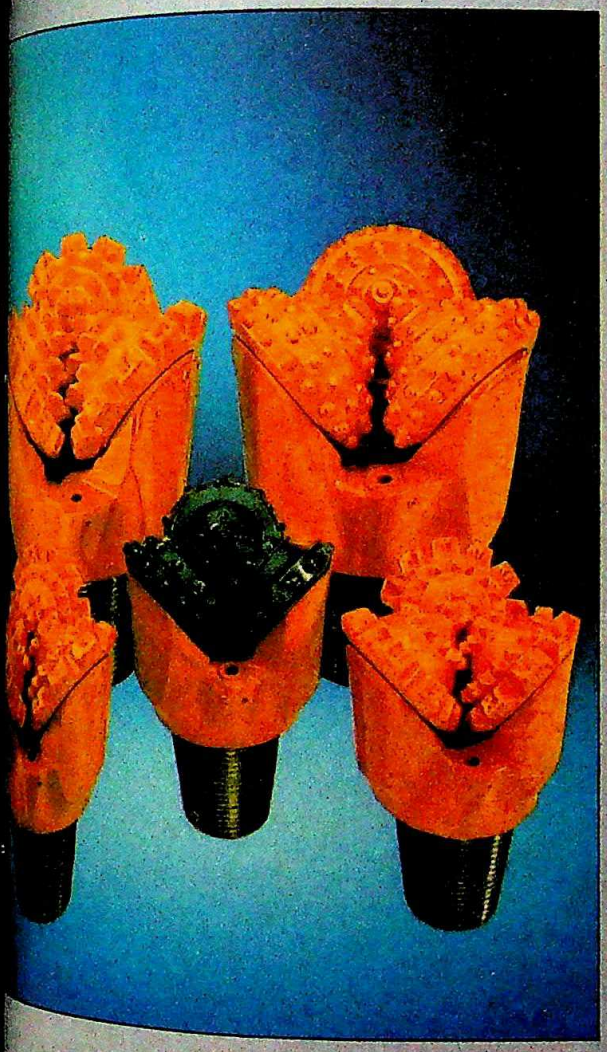
INNOVATION



Take the best technologists. Give them the most sophisticated equipment. And the freedom to innovate.

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WIDIA. It's the attitude that makes the difference... believing that anything is possible is the first step to making it so. That's what innovation is all about.

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RK SWAMY/WIL/2689

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Five Reasons why customers in over 25 Countries trust Paharpur

Paharpur has become a name to be trusted in the fields of cooling towers, air cooled heat exchangers and woven plastic bags. Here are some of the reasons more and more people are seeking us out.

Innovation

A strong commitment to high technology and research & development has given us the ability to innovate when required.

Dynamism

A highly professional management, combined with strong leadership and respect for the individual, keeps us ahead of competition.

Excellence

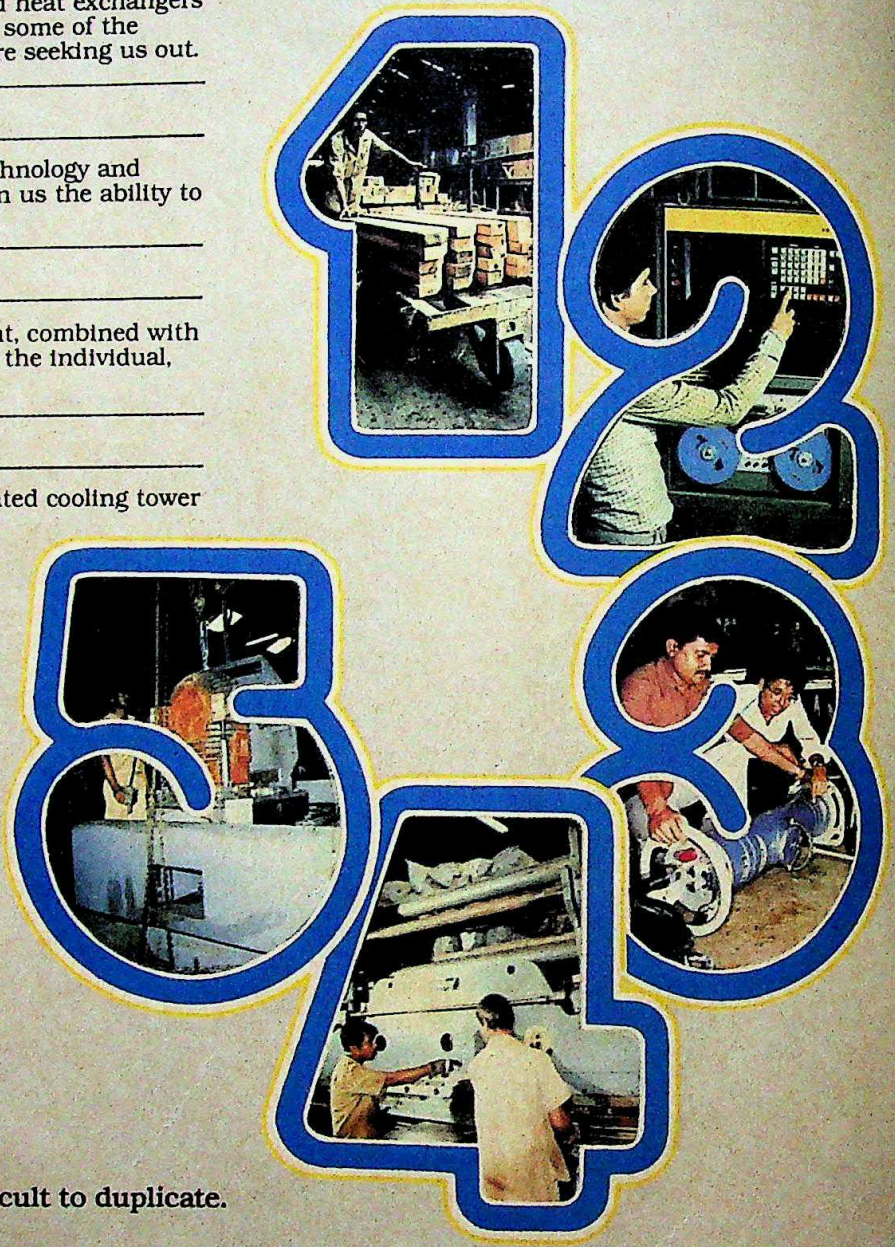
Having the best and most integrated cooling tower manfacturing facilities in India or, for that matter, anywhere in the world (outside the United States) makes it easy for us to produce excellent cooling towers. The same excellence goes into our other products.

Culture

Integrity and shared values are reflected in the reputation we enjoy today. A culture which has taken almost 40 years to acquire and consolidate.

Reliability

Financial strength and an obsession for accuracy, quality and service make us a reliable company to deal with. One which will be around when many other have been forgotten.



All very simple. But very difficult to duplicate.

JETSETTERS/PCT/44/86

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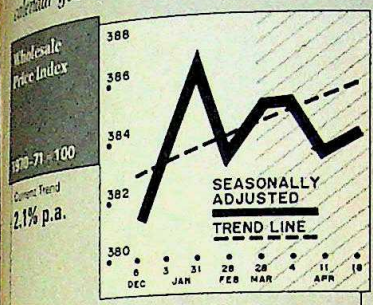
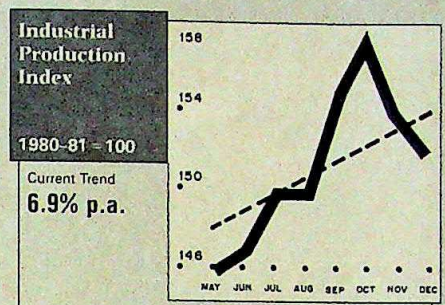
DISTINCTLY disturbing signs are emerging in the Indian economy: inflation, though still at a very low annual rate, has begun to accelerate and industrial production is slowing down after three years of healthy growth. The Government faces the difficult task of reducing growth in money supply and relaxing bank credit to boost industry.

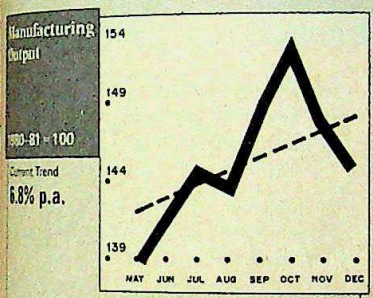
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months (weekly data) or two years (monthly data) figures. The quarters referred to in the text are calendar year quarters.



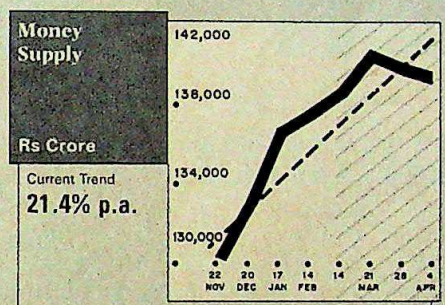
Following six weeks of price stability, inflation showed signs of acceleration, and could pose a problem if there is no corrective action.



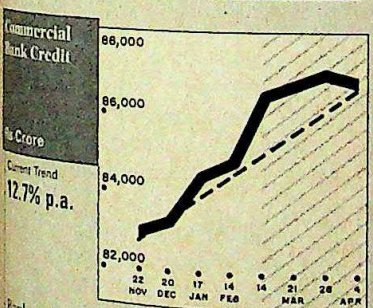
Overall industrial production reached a plateau towards 1986-end. Although the trend rate is still healthy, there are signs of deceleration.



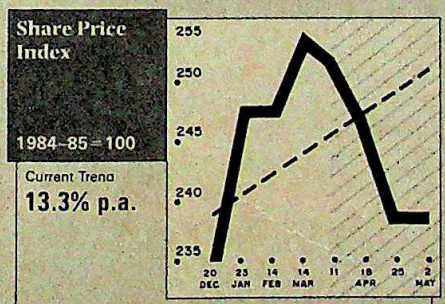
Deceleration in manufacturing output at the end of 1986 was disappointing, even though there was record growth for the last three years.



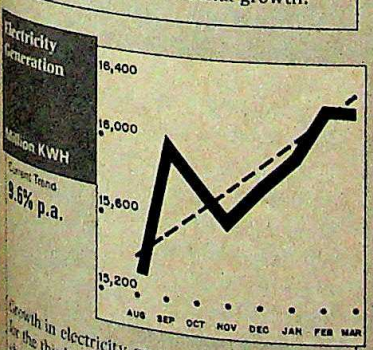
Money supply growth is far above targeted levels. The high current trend rate will lead to excess liquidity and strong pressure on prices.



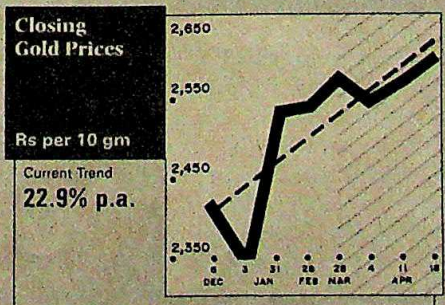
Bank credit to the commercial sector remains tight. Unless the RBI relaxes its credit policy, it may begin to constrain industrial growth.



The longer term trend rate of share prices is still far above inflation rate, notwithstanding the recent minor crash in the share price index.



Growth in electricity generation remains high for the third year. Bottlenecks in the economy should be fewer this year if this continues.



Gold prices continue to rise sharply. This could accelerate if hot money flows from the share market to the bullion market.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

Growth of items in April-Dec 1986 Over April-Dec 1985

	% Growth
Railway Wagons	76.0
Forged Hand Tools	62.1
Polyester Fibres	49.7
Air/Gas Compressors	42.9
Scooters	40.3
DDT	39.9
Rubber Machinery	37.4
Wrist Watches	35.5
Computers & Peripherals	35.5
Air-Conditioners	34.7
Baby Food	31.7
Copper (cathodes)	31.6
Metallurgical Machinery	30.1
Penicillin	27.0
Nitrogenous (N) Fertiliser	25.9
Lifts	25.8
Calcium Carbide	25.1
Twist Drills	23.5
Polyester Filament Yarn	22.8
Cars	21.2
Motorcycles	21.1
Scooter Tyres	20.5
Boilers	19.9
Storage Batteries	19.8
Vat Dyes	18.4
Fluorescent Tubes	18.0
Printing Machinery	17.5
Phosphatic (p205) Fertiliser	16.1
Newsprint	16.0
Industrial Explosives	15.6
HDPE	14.9
Tetracyclin	13.6
Electric Motors	13.4
Paints & Varnishes	12.5
Cement Machinery	11.0
Earth Moving Equipment	10.9
Machine Tools	10.3
Aluminium Foils	9.9
PVC Resins	9.2
Polyesterene	9.1
Lead	8.3
Cement	8.3
Viscose Filament Yarn	8.0
Transmission Towers	7.6
Toothpaste	7.2
Bicycles	7.1

Of the 141 series considered, 90 of them with a total weight of 72.5 per cent had a positive growth and 51 of them with a total weight of 27.5 per cent had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1987	1986
Coal		
Thousand Tonnes, March	19,622	18,679
Saleable Steel		
Thousand Tonnes, March	958.3	918.0
Cement		
Thousand Tonnes, March	3,580	3,280
Petroleum Crude		
Thousand Tonnes, March	2,636	2,894
Petroleum Refinery Products		
Thousand Tonnes, March	4,367	4,085

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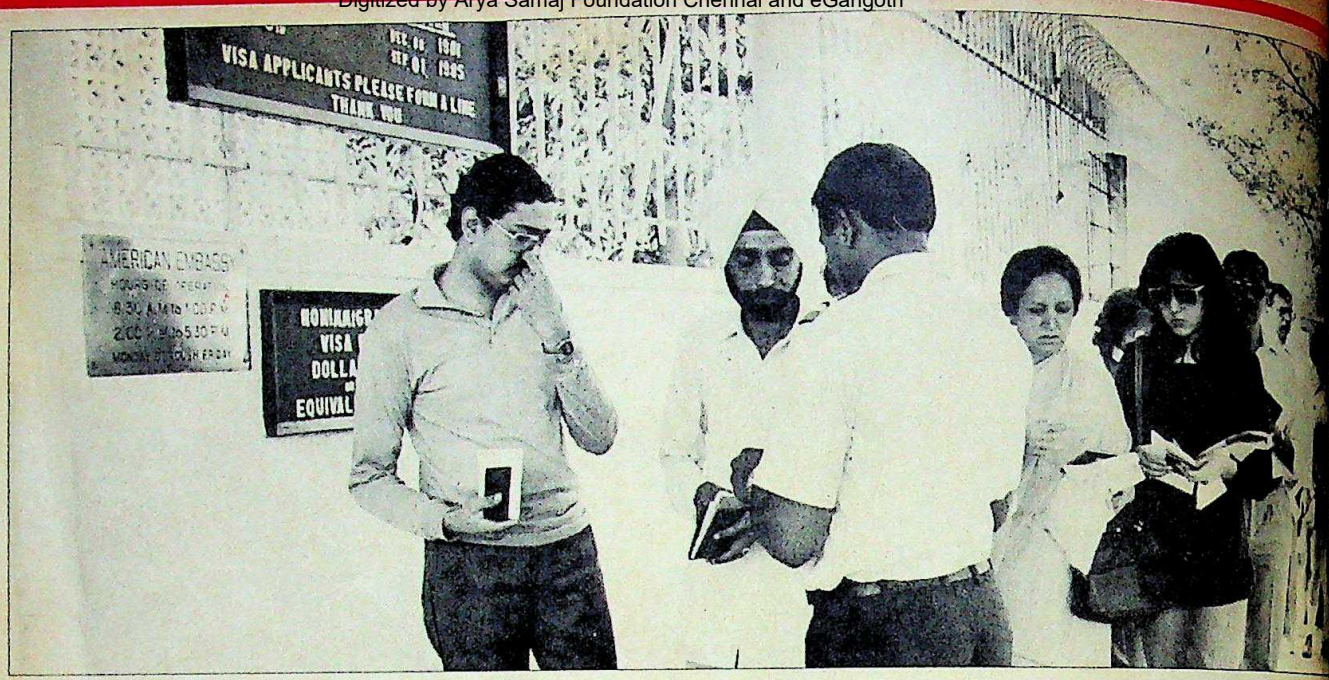

FOREIGN TRAVEL

An Indian Summer

ARMED with travel guides and cameras, they are flying out in droves. To the West. To the East. To the Far East. Even as far north as Moscow. By the end of summer over half a million of them would have criss-crossed the globe, making the Indian dream of "foreign returned" a reality like never before. Suddenly the world is seeing Indians in a new light: as tourists.

On the road from Lucerne to Innsbruck, backdropped by the towering Alps, the clear air is filled with the spicy smell of mango pickles and chicken *masala* as a group of touring Indians alight from their bus equipped with a travelling kitchen for a meal. On Paris' elegant Champs Elysees, Indian women with their sarees fluttering in the breeze, swirl in and out of *haute couture* shops. In the UK, where Indian tourist traffic has trebled in the past decade, groups of Indians sit guzzling beer in London's smoky pubs.

Elsewhere in the US, where Indian tourists have doubled in six years, as a motorboat heads towards the Statue of Liberty, sounds of *"Wah! Wah!"* float across the Hudson river. In Moscow, Indians taken on a guided tour of the Kremlin towers, make *spasibo* sound like Hindi as they mutter their thanks to a vocal Russian guide. And Singapore's plush shopping arcades, bristling with electronic goods, are teeming with Indians looking for a bargain buy. So heavy has been the traffic to Singapore that now one out of 12 of its tourists are Indians. "After the TV and video boom in Indian households it is now the age of foreign travel," observes Gautam Chadha, British Airways sales manager.

Stoking the wanderlust has been an unprecedented boom in package tours that has made overseas travel in many cases cheaper than having a holiday in India itself. Among the more attractive packages:

► For Rs 7,000, inclusive of air fare and hotel charges, an Indian can now have a nine-day holiday in Pattaya, Bangkok and Singapore.

► For Rs 15,000, one can fly to Europe and have a 14-day round trip spanning six countries and eat Indian food as well. For Rs 15,000 more, a nine-day tour to the US is included.

► Tours to Russia are going at a bargain price of Rs 8,000 for 12 days in Tashkent, Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev.

► Nearer home, for as little as Rs 2,000, inclusive of flight fare, Indians in Delhi and Calcutta can have a four-day holiday in Nepal (*see box*).

"Indians seem to be sick of India. They want to go out and see new places and shop. And they have the money to spend," says Purushotam Chhatpar, general sales manager, SOTC, the largest tour operator in the country. This year, despite doubling the number of its tours to the US and Europe, these are sold out till mid-June.

Other travel agents report the same kind of growth. "Our tours are chock-a-block," says Nadir Muncherjee, general manager, Travel Corporation of India (TCI), which runs tours to the East and West. Their weekly 'Europe by Road' buses now run to capacity. In Delhi, Iyer and Sons, which has a tour to Singapore every week, boasts that it hasn't had to drop a tour even once for the past two years. "Indians are becoming as travel minded as people in the West," says Vijay Gupta, Iyer's director.

Everywhere the rush was obvious. At all the major international airline offices there was a stampede for tickets with flights being booked well in advance. Says TCI's Muncherjee: "You can't get a seat even if you sell your blood." Air-India flights to major destinations were heavily overbooked, and it now plans to add four more flights to Europe and the US to cope with the rush. Flights on major airlines like British Airways, Lufthansa, Singapore Airlines and Pan Am too were running full and most of them had expanded their services too.

Airlines were also busy modifying services to cater to Indian tastes. British Airways plans to devote an entire music channel onboard to popular Hindi songs apart from serving *supari* after meals. Singapore Airlines has hired several Indian cooks to serve ethnic dishes like *Dal Makhani* and *Palak Paneer* on its flight. A major price war is also on, with every airline offering anything from 10 per cent

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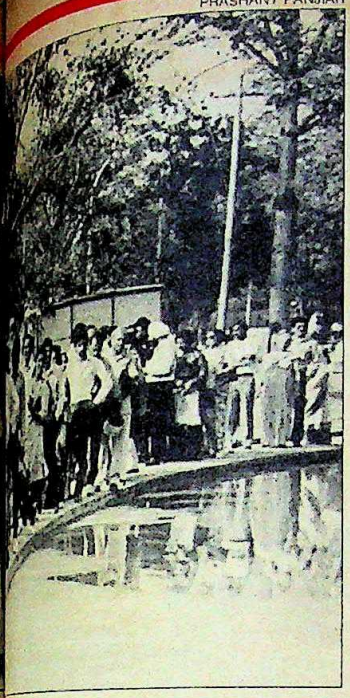
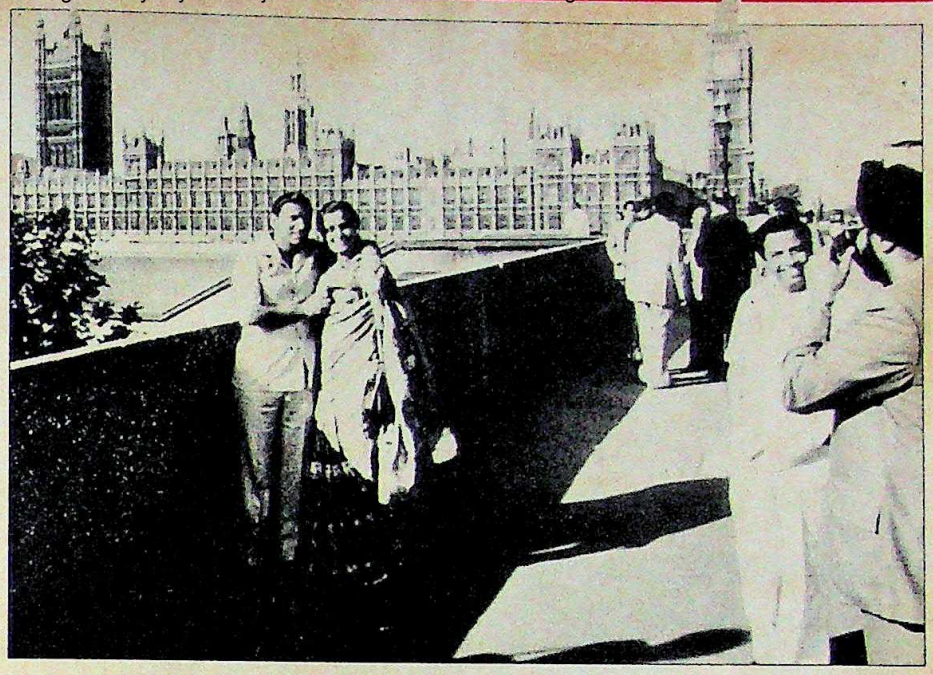
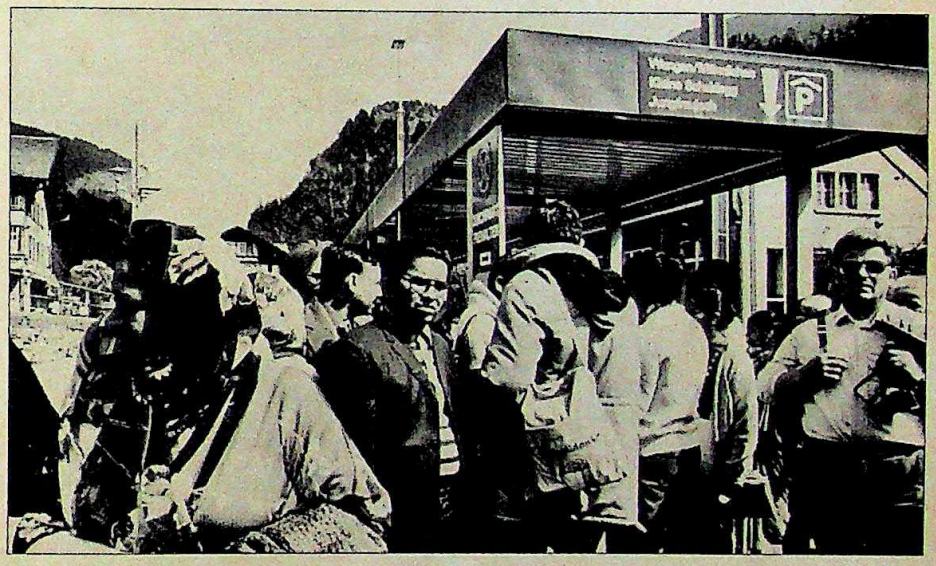
PRASHANT PANJIAR







(Clockwise from top) Indian tourists at American Embassy; clicking London; on German streets and at amusement park

20 per cent discount on each ticket, making flights tantalisingly cheap (*see*

And not surprisingly, the queues for visas outside consulates in Bombay and Delhi get longer every day. At the American Embassy in Delhi people start queuing in the early morning and around 400 visas are issued daily. Tourist traffic to the US, which grew from 43,000 in 1980 to [illegible]00 last year, is expected to cross a [illegible] this year. The rush to the UK is no [illegible] despite the need to procure visas now. According to the British Tourist Authority last year 1.37 lakh Indian tourists visited the country. And this year it expects the figure to grow to 1.44 lakh. Meanwhile Austria, West Germany, the Soviet Union, Japan and even Australia reported a significant increase in visa applications.

What has surprised the travel trade is that despite the Union Finance Ministry imposing severe restrictions on foreign travel last year the boom hasn't deflated. The restrictions came after withdrawals under the Foreign Tourist Scheme (FTS)—which allows Indian tourists going abroad $500 each—shot up from just [illegible] crore in 1983 to Rs 196 crore in [illegible]. From April last year, Indian tourists were entitled to FTS only once every three years instead of two. Children below 12 years were entitled to only half the FTS amount. In this year's Union budget the government announced a 15 per cent tax

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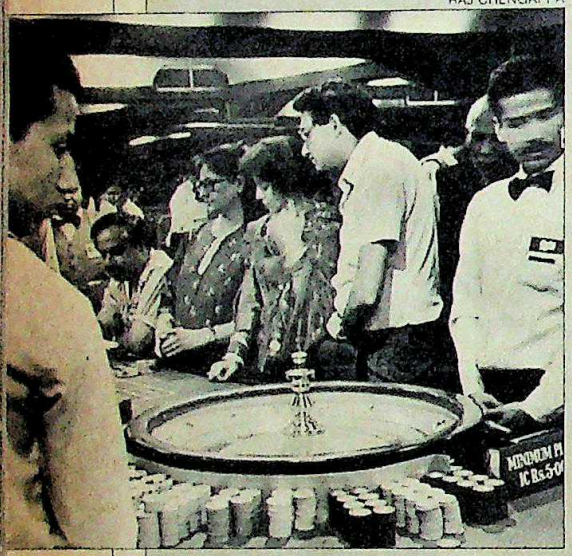
NEPAL

New Scene

WITH its high Himalayan ranges and promise of fun, Nepal is proving to be the new Shangrila for Indian travellers. The number of Indian tourists flying to Kathmandu doubled in the past five years and crossed 55,000 last year. Around the same number came by road. Now every third tourist to Nepal is an Indian.

In the summer months, when the heat and rain discourages most foreign travellers, Kathmandu is transformed into an Indian city. Every hotel, eating place and shopping centre is jammed with Indians. At the Casino Nepal, Indian men prefer to gamble on card games like blackjack and pontoon while women keep themselves busy by dropping coins into the "one-armed bandit" machines or trying their luck at roulette. "Around 75 per cent of our business is from Indians and they are big spenders," says R.D. Tuttle, Casino's managing director. Indians spend lavishly in Nepal's super market too where textiles and electronics goods are hawked at bargain prices.

RAJ CHENGAPPA



At the Casino: in thing

And Nepal is steadily becoming a major convention centre for Indian businessmen. Only last fortnight the Travel Agents Association of India held its annual convention in Nepal. Last year alone over a 100 conventions were held in Kathmandu by such companies as Reliance, Gwalior, DCM, Escorts, Glaxo and Ponds.

Companies pay as little as Rs 550 per person for each night at a five-star hotel which includes food and convention facilities, apart from sightseeing trips—something few Indian hotels can match. And some companies have even started incentive tours to Kathmandu for high-performing dealers.

Increasingly, Indian tourists too are beginning to realise how cheap a holiday to Nepal is. More than a score of travel agencies now offer package tours that suit every purse. For those who want a bit of five-star luxury, they could get one for Rs 1,499 for three nights at the Soaltee Oberoi, Kathmandu's plushest hotel. Downmarket hotels offer packages for as little as Rs 450 for three nights. Most packages come with the added attraction of free Casino coupons.

For hotels in Kathmandu the large Indian traffic is a welcome relief. During summer, which is the lean season for them, the influx has seen occupancy rates going up to 80 per cent. "We don't have lean periods any more," says Kishore Pandey, vice-president of Hotel De L' Annapurna. And hoteliers notice another trend. Kathmandu is becoming a honeymooners favourite too.

What makes things easier for Indian tourists is that they do not require a passport to enter Nepal. Just identification papers like a driving licence are sufficient. Indian rupees are freely exchangeable and with the Nepali rupee much cheaper tourists for once feel richer in a foreign country. Shiv Kumar, a Bangalore industrialist holidaying in Nepal with his family last week, says: "It's an exotic place and I'm having more fun than I could hope to have in an Indian resort."

But the surge of Indian tourists has also brought its problems. Flights are a major bottleneck and although Royal Nepal Airlines and Indian Airlines have flights daily to Kathmandu in summer, they are booked for weeks. Says Ramesh Nath Pandey, Nepal's minister of state for tourism: "We have requested the Indian Government to allow us to introduce flights connecting Kathmandu to Bombay and Madras. If it agrees, much of the problem would be solved."

—RAJ CHENGAPPA in Kathmandu

on foreign exchange withdrawals as well. But as V. Subramanian, the Finance Ministry's exchange control director, admits: "It hasn't dissuaded Indians from travelling abroad." Inder Sharma, Sita Travels' chairman, adds: "The upsurge is defying all economic rules. Nobody knows from where people get the money to travel so much. It looks like no one wants to save for their children's marriages anymore."

Much of the growth has come from India's middle class which seems to have more disposable income than ever before. "Just look at the number of executives who figure in the Rs 3,000 plus bracket in the balance sheets of companies and you see a dramatic increase," points out Francis Dagama, Air-India's regional director. And with wives also working, the income of most families has become large enough to have a holiday abroad. "Earlier only the affluent went for holidays abroad but now we get professionals, teachers and even secretaries on our tours," observes S.A. Peter of Thomas Cook.

Package tours: clicking

Significantly, a growing section of tourists today is composed of traders and farmers, India's new rich, who come from what travel agents chose to call "the hinterlands". And though most travellers are from the metropolises, small cities like Kanpur, Chandigarh, Rajkot, Satara, Madurai and Mangalore too are throwing up a good number of tourists. Sita Travels, for instance, successfully marketed foreign tours to tobacco growers in Tamil

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Noida. And members of the Lions and Rotary clubs from these cities form the largest number of people attending their international conferences abroad. Also, Indian businessmen are increasingly attending diverse international trade fairs—on medical equipment, textile and computer sciences.

Helping the boom along is the fact that with over 1.5 million Indians settled abroad, people now have more relatives to visit. But travel agencies already see a shift from what is called VFR or Visiting Friends and Relatives trips. Indians now just dump their heavy baggage with relatives, pack smaller suitcases and take off again. Typically, last week Avinash and Aruna Sundari and their two children were off to Edmonton in the US where they plan to use Aruna's sister's house as a base for their holiday. Their son, Aditya, says excitedly: "I want to see Disneyland."

The surge began five years ago when Indians discovered what is now jokingly called the "video trips" to Singapore and Dubai. With these trips costing less than Rs 6,000 the money barrier for foreign travel was broken. After their baptism in the East the travel bug seems to have bitten them for good. And package tours have clicked in a big way. Says P. Nagpal, a Delhi industrialist: "Package tours may be a little costly but they get rid of the hassles and save a lot of running around. And you don't get stuck for flights or hotel bookings." Last week Nagpal and his wife, Nisha, left for a 21-day package tour to the US and Europe.

But Indians travelling abroad are still, well, Indians. At a Bangkok massage parlour recently, an Indian tourist, when told the price for a session, promptly pulled out his calculator and worked out how much it would cost him in Indian rupees. Most Indians are fussy about food and tour operators make sure that their hotels have Indian cooks and their buses have a kitchen trailer equipped with the choicest *desi* cuisine. Indians are not keen sightseers either. One of them told a tour operator in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel: "I am tired of seeing churches. Why are you taking me to another one?" And tour operators are embarrassed when Indians point their fingers at waiters or take offence to bus drivers sharing meals with them. Travel agents now give a course on etiquette calling it mildly "tour briefing".

But with the travel trade predicting an even bigger exodus of Indian tourists abroad maybe *s'il vous plait* and *danke schon* would become part of the average Indian's growing foreign vocabulary.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

AIRLINES

Sky Wars

TO Dubai and back for Rs 2,900. Singapore return for Rs 3,700. Up and down to Hong Kong for Rs 4,800. And Delhi-London-Delhi for Rs 8,000.

These fares are not being offered on no-frill charter flights but are the rates for seats on some of the major international airlines, including Air-India. In the heaviest undercutting ever seen by the country's travel industry, all the major airlines are offering discounts varying from 10 per cent to 20 per cent on flights to Europe, the US, the Middle and Far Eastern countries.

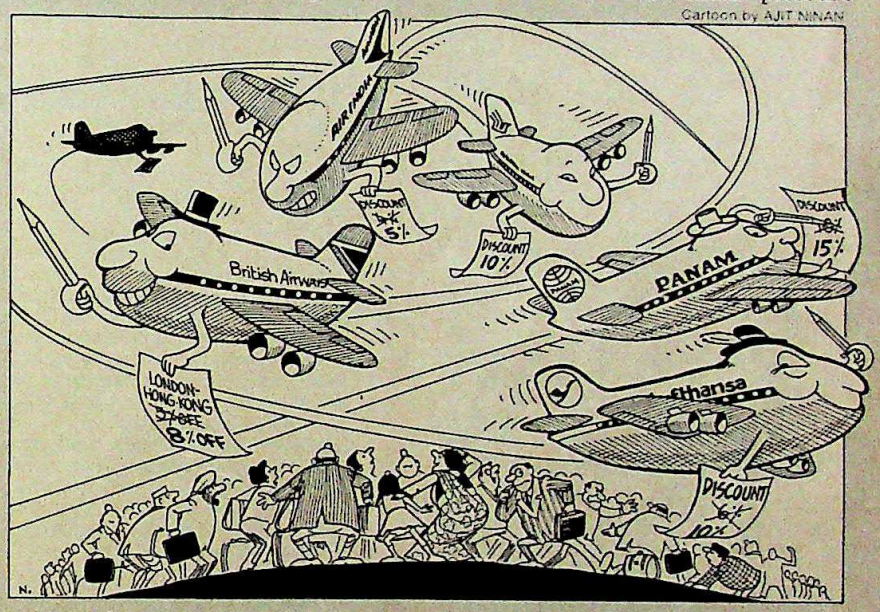
Fare discounting by airlines in India is not new. But foreign airlines say that the price war escalated when Air-India in an attempt to "clean up the market" offered travel agents a 10 to 15 per cent discount on its flights last September.

Soon everybody was in the act. The next month British Airways started what it termed as its "flexible pricing policy" by offering around 8 per cent discount on its flights to London and Hong Kong. Seeing business dropping rapidly, Singapore Airlines jumped onto the bandwagon and the prices plunged further. While the normal excursion fare to Singapore was Rs 5,400, it came down to Rs 4,500. And travel agents, who were willing to forgo a part of their normal 9 per cent commission, brought the price down to less than Rs 4,000.

And the war moved to other sectors as well. Lufthansa, which prides itself as being a "clean airline", was forced to offer a 6 per cent discount calling it a "market price adjustment." KLM, Pan Am and Air France soon joined the fray. And with everyone undercutting the other, discount rates touched the unprecedented limits of 30 per cent during off season.

The flights were still viable, for as one airline representative said: "It was better than running empty, and anyway we made up by the volume of our turnover." However, under pressure from travel agents, they have been forced to maintain the discounts even during the peak season.

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



With the discount war getting out of hand, however, the airlines decided that enough was enough. The Board of Airline Representatives (BAR), of which all international airlines operating in India are members, has held a series of meetings in the past two months to put an end to the war. "We have to clean the market because what's happening is not a nice thing at all," says Francis Dagama, regional director of Air-India and chairman of BAR. No consensus has so far been reached on how to end the no-holds barred war. But Air-India hopes to get all the airlines to agree by June 1 on a minimum price line for tickets to prevent excessive discounting.

Meanwhile, the Indian tourist isn't complaining. The discounted air fares have made overseas travel much more attractive.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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SPEECH DELIVERED BY SHRI RAUNAQ SINGH CHAIRMAN & MANAGING DIRECTOR AT 14TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON MONDAY APRIL 27, 1987.

Shri Raunaq Singh

Friends,

I have great pleasure in extending to you a hearty and cordial welcome to the 14th Annual General Meeting of your company. The Annual Report and Audited Accounts for the year ended 31st October 1986 have already been circulated. I am sure, you would have had time to read these in detail and would be eager to offer your valuable comments & suggestions. I would not like to take much of your time.

We are meeting today in an atmosphere of confidence, hope and optimism about the future of your company, after having achieved a dramatic turnaround and after having wiped out all accumulated losses and arrears of depreciation. In fact a surplus of Rs 32 lakhs is being carried forward to the balance sheet. If the trend for the first six months of current financial year is any indication, your company should be breaking all previous records in respect of sales and profits and you should be ready to hear some cheering news when we meet next year, God willing. The company has been able to reach this impregnable position entirely due to the persistent effort of all concerned—towards continuous and ongoing product development, quality improvement, innovative marketing, cordial work atmosphere and most important of all, human resources development. No doubt the wholehearted support of financial institutions and banks has played a pivotal role. It is not that we did not face any problems. We had to cope up with several of them. I am proud to say, the management team, staff and workers measured upto the task and worked with an unity of purpose. Operating, technical and managerial skills are being further sharpened to face the challenges of future.

BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Since Hon'ble Shri Rajiv Gandhi assumed leadership of the Govt, there has been a perceptible change for the better in the attitude of the Govt. towards industry & trade as a whole.with pragmatism and positive approach being the undertone. As we enter the 3rd year of 7th plan, most of the indicators of economic performance are encouraging The growth impulses are being sustained by allocation of further resources for development. The economy has certainly taken a sharp upswing in the recent past to 5% per annum compared to the earlier 3.5% per annum. The year gone-by witnessed acceleration of industrial growth, resilience of agriculture despite a poor monsoon, buoyancy of investment intentions, healthy growth of export and slowing down of imports. These are all harbingers of further good things to happen. Sweeping reforms in fiscal policies have certainly contributed to buoyancy in revenue collections. Reduction in procedural impediments, growing emphasis on capacity creation/utilisation, insistence on technology upgradation, encouragement of healthy competition, preference for economic scales of production and loosening of infrastructural bottlenecks, are all paving way for a healthy industrial sector. We have now come to witness and enjoy the fruits of a regime of reasonable tax rates, in a long term predictable environment with sharp focus on better compliance and enforcement. However, the resources position of the Government continues to be under severe pressure, with mounting non-plan expenditure, shortfalls in public sector surpluses and adverse balance of trade. A heartening feature is that the Govt is alive to these problems and there is a demonstrable urgency in tackling them. In this context, the new concept of zero-based budgeting is to be appreciated.

Specific action plans have been formulated to tone up the working of public sector units and to boost exports.

A strong and sustained growth of export is possible only with a strong industrial sector, operating in a cost-conscious environment, with continuous ongoing technological upgradation and reaping economic scales of production. Energy conservation is another area which calls for the highest priority. I am glad to inform you that the key objectives of your company are precisely dovetailed to the national objectives as enunciated above.

A few words about the Central Govt budget for 1987-88 which has met with mixed reactions—quite rightly, anxiety and concern have been widely expressed in industry & trade circles, about the proposal to tax minimum 30% of book profits and the insertion of section 194-E in the Income-Tax Act. It is earnestly hoped that these proposals will be withdrawn by the Government, consistent with the general approach of pragmatism. Otherwise it would be like killing a goose that lays golden eggs everyday.

The tyre industry is feeling let down, with the budget not offering any relief whatsoever, except a concession in import duty on tyre moulds used for export production. Extension of Modvat to other chapters has not really helped the tyre industry, since main items like nylon and rayon fabrics have been left out of its perview. A persistent plea of the industry to consider tyre as an essential item (and not as a luxury one) and reduce excise duty to 15%, has so far fallen on deaf ears. I am very hopeful that atleast by the time we meet next year, this distortion would be corrected. I would like to compliment the Govt for its bold initiative to restructure the interest rates on bank borrowings.

TYRE INDUSTRY

The problems and prospects of the tyre industry cannot be viewed in isolation, since it is just one component of a much bigger industry viz "Road Transport Industry". The rapid development of the economy since the advent of planning has not only contributed to substantial growth in agriculture and industrial production, but also to a corresponding development of infrastructural facilities and services. With railways shedding short-distance non-bulk movements, continuous growth of road transport industry as the most economic and desirable alternative is a natural consequence.

There are three major components of road transport industry viz a network of roads properly constructed and maintained, a healthy automobile industry and an infrastructure industry which plays a supporting role in maintenance and servicing. (tyre constitutes an important and vital component of this). High cost of transportation naturally gets reflected in the price of essential commodities since transportation cost works out to as much as 25%, (incase of perishable items it could as well be 100%!). The logic of classifying automotive tyre as a luxury item and punishing it with a high rate of excise duty is questionable.

Somehow or the other development of roads has been progressively neglected as could be seen from the proportion of public sector outlay on road transport provided in the successive 5 year plans. Hardly 1/3rd of 5.76 lakh villages in the country are connected by all-weather roads. Therefore there is an urgent need to increase the outlay for development and maintenance of roads, to meet transportation demands effectively and economically. In the absence of a long term development policy for the road transport industry, the growth of tyre industry has naturally suffered with the added burden of excess capacity. It is advisable to encourage the existing units to expand and achieve economic

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APOLLO TYRES LTD

HIGHLIGHTS

- RECORD SALES AND PROFITS
- ACCUMULATED LOSSES WIPED OUT
- ARREARS OF DEPRECIATION FULLY PROVIDED
- CURRENT YEAR SALES 60% UP OVER LAST YEAR
- CONTINUED THRUST ON PRODUCT EXCELLENCE AND EXPORT.

scales of production instead of proliferating capacity. The overall capacity so far registered with DGTD is adequate to take care of projected demand upto the end of this century.

TECHNOLOGY

The rate of obsolescence in tyre industry is phenomenal which calls for continuous upgradation of technology in respect of products, processes and plant. Although basic research at the company level is very expensive, your company has access to the fruits of such research being continuously carried out at General Tire's plant through the instrument of a collaboration. Proper organisation and facilities have been built up at Apollo and which is fully geared to adopt and assimilate General Tires' technology—to develop new products, establish quality control techniques, design tyres to give higher mileage/carry more loads and reduce product costs without sacrificing quality. A firm commitment to this strategy has paid rich dividends in the past and will be pursued vigorously in the coming years.

EXPORTS

The Union Commerce Ministry is engaged in, formulating a multi-pronged strategy for promotion of export for achieving the goals of the 7th plan. The strategy has been designed to identify products and markets which have a growth potential and provide for a set of policy measures which would help in the production of goods that are acceptable in the international market and make it profitable for the exporter to export. The Indian companies can certainly compete with the best international companies provided, they do so on equal terms. The Indian tyre industry has demonstrated its ability to build up exports rapidly, in that, within a short period it built up exports to over Rs. 50 Cr. per annum, with clientele spread over such diverse countries like USA, USSR, Afghanistan, Holland etc. Unfortunately, export growth suffered a setback with the problem of product liability insurance cropping up in USA.

The interest on pre-shipment credit has been recently brought down to 9.5% p.a. but is still higher than 6-7% enjoyed by our competitors abroad. The Indian exporter has to deal with as many as 20 agencies which causes considerable hardship, apart from loss of time and money. It would be advisable to establish a single-window operational clearance mechanism. Many of the competing countries are enjoying concessional freight on internal movement of export consignments. Your company is planning to export atleast Rs. 4 Cr. worth tyres during the current financial year.

RAW MATERIAL

After the introduction of buffer import scheme, price of natural rubber, has been more stable than in the earlier years. However, the buffer stock maintained by STC is considered to be inadequate and should be increased to cover atleast a month's requirement. Some of the critical raw materials like SBR, polybutadiene rubber and VP latex have been shifted from OGL to restricted permissible list. In the absence of adequate indigenous availability, I am afraid this will cause serious dislocation of production. These raw materials are required to achieve certain unique performance characteristics in the finished product. It is earnestly hoped that these vital raw materials will be restored to the OGL list.

AN OVERVIEW OF OPERATIONS

The year under review was an important milestone for the company with production crossing Rs. 103 Cr. and sales touching Rs. 98 Cr. I am confident that we will cross the Rs. 200 Cr. mark in a much shorter time than it has taken to reach Rs. 100 Cr. The viability and profitability of the company has now been firmly established and is ready for a further climb. With a record gross profit of Rs. 11.90 Cr. on top of Rs. 6.11 Cr. in the previous year, all accumulated losses, as well as arrears of depreciation have been totally wiped out, leaving a surplus of Rs. 32 lakhs. The commitments to financial institutions towards repayment of loan instalments and funded interest, are being met as per schedule without affecting liquidity and growth plans. Power shortage in Kerala has become a recurrent problem, with overdependence on the weather Gods. Therefore, captive generating facilities covering 60% of power requirements are being installed to pre-empt any future disruptions in production. With the conclusion of a 3-year agreement with the trade unions, production is in full swing. A range of tyres for new generation vehicles are ready for launch. The continued cooperation and support of our collaborator has helped the company in maintaining product leadership. The dedication to quality is a way of life in Apollo, so much so, that it goes far beyond rhetorical slogans. The ongoing programme of continued improvement reaches out for change, refinement and even revolution in pursuit of quality excellence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before concluding, I must express my sincere thanks to the financial institutions and bankers for their continued support, without which it would not have been possible for the company to reach the present position. My gratitude to our collaborators—M/s General Tire International Co, USA for their active participation and support in achieving product excellence. Our valued customers have been the backbone of our company's success. My sincere thanks to the employees for their dedicated hard work. Most important of all, it is you the respected shareholders who have shown immense patience and have stood by the company during the most difficult period. I am sure, your patience will not go unrewarded and the management of the company hopes to live upto your expectations I am thankful to my worthy colleagues on the board for their advice, counsel and guidance. I would like to congratulate and convey our best wishes on behalf of you to Mr E K Nayanar who has taken over as Chief Minister of Kerala.

Thank you

Cochin RAUNAQ SINGH

NOTE :
This does not purport to be the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

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P.H. PANDIAN

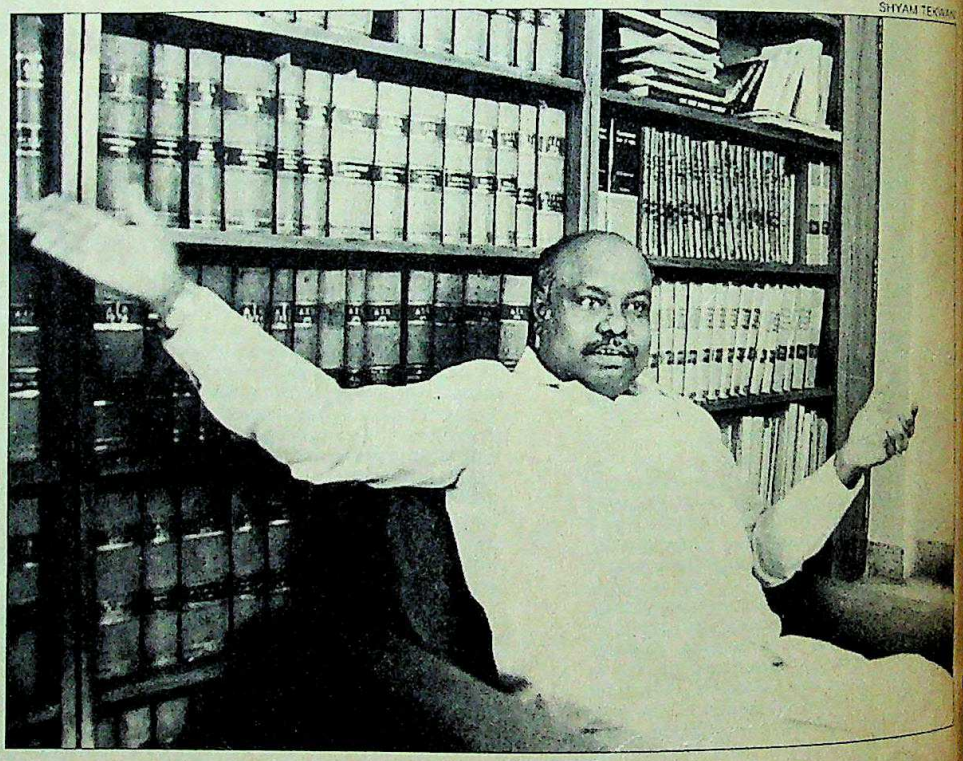
"Legislature is supreme"

IN less than two years in office, Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker P.H. Pandian, 42, has already created legislative history. His acerbic, yet well-reasoned, rulings have reversed high court judgements, sent editors to jail and expelled half the opposition DMK *MLAs.*

Pandian began his career as an advocate in Tirunelvelli and was elected to the state Assembly in 1977, then re-elected in 1980 and 1985. An MGR loyalist, he was appointed deputy speaker in 1982, and to his current position in 1985.

Pandian firmly believes that the "people's voice", as reflected in the legislature, should prevail in a democratic system. And this is clearly reflected in all his rulings. He hit the headlines early last year when he acquitted three persons convicted by the Madras High Court, saying that he was only "correcting" the judgement. His ruling almost led to a constitutional crisis in the state, with the high court sticking to its decision.

The controversial speaker strongly feels that the judiciary and the media have overstepped their jurisdictions and that there is a need to discipline both these institutions. Last fortnight, he was once again in the centre of a controversy when he demanded that all licences for cinema houses showing films derogatory to politicians should be cancelled. He also reiterated his stand when he directed his secretariat not to respond to a Supreme Court notice regarding a writ petition challenging the expulsion of 10 DMK *members from the Assembly. Like his peers, he has refrained from meeting the press. In an exclusive interview, he spoke to Senior Editor* PRABHU CHAWLA *in Madras. Excerpts:*



SHYAM TEKWANI

Q. *Through your recent ruling in the state Assembly you have been asserting that the legislature has unlimited powers. Why do you feel this way?*

A. I firmly believe that the legislature is supreme in a democracy. Each of its members represents the people of the state. We have four-and-a-half crore people and all of them cannot sit in the Assembly. They can only elect a representative to the House. In fact, an assembly reflects the will of the people, the pulse of the people and is the heart of the people.

Q. *Should it be above the judiciary?*

A. The judiciary only implements the laws passed by the legislature. It cannot deliver judgements beyond the law of the land. So we can assume that legislatures who have the powers to enact the laws are the most powerful organs of democracy.

Q. *You mean that the legislatures can also have the powers of the judiciary as you showed recently?*

A. The legislature is not passing a judicial verdict. But it can deliver social justice to the poor. You have to agree that both the judiciary and the executive are products of the legislature. The executive is responsible to the legislature which in turn is accountable to the people. It is this accountability which raises the status of the legislature in comparison to the judiciary. If you look at it that way, even the judiciary has no accountability.

Q. *If a legislature starts performing the task of the judiciary, there is a danger that it may deliver political judgements.*

A. You can't say that. The majority cannot be biased and politicised. Recently, we have noticed that the judiciary is making inroads into the powers of the legislature. Some of the members of the judiciary have claimed that the legislatures have failed the people. Nobody can be allowed to run down an elected body.

Q. *But have legislatures failed to deliver the goods?*

A. Who has to judge that? Only the people, and nobody else has the right to pass judgements. The people are supreme. And if they elect the same legislators again, it means they have endorsed the conduct and performance of the legislators and ministers.

Q. *Are you asserting that there should not be any other check on the executive and the legislature in a democracy?*

A. No. None at all, except what is provided in the Constitution.

Q. *But the executive does have the power. Legislatures can impeach judges.*

A. If that was so, then my ruling reversing the high court judgement should have been accepted.

Q. *Are you in favour of assemblies performing the role of the courts as well? Then what will the courts do?*

A. Courts have the power to accept writ petitions against elected representatives. If found guilty of violating the laws, they can unseat a ruling MLA.

Q. *But a speaker can't reverse a judgement of the high court.*

A. Speakers derive their power from the House. Every legislature has the power to enact laws which can nullify the

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...ffects of a high court judgement. Even the chief minister has recently declared that Parliament will not accept the Supreme Court judgement on the national anthem.

Q. But none of them has reversed a judgement as you have. Is this the only case of its kind in India?

A. Nullification and reversal are the same thing. In both, the action and the remedy is the same: not to give effect to a judicial verdict. It is a question of interpretation of the power of the legislature. I am convinced that legislatures can reverse a judgement, so I did it. Others have not felt like me so far.

Q. But you seem to be against the idea of even the media writing against politicians.

A. I am opposed to the role of an irresponsible section of the press. Certain vested interests are misusing this freedom. Even under the Constitution, the freedom of the press is not higher than the freedom of an ordinary citizen whose voice is represented in the State Assembly.

Q. Do you believe that there should be some restrictions on the press?

A. The press will have to accept reasonable restrictions. It is mentioned even in the Constitution. If there are no restrictions on it, then what is the remedy against an irresponsible media?

Q. You are against the media exposing corrupt and inefficient politicians?

A. No. But allegations should not be vague. They should be specific and confirmed. Vested interests control the press. We should have an ombudsman for the press in India. If you have a right to write against politicians, then why not write against the irresponsible media also? The media is not above the law. It is not engaged in any social service. It is an industry and is run on a commercial basis. What is the check on the media in India?

Q. You have the courts and the Press Council.

A. Can you get an immediate remedy from these institutions? People believe that the pen is mightier than the sword. But it should be mightier only during times of war and not during peace time. The mighty should be more restrained and tolerant in their behaviour. The press should have concern for the nation and the constitutional functionaries. If you attack a politician, you sell more copies of your publication. It means the press is cashing in on the reputation of another person. We are now in 1987 and we cannot claim that freedom of the press was guaranteed in 1947. Things are changing. We need not change the laws. But they have to be interpreted according to the changing times.

Q. But it is the responsibility of the media to keep the people informed about the conduct and performance of their representatives.

A. Then they should distribute their publications free of cost. It should not be done on a commercial basis.

Q. If nothing is printed in the commercially-run media who will inform the electorate?

A. Readers can't judge what is right or wrong. Only the affected person can judge that a false statement has been published.

Q. But you also expressed a view that the licences of all those films depicting politicians with a negative image should be cancelled?

> **"The judiciary is making inroads into the powers of the legislature. Some of the members of the judiciary have claimed that the legislatures have failed the people. You can't allow anybody to run down an elected body like this."**

A. I strongly believe that we cannot be ridiculed in public. If you are ridiculing the legislators, it means you are ridiculing the public. Cinema houses are not doing charity or screening free shows. These films are attacking a popular person.

Q. Are all politicians popular?

A. If they were not popular, they would not have been elected. Evil may be in one corner or in one individual. But why do you want to propagate it throughout the country with the help of cinema? Evil should be curbed and not propagated. If you do that, the moral standards of public life will deteriorate. Some cinema people are more interested in tarnishing the image of a person. Has anybody propagated or appreciated any good work, uprighteousness, or honesty in any politician? You are playing up only the corrupt and not the non-corrupt.

Q. If one accepts your contention, a legislator cannot be attacked by anyone and should be allowed unbridled powers?

A. There should be some curb on him but he cannot be subjected to non-valid criticism. Or, we will have to start a press or a cinema to defend ourselves.

Q. But it is always the ruling party which benefits from all curbs inside or outside the legislature.

A. No. The Opposition gets a lot of time in the Assembly to attack the Government. In fact, it gets more chances than the ruling party. If the speaker is pro-opposition, he is hailed as neutral. But when he is actually neutral, he is accused of being biased and pro-ruling party.

Q. But your recent ruling in expelling MLAs from the Opposition has been interpreted as harsh and in favour of the ruling party.

A. It is not a harsh punishment. I gave them all a warning. I summoned them to my chamber and advised them against burning the Constitution. But they did not listen to me. I had no alternative but to perform my duties of protecting the Constitution.

Q. But you became the first speaker in the country who disqualified almost half the main opposition in the House. Couldn't you restrain yourself?

A. It was within my powers. My decision was ratified by the House.

Q. But it reversed the verdict of the people who had elected them. It could lead to a situation where the entire Opposition can be thrown out if it is inconvenient to the ruling party.

A. That can't happen. It depends on the occasion. It was not a punishment. That way, an election petition against the MLAs is also a punishment. And the courts can also declare an election null and void. Can we say that they have reversed the people's verdict? Under the Constitution, legislatures are the most powerful organs and this has to be reiterated.

Q. Since an MLA can't be attacked, do you support the idea that people should have the right to recall him before the expiry of his term?

A. Yes. They can recall their representatives. Anyway, a legislator is unseated when convicted by a court of law for illegal activities.

Q. How do you assess the performance of MGR's Government?

A. MGR has provided a good and efficient leadership. He has given a people's government. He has satisfied the common man on the street. He represents the voice of the poor people. His principles and policies have been appreciated by the people.

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SAVING A FEW RUPEES ON YOUR ROOFING SHEETS COULD BE AN EXPENSIVE MISTAKE.

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Because cutting corners, as you know, can never substitute quality.

Quality in Experience.

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A fact that has stood the test of time for over 50 years. For clients like Larsen & Toubro, Reliance, Hindustan Lever, Bajaj Auto, Dunlop, Indian Railways, BHEL and hundreds more.

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TEACHERS

Moonlighting Mania

■ UMESH KUMAR does not have the easy hands of the paanwalla. For 45-year-old Kumar, making paan in Greater Kailash is a part-time job, and a new one at that. His real job is teaching social sciences in an off-campus college in north Delhi. During Holi, he sells colours.

■ ASHOK RAJ, in his mid-30s, runs a gas agency in the afternoons; most mornings he lectures on commerce in a Delhi college. But his second profession is eating into his first; the teaching is rapidly becoming non-existent.

■ RADHA NATH, in her late 20s, teaches English in the mornings and edits a magazine in the afternoons.

THESE people are real (though their names have been changed), and moonlighting is, sadly, becoming a fact of life in the groves of academe. Students are not the only ones to cut classes; quite a few teachers do too. The result: many of the colleges are gradually becoming intellectual wastelands, and deserted ones at that.

Teaching has had to play second fiddle, as the number of college teachers with 'other jobs' has reached disturbing proportions. Delhi University itself has no estimate of the scale of the problem. But its seniormost professors feel that while nearly 10 to 15 per cent of the faculty in many of the university's colleges boost their incomes by working on the side, in some of the off-campus colleges, over half the teachers are busy moonlighting. Some teachers, in fact, only come to college on salary days. Says Subhadra Butalia, an English teacher who retired recently from Dayal Singh College: "I would definitely say that 90 per cent of my male colleagues have other jobs. We used to rarely see them in college."

'French leave' has gained currency to such an extent that teachers themselves are worried about the absenteeism. The staff council in Ramjas College, for instance, recently passed strictures against a colleague. Says Dilip Simeon, a history lecturer there: "We just had to do this. A colleague who runs a magazine came out in print about the decline of excellence in academia. But this gentleman himself never takes his classes. When asked to do so, he tells the other teachers to divide the work among themselves."

Why are teachers throwing in the towel, and giving in to Mammon after having shunned him for so long? For most university teachers, it is no longer a question of ethics, it is a question of their very survival. Moonlighting is not new, but spiralling rents and the equally vertiginous price index have made a mockery of the teacher's tight budget.

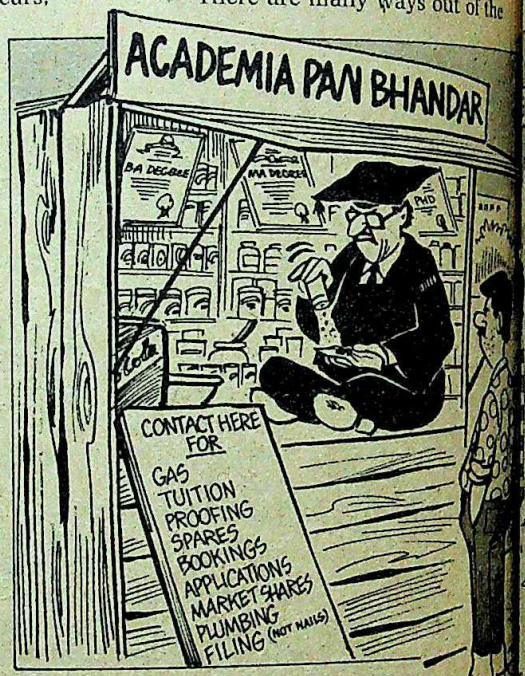
Teachers who have put in 15 years, get paid barely Rs 3,000 a month; their counterparts in the Government earn Rs 5,000, plus get an all-important roof over their heads. Net of rent (a single room can cost as much as Rs 1,500), the hapless lecturer gets only one-third as much as the government servant, who in turn sees himself as being underpaid. A career in the army is much more paying, more so if perquisites like free rations and medical cover are thrown in. Says M.M.P. Singh, president of the Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA): "The annual increment is about Rs 50. Throw in the allowances and it is slightly over Rs 100. Even after a promotion, the pay hike is often negligible. We have no conveyance allowances, no deputations, often no promotions."

Moonlighting is sadly becoming a fact of life in the groves of academe. It's not only students who cut classes; teachers do too.

An unmarried lecturer can still make ends meet; but a married man with a family, can't survive on his salary with any semblance of self-respect. Nor can a woman lecturer who has a family to support and does not have any private means. Social pressures eventually become difficult to resist. It is no small irony that college teachers want to give their children the best education, but are finding it increasingly difficult to afford the best schools. Two schoolgoing children can cost Rs 600 a month, on fees and bus fare alone, and that can be 40 per cent of the take-home pay, net of rent.

So people move to the most distant corners of the city to save on rent (as Saraswati Majumdar did, and she now changes three buses each morning and spends four hours a day commuting); or they don't get themselves a new coat for 15 years (as is the case with S.P. Chauhan of Shivaji College); or spend their life's savings paying for one medical mishap (as did a lecturer of Maheshwari Dayal Singh College). Or, they start moonlighting.

There are many ways out of the financial labyrinth. Tuitions were the first, and are still, the most common exit. Working in what are disparagingly called 'teaching shops', is the other. Writing for newspapers, or editing book manuscripts for publishing houses, are also respectable ways of getting some extra cash in the pocket. But not everyone has these avenues open, and teachers are diversifying into areas that were considered dishonourable not so long ago.



Some now run agencies to sell things like gas, motor parts, oil and clothes. Some dabble on the stock exchange, especially those who teach in commerce colleges. And some sell insurance or organise chit funds. There are convenient alibis as well as side doors to other businesses. A lecturer of DAV College runs a management institute in his wife's name. And a Satyavati College lecturer draws an additional salary from a boarding school in

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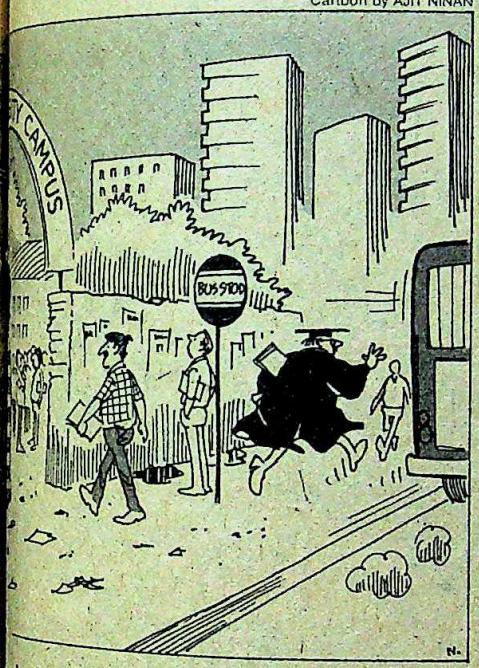
neighbouring Haryana. Until recently, a lecturer of Ramjas College, who is the son of a former University Grants Commission chairman, ran a full-fledged travel agency. Hindu College history teacher is a part-time model, and so is her husband who also teaches in the same college.

Money alone is not the motivating force. Says Purabhi Panwar, who teaches English at the College of Vocational Studies: "I felt that I was stagnating. So I started to write book reviews. I went on to features, and soon wanted to develop as a journalist." The money came as a bonus, but then Panwar had also wanted to buy a flat, something she could not have done without the extra income.

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



Academics, of course, is uniquely positioned for facilitating moonlighting. Teachers are expected to use most of their time keeping abreast of developments in their areas of specialisation: doing research, reading, and guiding students. Most of them, as a result, are asked to hold classes for no more than 15 or 18 hours a week, with long summer holidays and winter holidays at other times in the year thrown in. Holding down a second job, or carrying on a side business is not, therefore, a very difficult affair, especially when classes allotted to you: most boys' colleges do not believe in attendance records.

There have been fashions in the variety of moonlighting. In the mid-1960s, teachers wrote books, both for intellectual stimulation as well as for a little extra money. In the next decade, teachers began to dabble in the share market and chit funds—this was the beginning of the boom in the stock-market. In the '80s, the petty businesses have gained currency. Some teachers started speculating in real estate. Consultancy, whether in management colleges or for private firms, was the other lucrative avenue. Senior professors of management colleges earn small fortunes in consultancies for private companies. Some teachers of the Faculty of Management in Delhi University, and Sri Ram College of Commerce, for instance, get as much as Rs 2,000 for each assignment. Contracts for government or public sector companies can yield still more.

But life for the unlucky ones with no other source of money, has become financially difficult, to the point that even the surviving idealist may have to resort to moonlighting. Says Anil Sethi of Khalsa College: "I used to boast about not tutoring students for money. I would do it free. Now I am actively looking for tuitions. And I kick myself for not joining the Government."

And Chauhan of Shivaji College adds ruefully: "I wish to God that I had become a school teacher; I would not be in this state now. I am paying Rs 50-an-hour to one of them for tutoring my daughter in physics and chemistry. It comes to Rs 600 every month." B.N. Raina of Kirori Mal College, who has taught post-graduates English for the last 16 years, in addition to the three years he spent teaching in the US complains: "Social pressures cannot be escaped. We need money for clothes, for cigarettes. I can't even afford to buy a book.... Naturally, people will have to look for money elsewhere."

There are many ways out of the financial labyrinth: from tuitions to journalism to gas agencies to dabbling in shares.

The only thing left for many of the teachers is the students and the sacrosanct relationship with them. These teachers just dig in their heels and brave it out, but often at the cost of a genteel poverty, nothing set aside for the inevitable rainy day, and the certainty of dropping slowly down the ladder of social respectability.

In a rapidly changing society, where the worth of a man is measured by how much he earns, the greatest casualty is the self-esteem of the teachers. Says R.C. Malhan, who teaches economics at St Stephen's: "When I joined in 1961, there was respect for a teacher. There is not much today. Our value system has changed; only money has any value now." And for Vijay Singh, who teaches in Satyavati College, the tragedy is that "a teacher feels there is a social stigma attached to his profession".

Raksha Sethi, Anil's wife who also teaches at Khalsa College, is even more bitter. "When you are in a social gathering, people lose interest the moment you tell them that you are a lecturer. They realise we earn nothing, and are thus not worth talking to.... Our son says that he will never become a teacher because he will then have to refuse everything his children will ask him for." And another teacher said that one of the students he tried to discipline, turned upon him and told him that his father paid his servant more than what the teacher earned.

A feminisation of the university is also taking place: more and more women are joining colleges, women who either have houses or are married and are self-sufficient. Between 1978-79 and 1982-83 (the latest year for which figures have been compiled), the number of male teachers in Delhi's colleges actually fell—from 2,767 to 2,693—while the number of women teachers rose from 2,070 to 2,301. Said DUTA President Singh: "It will not be long before the female-male ratio is 60:40."

If things continue the way they are, fewer bright teachers will remain. As it is, many come not because they want to teach but because they cannot find jobs elsewhere. Many of the absentee teachers ought not to have been teachers in the first place. Says Tripta Wahi, who teaches history in Hindu College: "Many of those who cut classes often come through the back door, or are with the establishment and have political clout."

Already there is a dearth of good people. Says Malhan: "It is difficult in economics to get good people. They don't come into the profession; they prefer to join companies selling soap." And though an official committee has suggested that teachers' pay scales should be improved following the Fourth Pay Commission report for Central government staff, things are not likely to change for some time.

—MADHU JAIN

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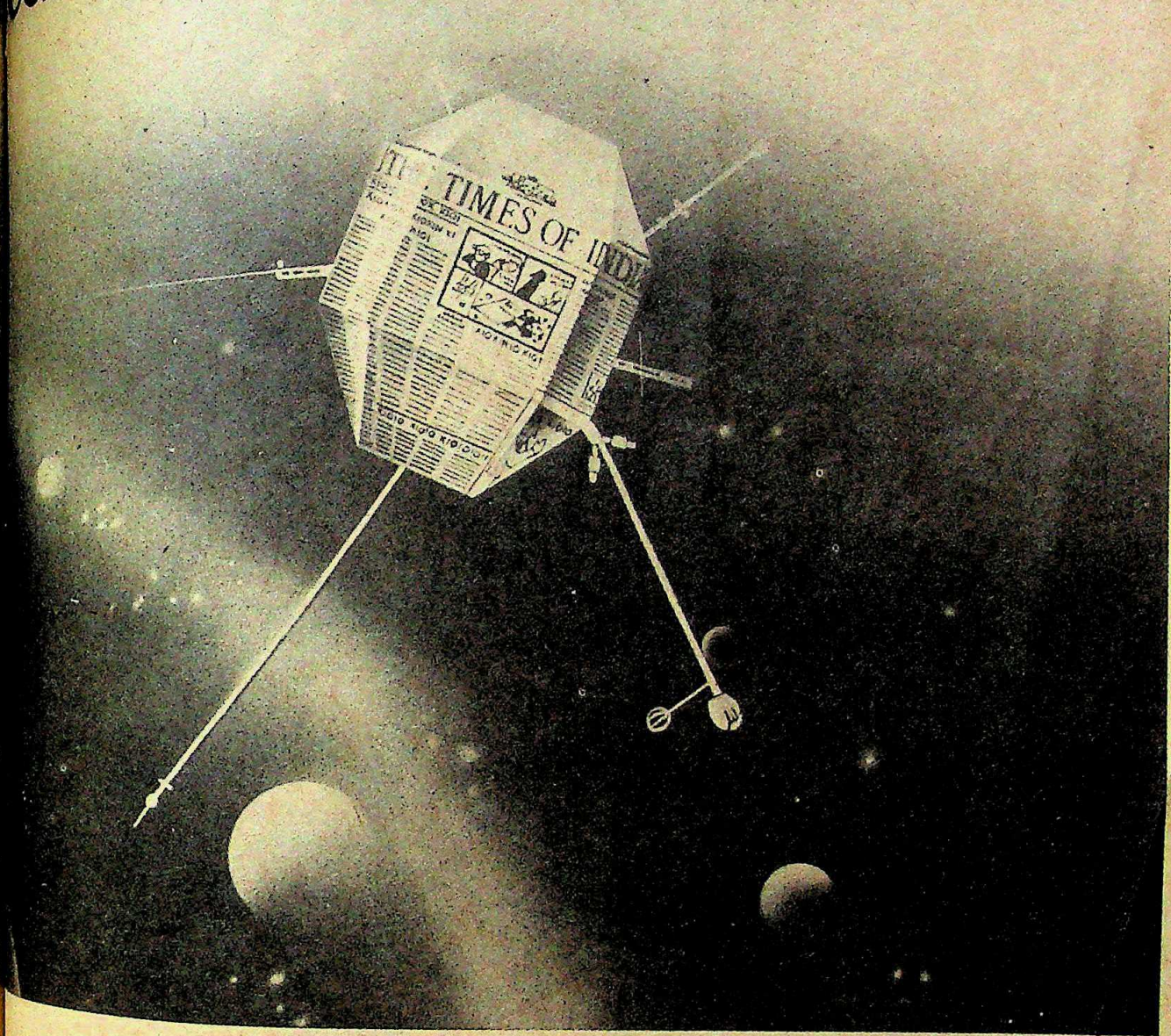
ed a wider vision.



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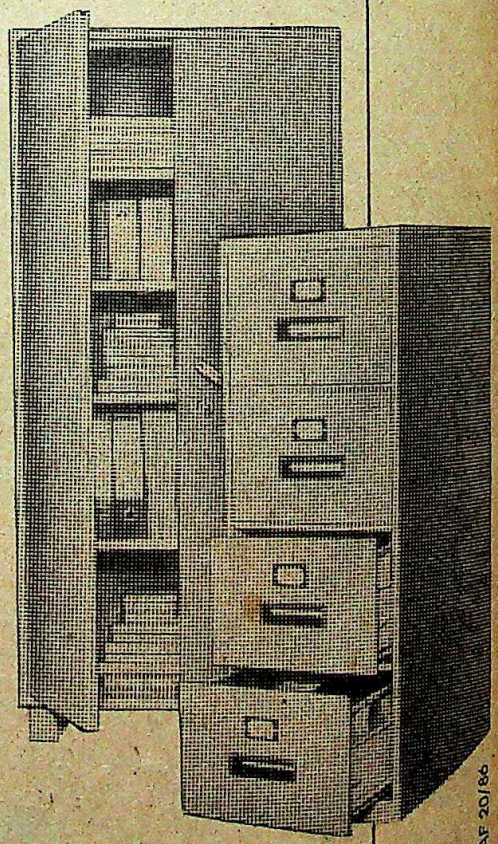

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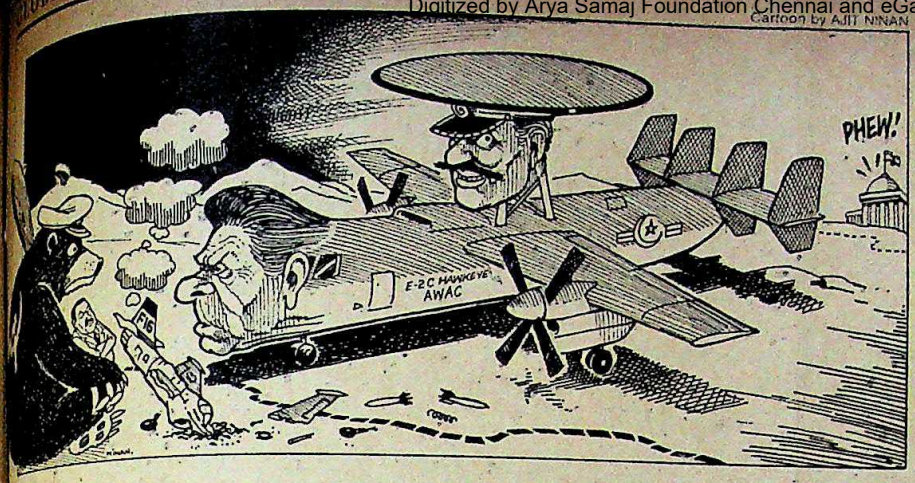

AWACS

Advantage Pakistan

LOSE an F-16 and gain an AWACS. Islamabad proved just that last fortnight as the Pakistan Air Force's most prized fighter was downed at 22,000 feet over the Khost province of Afghanistan to a high-streaking MiG-23. The immediate reaction in the US was one of shock and outrage. To most US opinion leaders and even liberal commentators, not to talk of the Pentagon hawks, the very idea of losing an F-16 to a moderately good Soviet fighter aircraft was inconceivable. The result: a fresh outcry against the Soviet intimidation of Pakistan and a much needed plug for the Pakistani quest of an Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft.

The change that the incident brought about was most palpably visible in the editorial columns of the *New York Times*, a newspaper that had so far opposed the suggestion of any major arms sales to Pakistan. In an impassioned editorial, headlined "Lease Radar Planes to Pakistan", the paper declared: "Pakistan deserves US help, leasing it Hawkeyes makes sense. Can Congress rise to the challenge?"

The challenge before the Congress, obviously, is to get around the existing American laws that make such quick leasing of major armament systems difficult. But indications last fortnight were that the Congress was not exactly devoid of people determined to find a way out. Brooklyn Representative Stephen Solarz, who heads the house Asian and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee, was prompt in holding hearings on the issue. He has consistently backed the idea of leasing AWACS to Pakistan. And last month, with the Senate subcommittee voting the $4.2 billion aid package to Pakistan in its entirety, the AWACS issue seemed to be over.

In the Indian camp the supply of the AWACS aircraft to Pakistan over a two to three-year period was considered a *fait accompli*. But last fortnight the issue was reopened by none else than Pakistani Prime Minister Mohammed Khan Junejo. He sent in, through hawkish Conservative Senator Gordon Humphrey a letter to President Ronald Reagan that was unusual in its content.

Junejo virtually threatened that in case the US Administration did not immediately release the E-2C Hawkeyes to Pakistan his country may find it impossible to support the Afghan rebels. Further, he said he did not mind if, for the time being, American crews and technicians flew the aircraft. He even promised that the aircraft would be flown at a reasonable distance from the Afghan border so that neither the aircraft nor the crews are endangered.

The letter came just a few days before the F-16 was shot down—so quick that some in the Pentagon joke that the whole thing was pre-planned. However, even before it was delivered to Reagan the letter was leaked to Novak and Evans, the muckraking *Washington Post* columnists known to represent the extreme right opinion in the US capital. They quoted extensively from the letter to make out a strong case for the lease.

The letter, and the subsequent developments, have opened up several new possibilities and questions. The US Assistant Secretary of State Michael Armacost seemed to represent the Administration's point of view, when speaking at an Asia Society meeting, he declared that the lease presented a "more urgent answer" which may find "preference in the Congress", and may be more acceptable to India.

But he was quick to point out the complications. President Reagan would have to first certify that the release of the planes would make no difference to the defence preparedness of the United States. And, as Armacost added, it involves the question of "Americans being deployed in areas where the Soviets are employed in active military operations".

The Pentagon, however, did show a marked unwillingness to lease out the aircraft. Assistant Secretary of Defence, Richard Armitage, says the lease would, atleast in the short run, "degrade our capability". According to him, the navy is not in a position to release four Hawkeyes nor can the US Air Force spare three E-3A sentry AWACS without compromising security. Yet he and the other Pentagon decision-makers indicate that for Pakistan's sake they would be willing to bend law and logic as far as humanly possible.

The Indians, however, viewed the lease offer as a mixed blessing. While it would mean that Pakistan will get its airborne surveillance capability much sooner than Indian planners had anticipated, it would also entail US controls over it. The Pakistanis may not be able to use it, at least routinely, against India if the aircraft are to be flown by American pilots. At the same time, there is the fear that once the systems are transferred to Pakistan their leased status may not mean much.

Indian strategists remember only too well that when the Pakistani submarine *Ghazni* was destroyed in Indian waters in 1971 it was on lease from the US. Further, that was before hostilities formally began in December.

Also, in 1980, the US gave AWACS to Saudi Arabia on wet lease in the face of an Iranian threat. Next year, the Saudis were allowed to buy brand new AWACS of their own.

But whether or not the lease finally leads to a sale there is little doubt at least about one point: that in exchange for a quick transfer, Pakistan has agreed to scale down its quest to the relatively modest twin-engined Hawkeye instead of the awesome E-3A sentry AWACS.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Washington

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BOFORS INQUIRY

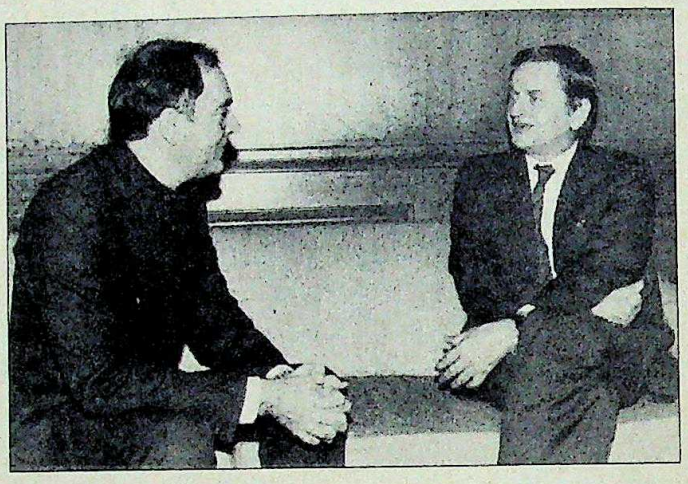
Full Access

THE Bofors scandal took a dramatic turn last week when Swedish Radio announced that Bofors had paid 175 million Kroner (Rs 35 crore) to Indian sources in May, 1986. This was in addition to the 33 million Kroner (Rs 6.6 crore) paid in November-December 1986. The new revelations have put an entirely different twist on the Bofors deal. Over Rs 40 crore is no small amount and, if additional money has been paid, as now seems likely, the obvious implication can only be that some of that money found its way to the highest levels of the Indian Government.

Even more damaging was the radio's report that Per Mossberg, director general of Bofors, had admitted that it had all along been stipulated in the contract signed between the Indian Government and Bofors that 3 per cent of the total contract value would be paid as "provisions". Three per cent would work out to around Rs 50 crore. This would further imply that the Indian Government knew all along that the sum was to be paid as "provisions", a typically Swedish word that can be loosely translated as commissions. If proven true, it would contradict Rajiv Gandhi's statements that no middlemen were involved and no commissions paid.

The latest revelations have put additional pressure on the Swedish Audit Bureau entrusted with probing the Indian Bofors deal. There is already mounting speculation in Stockholm that the National Bureau of Auditing will officially present the findings of its investigations next fortnight. The key question, however, was whether the investigations would reveal the names of Indians who received payments into secret Swiss bank accounts. Even if it were confirmed that large payments were paid by Bofors, the repercussions for the Indian Government or its Swedish counterpart would be tremendous.

However, the question being asked by most non-Swedes related to the credibility and effectiveness of the bureau itself. In Sweden, the "Riks Revisions Verket"—the National Bureau for Auditing—is respected for its integrity and independence. It is affiliated to both the Ministry of Finance and the ministry for Civilian Affairs. Although a government-controlled body, it enjoys a hard-earned reputation in auditing and monitoring the performance of public corporations. The bureau is headed by an auditor-general appointed for a six-year term. The current incumbent is Ingmar Mundebo, who is involved in the Bofors investigations. Mundebo is a widely-respected former Liberal Party politician, who was minister for finance and quit politics in 1980. The auditor-general is assisted by a 10-member board, of which he is also the chairman. All 10 members are nominated by the Government and include, besides civil servants, three MPs who thus guarantee the Swedish Parliament an insight into the workings of this public body.



Rajiv, it appears now, had given far too much weight to Palme's informal assurance that no middlemen would be involved.

Assisting auditor-general Mundebo in the investigations into the alleged Bofors pay-offs, is Bo Sandberg, an experienced administrator who has been designated project leader. As a bureau spokesman said: "In our investigations, we do get overall directions from the Government, but from then onwards, we operate without any form of interference. This current assignment is rather unusual in the sense that we normally do not investigate private enterprises. This is an exceptional case." Asked if that factor would undermine the thoroughness of the investigation, the spokesman responded: "Not at all. I think we are equally competent to assess Bofors and undertake a fair and thorough investigation."

Although there are little doubts about the bureau's ability to do a diligent job, journalists at the Swedish National Radio were worried whether the audit bureau's two senior officials were getting access to the kind of information the radio itself possessed. Said a senior journalist: "What we would like to see is how deep they can dig to unearth the information. They can certainly get information from the Riks Banken which in turn can get the documents from Bofors' bank, the Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken. But the question is, how much can they get out of Bofors?" Asked if the radio station would cooperate by offering their own evidence should the audit bureau get itself into a quagmire, journalists replied: "At this moment, we have taken no decisions. But it is certainly in our interest that the bureau gets all the information it needs."

Meanwhile, Carl Johan Aberg, the undersecretary for foreign trade when the Bofors deal was being negotiated, finally granted interviews to the Swedish press. Aberg bluntly stated that no written assurances on the non-involvement of middlemen was ever given to Rajiv by Olof Palme in January 1986.

Aberg said he was told by the then Bofors' chief executive, Martin Ardbro, that the company would not involve middlemen in the Indian contract. He then repeated this to Olof Palme. The Swedish prime minister, at a private lunch given by Rajiv Gandhi where Sonia Gandhi was also present, only "mentioned" to Rajiv that no middlemen would be involved. Added Aberg: "No other Swedes were present. And Palme had offered no documents whatsoever". The Indian prime minister then went on to state in Parliament that he had received assurances from Palme. The general thrust of Aberg's statements seemed to be that Rajiv was giving far too much weight to what was a passing reference made by Palme.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN in Stockholm

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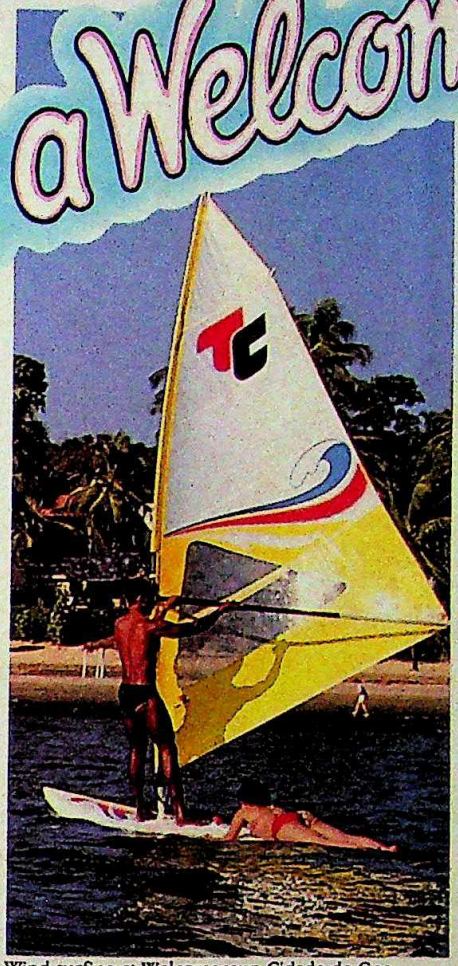

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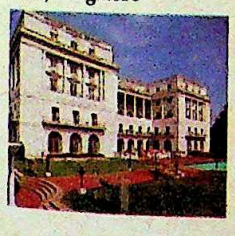

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BUNIYAAD

Bringing Down the Curtain

■ *SHYAM LAL strolls on the beach in Andheri. People crowd round. The crowd gets bigger. Somebody throws a stone at him, shouting: "How dare you be so nasty to JB and Vrishbhan?" Shyam Lal (Vinod Nagpal) runs to a taxi, the crowd chases him.*

■ *Mangala in all white widow attire steps outside the sets. Within minutes she is gheraoed. "JB is dead, JB is dead," they chant, verging on hysteria. Women put their hands on Mangala's head and mourn.*

■ *A doctor from the Tata Memorial Cancer Hospital sends a message to* Buniyaad *script-writer Manohar Shyam Joshi that he should not let JB die because it would affect people with leukaemia in the country. He suggests a bone marrow transplant. A group of college girls appeal to Joshi to give JB the best medical treatment and let him live.*

NEVER has the line between fiction and fact, between reel and real life been so blurred, the identification so complete. In *Buniyaad* art has not only imitated life, it has become life for thousands of television addicts. And when the curtain comes down next week for the last time after 104 episodes, thousands are likely to suffer acute withdrawal symptoms.

Those symptoms are already visible on the sets of the second-longest running serial in Doordarshan history. For most of those involved, cast, crew and director Ramesh Sippy, a unique experience is coming to an end, an expanding joint family is about to break up. A certain ennui has set in. People want to leave but not without varying levels of regret. Vijayendre Ghatge (Vrishbhan), half in jest, touches Ramesh Sippy's feet and says: "Goodbye, sir. I'm off." Sippy, absent mindedly nods: "See you tomorrow." Vrishbhan: "But, sir this is my last day." Sippy, as if awakening from a dream, finally extends his tiny frame for a formal goodbye. JB (Abhinav Chaturvedi) killed off in episode 100, has already made his tearful farewell as has Subhadra (Anjana Mumtaz). But, as she says: "I just don't want to leave, I keep finding excuses to come back; this has become my family."

But the goodbyes, it appears, might only be *au revoirs*. Although Sippy and company have closed shop, they do hope to return—even though they don't admit it. The last show is twice as long and winds up this epic saga of a Punjabi family spanning seven decades and many generations. But astutely, the final episode includes several teasers to a possible *Buniyaad* Revisited in case Doordarshan, besieged by

Photographs by NAMAS BHOJANI

(Anti-clockwise from left) Joshi with Sippy; and the *Buniyaad* family on the sets: Lochan and her mother; Roshan Lal; Prince and Mangala; Haveli Ram: larger than life

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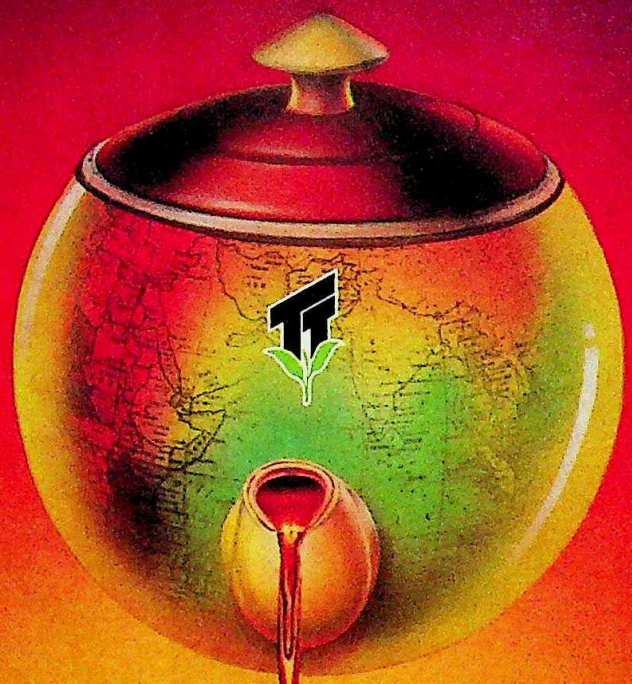

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RAMESH SIPPY

Soap Success

It could have been mission impossible: 200 people: cast and crew, with varying sizes of egos and tantrums working 15-hour days together. But director Ramesh Sippy, who has the patience and unflappability of a turtle, steered them smoothly past 104 milestones of Buniyaad. *Quietly assertive, Sippy moves through the sets like a tiny god. His every gesture is an unquestioned command; the adulation is almost embarrassing.*

For Sippy himself Buniyaad *has been an undreamed-of resurrection. Now, it is back with renewed vigour to the big screen. Principal Correspondent* MADHU JAIN *interviewed Sippy. Excerpts:*

Q. ***What has* Buniyaad *meant for you?***

A. It's been a marathon—a strenuous, huge project. But the end comes as a relief. It has been strange: families visiting the sets are so keyed up. *Buniyaad* has become a part of their lives.

Q. ***What did you want to do with* Buniyaad?**

A. There is no message to be conveyed. One purpose was to travel through time. But we were not able to stick to this because of interventions by Doordarshan. Partition could not be made too traumatic. They cut references to Gandhi. Some of their cuts were ridiculous: the refugee camp scenes were the most affected. This was the time of displacement of refugees from Punjab, the Government did not want us to show any problems in refugee camps. They wanted us to show the refugees from Pakistan arriving in Delhi and going straight into houses. So we watered it down to family problems.

Q. ***To what extent did audience feedback influence the course of the story?***

A. I did not expect so strong a reaction to JB dying. But one can't change the story. You can't hide the truth; in the early '60s there was no cure for leukaemia. But we couldn't change the story. In the end people know JB is alive and kicking round like Abhinav Chaturvedi.

Q. ***Vinod Nagpal says that when it is close-up time, they know they are in for it. That is when you really get them to work.***

A. It is not the dialogue which takes time but the silent reactions: the look, the glance, the turn-away, the feel. It is difficult because, at that time, they are not reacting to a person but to a set-up, a dummy situation. They must have a voice to react to and therefore the cue becomes important.

Q. ***Will your* Buniyaad *experience influence your film-making?***

A. I have learned a lot about the narrative form; now I am even more conscious that human interest is very important to the story in the Indian context. I am also confident that I will be able to make movies faster. I plan to use the video monitor for feature films.

NAMAS BHOJANI

Sippy: resurrected

Q. ***Manohar Shyam Joshi and you are described as quite a team?***

A. Well, the chemistry between us is right. He has an understanding of screenplay and character and does his research. And he has a feel for what I can only call *Hindustaniat*—an Indian at heart. We are complementary to each other.

Q. ***Why don't you do films with different, off-beat themes?***

A. My problem at the moment is that *Sholay*'s tremendous success has bracketed me in the big box-office league. I have to come up to expectations and subjects with larger mass appeal. *Sholay* is as much a millstone round the neck as a feather in the cap.

Buniyaad addicts, okays an encore.

Sippy and script-writer Joshi have left a lot of loose ends dangling tantalisingly. A third of the episode is circa 1964 but the rest is set 20 years later. The still endearing Haveli Ram celebrates his 90th birthday surrounded by his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Lajoji is not seen and we can presume the lady who gave the life force to *Buniyaad* serenely left Masterji somewhere down the line. Using a clever literary device, the *pater-familias*, left with his mountain of memories goes on many nostalgia trips; and takes the viewer with him. In the end are many beginnings; flashbacks to the '60s are like trailers for coming attractions. Says Sippy: "If *Buniyaad* returns it will be a nostalgia trip for the post-Independent generation."

The month-long film strike has sent the work schedules of the actors haywire. Mazhar Khan ought to have been in the US a week earlier for a show. He waits patiently for his exit cue. Since the group scene for the last episode requires all the characters, a technical solution allows him to finally leave. Neena Gupta has still not turned up. Since many of the actors signed other films, Sippy's assistants juggle dates and shooting schedules. Vinod Nagpal and Dalip Tahil keep disappearing to Ismail Merchant's *The Perfect Murder*. JB had exited earlier—to Delhi for his M.A. history exams.

But to such an extent has art appropriated life that it comes as a shock to see the *Buniyaad* khandaan without their screen images. Alok Nath sheds his Haveli Ram clothes and character, relaxing after his takes are over with a gin and lime. Anita Kanwar, her Lajoji image intact—is propped up on a chair in a corner of the large studio, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* in one hand, a cigarette in the other. Vinod Nagpal has just finished Simon Callow's autobiography and loans it to Mangala (Krutika Desai), who is in the middle of an M.A. in psychology. Satbir (Kanwaljit Singh) is engrossed in Henry Miller's *Plexus*.

There *is* life after *Buniyaad*. But for many, a gnawing sense of insecurity has set in. Says Kanwar: "I feel insecure. In fact I am even more insecure than I was earlier. *Buniyaad* for me has meant a year of sure work. Now there is the spectre of unemployment. What will I do next?" Kanwar has already distanced herself mentally from Lajoji. "Earlier I was so absorbed by Lajoji that I used to be frightened about how I would get over the character. Now I am tired of playing

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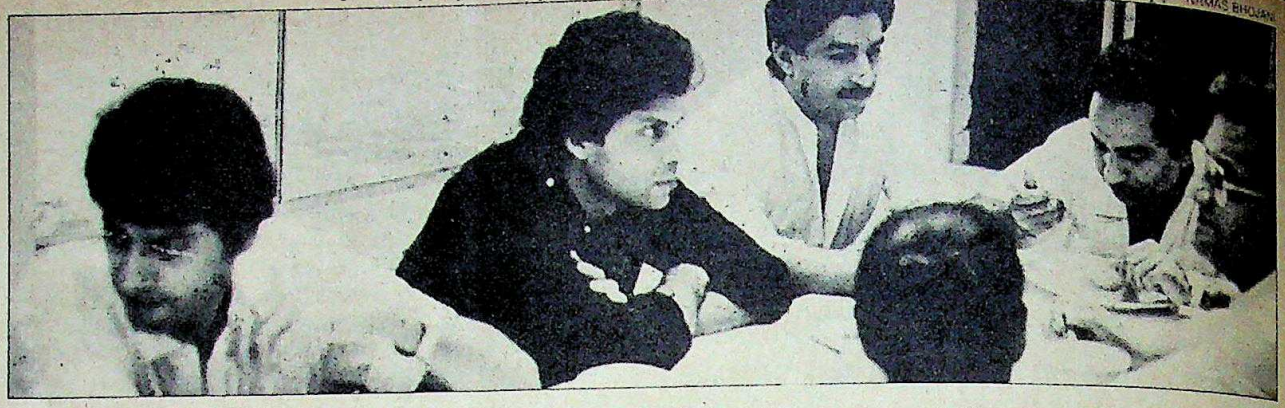

Eating together: the last supper

an old woman. It is not easy to have lines on my face and grey in my hair day after day. It has worn me down."

The talented Krutika echoes her: "There was regular work for eight months, suddenly I do not know what is in store for me. When we were doing the 70th episode, I realised that there were only 30 left and it would all be over."

Satbir welcomes a change but also senses insecurity round the corner. "I have already begun to wonder who will sit in Room 9. I have begun to notice the smallest of things here. Even lunch time was a great ritual. It will be gone. When JB came to my room to say goodbye I barely looked up, I was reading my script. But then he said: 'It was great working with you', and he had tears in his eyes. I never realised until then that people would have to go." For film and theatre personality Dalip Tahil (Kulbushan), it means the end of a way of life. "*Buniyaad* has become a part of me. There will be a void when it ends. I would work with Sippy even on a Super 8 film."

Nobody has been left untouched by the serial or by Sippy, whom they almost worship. Screen roles spill into their lives: vestiges of the characters cling to the real persona. Mazhar Khan talks of ladies getting out of their cars at red lights and telling him, "*Puttar*, you are doing so well." And some of Roshan Lal's character seems to have rubbed off on him. "I've changed as a person after playing Roshan Lal. I have always been ambitious, but I was always a talker and lazy. Now I have become a doer."

Soni Razdan and Vinod Nagpal seem to have the toughest time shrugging off their screen persona. Says Nagpal, who plays the villainous Shyam Lal: "When the take is over the others rush to the video monitor to see how they have done. I can't bear to look at myself." Adds Razdan, the brittle and bitchy Lochan in the serial: "Everybody hates me, I keep getting asked why I am so mean to Lajoji?" Lochan's mother (Sarita Sethi) does not have it any easier. "Even friends tell me they never knew I had this negative side. Frankly, in *Buniyaad*, I've lost my identity. It is so strong and overwhelming; people have forgotten everything I've done before this."

There is nothing but love and respect for Haveli Ram and Lajoji. Alok Nath is deluged with letters seeking advice and offers of roles. *Buniyaad*, he admits, has been "the best thing that has ever happened to me but I don't want to get into the groove of playing old men".

BUT whatever its effect on the cast, its effect on the television public has been nothing short of phenomenal. Viewership never dipped below 70 per cent. In the North, it touched 93 per cent. "At least some people put down their guns in Punjab on Tuesday and Saturday nights," says Executive Producer, Amit Khanna. Over 20 million people in the country let the Gaindamal *aulad* into their homes twice a week.

Buniyaad undoubtedly found a vacant niche in the Indian mindscape. Video cassettes of the episodes began to replace the pickle jars and papadams which mothers sent their children in California, Vancouver, London or Dubai. In Lahore and other Pakistani cities within transmission range, nearly a million viewers tune in to *Buniyaad*.

The reasons are obvious; it revolves round the family, drips with melodrama and has all the necessary hooks. Crucial to its success is Joshi, India's foremost long distance writer. Not only has he mastered the rules of the soap opera, he has his time, place, and historical references right. The characters are rooted in a milieu painstakingly researched; the accents are right, the clothes look right and so does the furniture.

Moreover, for the pre-Partition generation of north Indians, *Buniyaad* was a journey to the times and places they had to leave behind, an Indian *Roots*: the language peppered with Punjabi phrases. Lahore for that generation was still a magic word. For the younger generation it provided an opportunity to discover the past of their parents.

More important, it was a journey to the times when there were still idealists and heroes; practically each family could find one on his family tree. The Independence movement had brought out the best in people fighting for a common cause. Looked at from the more cynical India of today, overpopulated with the scheming Shyam Lals and the on-the-make Roshan Lals, the soap opera was a return to a paradise lost. At its best, before it degenerated into cliches, *Buniyaad* had tried to depict the changing scene in the country as well as the change in the values of a nascent India, capturing in its slowly unfolding canvass its progress and the ensuing conflicts with tradition through the story of one family. Appropriately enough *Buniyaad* ends in 1964, the year of Jawaharlal Nehru's death, the end of an epoch which Joshi seems to lament.

The serial fails to fulfil its initial promise of a tryst with recent history: Partition and its aftermath. Recent history was supposed to be the axis of the story but ended as a mere backdrop. Doordarshan put down its censoring foot: no riot scenes, no refugee camps, no discussions about Mahatma Gandhi.

Nevertheless, *Buniyaad* has been an enduring phenomenon. Tuesday and Saturday evenings will never be the same again. Even as Fairfax and Bofors simmer juicily on dining tables and *dhabas* across the country, people will still be asking: Will Prince marry Mangala? Did Lajoji die? Who is the heir to Vrishban's fortunes—Kaka or Mangala's little daughter?

—MADHU JAIN

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SPICMACAY

Reviving the Gurukul

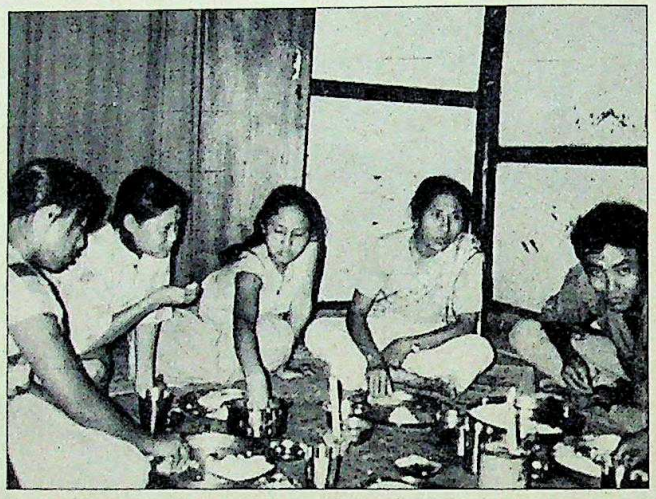
RUSTAM Vania, 19, has no background in classical music or in Indian culture. His Parsi father is in the defence services and his Bengali mother speaks Punjabi more fluently than she does Bengali. Rustam has never experienced anything even remotely traditional. But today, he is reaching out to grasp his roots. Ruffling his hair nervously, he explains why he wants to go on the Society for Preservation of Indian Classical Music and Culture among Youth (SPICMACAY) summer scholarship which will plant him in the home of a guru for a month where he can experience, close up, the guru-shishya parampara in the classical arts. To him, this will mean a peep-hole to a tradition he has only watched from afar. He has no credentials and no previous knowledge of classical music. He only shares with other people of his age a curiosity about Indian classical traditions.

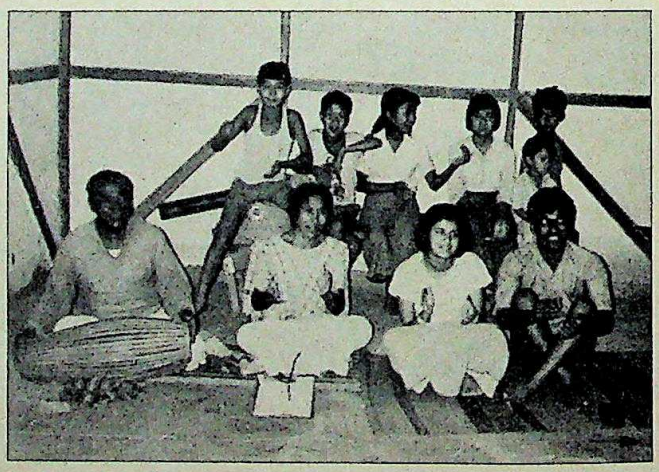
Rustam is just the kind of candidate SPICMACAY is looking for: uninitiated yet inquisitive. Ten years ago, SPICMACAY was formed with the explicit purpose of countering the unthinking rejection of traditional culture by the youth. This novel scholarship scheme is a new dimension in this effort and Rustam was just one of the 30 students selected from the scores of aspirants who applied.

The scholarship, which promises a live-in exposure to the traditional *gurukul* system, has struck an enthusiastic chord not only in the students, who came swarming for the interviews despite their ongoing college exams, but also among the artistes who see this as a last chance of preserving traditions that threaten to go extinct. Those who will be gurus to the devoted shishyas this summer include some formidable names: Suryamukhi Devi, Leela Samson, Gangubhai Hangal, Kelucharan Mahapatra, Zia Mohinuddin Dagar, Padma Subramaniam, Sanjukta Panigrahi, Kalamandalam Nair, B. Rajam Iyer, Balram Pathak, S. Ramanathan, D.K. Pattamal, Trinath Maharana and Ram Chatur Malik.

They admit that a month is not enough to learn the first alphabet of the arts. Yet it would reinforce some of the values of the guru-shishya parampara. Says SPICMACAY Vice-Chairman Kiran Seth: "There has to be a re-examination of this system if our cultural traditions are to survive." Leela Samson, the noted Bharatnatyam dancer who plans to take two students into her fold, agrees. "The idea is not to give finishing touches or to enhance the art form," she says. "The idea is to gain from living in the guru-shishya environment."

Eating together: devoted shishyas





Rehearsing at the gurukul: living in

For the majority of the candidates, it was precisely this mystic excitement of living in a *gurukul* environment that was most appealing. Priya Kanungo wanted to see the kind of dedication the system promised. Joyeeta Dutta wanted to see a system of learning untouched by urban distractions. And Uday Lambat simply wanted to learn about Indian culture which he knew nothing about. To them, a "guru" was an ideal sadly lacking in today's schoolteachers and college lecturers with their interminable strikes. "A guru is the highest person you can look up to," said Abha Gandhi, a final year student at Jesus and Mary College, who wants to learn the values of discipline and obedience this environment promises after the military regimen she underwent in her NCC days. Others want the opportunity to live in a *gurukul*, preferably in a village. The applicants ranged from 13-year-olds, who came with their parents, to medical college interns.

The entire programme is being coordinated by Amreeta Lulla, a psychology student from Delhi University. She came into contact with the classical arts only last year when the scholarship scheme was still in its experimental stages. Totally ignorant of any classical art form, Amreeta went to Suryamukhi Devi's *gurukul* in Manipur where she followed the routine to the last detail, wearing a Manipuri dress and eating rice—the staple diet—which she couldn't digest. That month changed her outlook on classical traditions from curiosity to conviction. She is now one of the forces behind SPICMACAY.

In the world of culture, SPICMACAY has already become a big name. It has a Lec-Dem (Lecture-Demonstration) series spread out in schools and colleges all over the country, and it stages over 250 concerts in 100 towns and cities every season. The *gurukul* scholarship scheme is part of phase two of the SPICMACAY goal: having aroused curiosity through widespread performances in the classical arts, it aims towards reviving dying traditions on the strength of this interest.

—TANIA MIDHA

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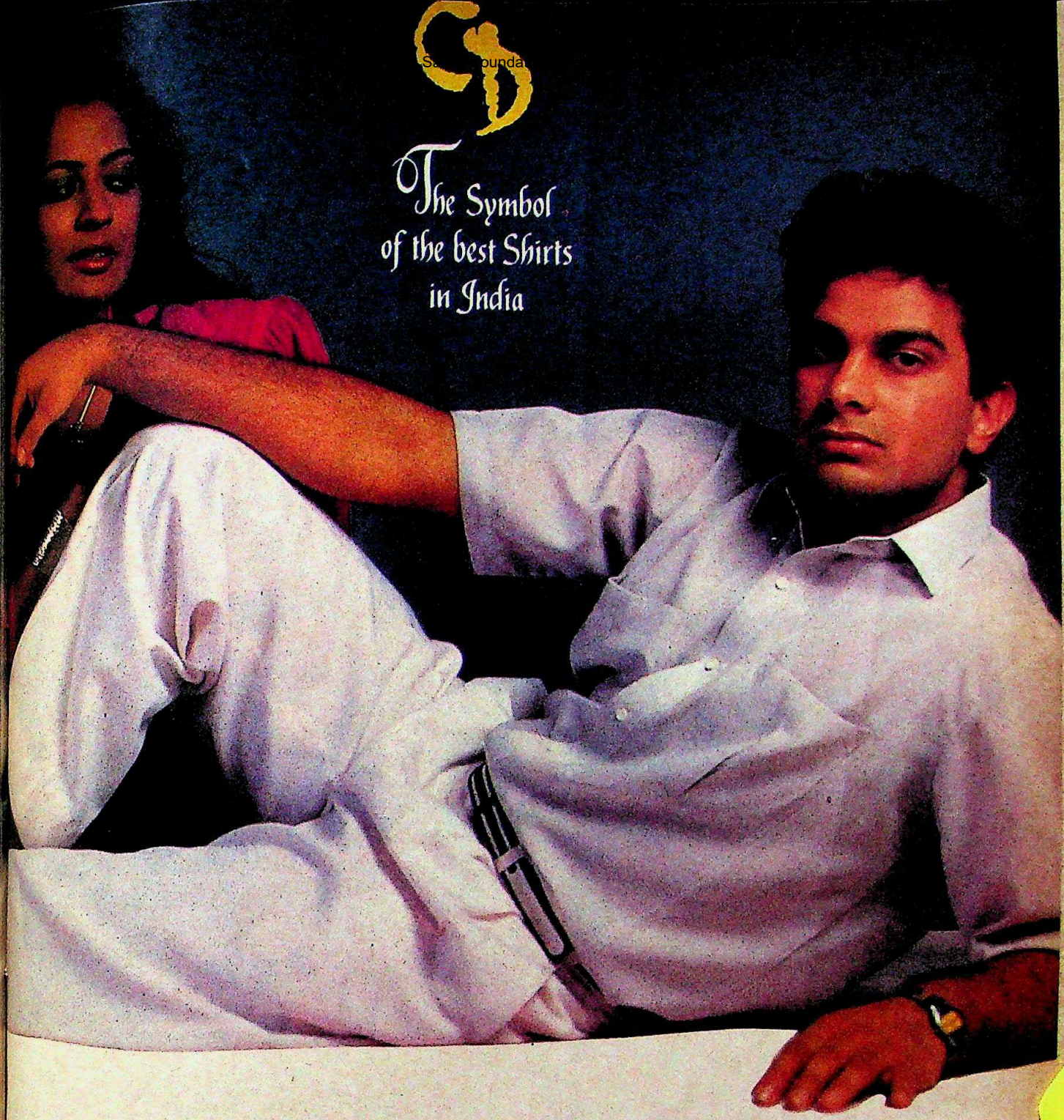

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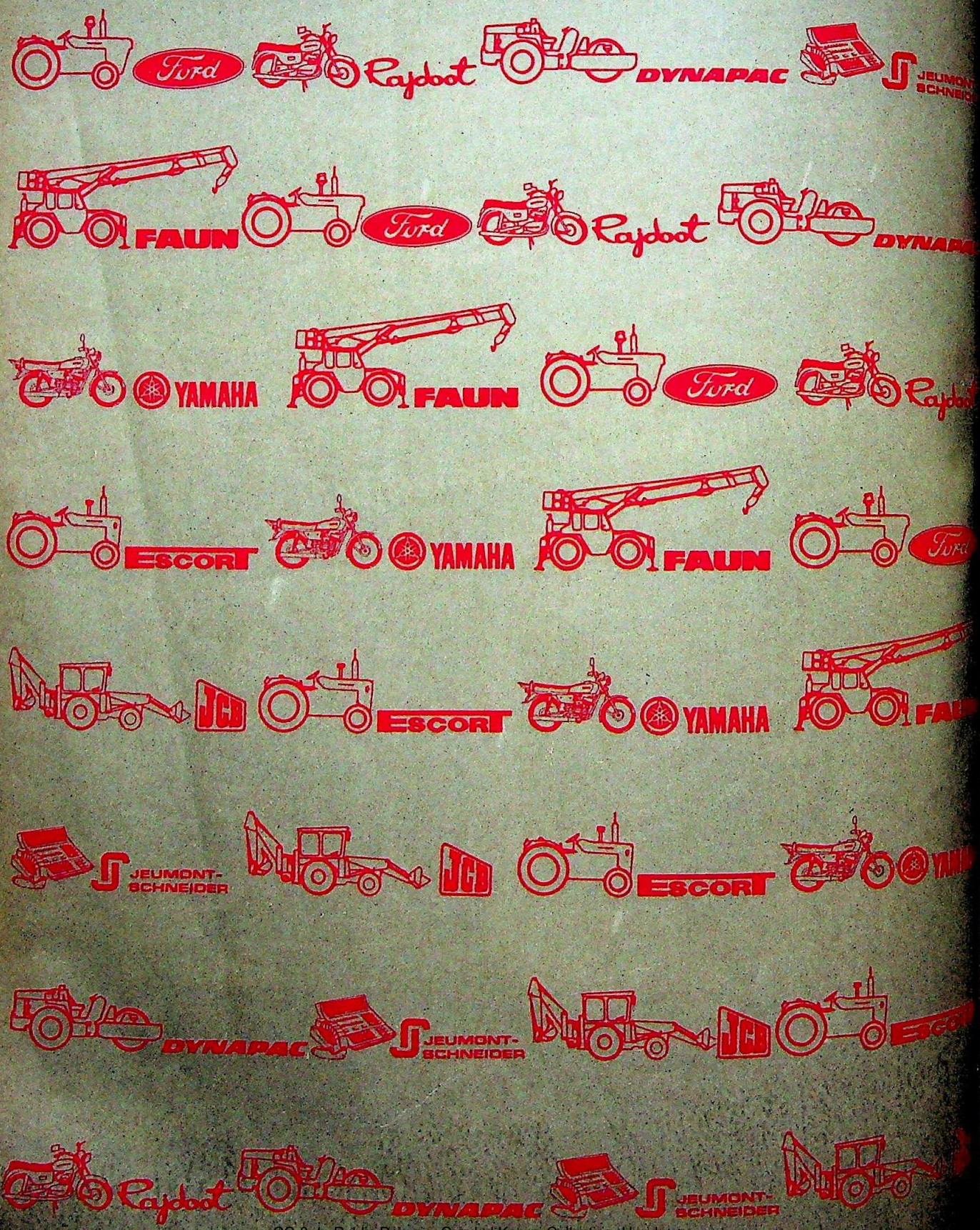

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HMV

Old is Gold

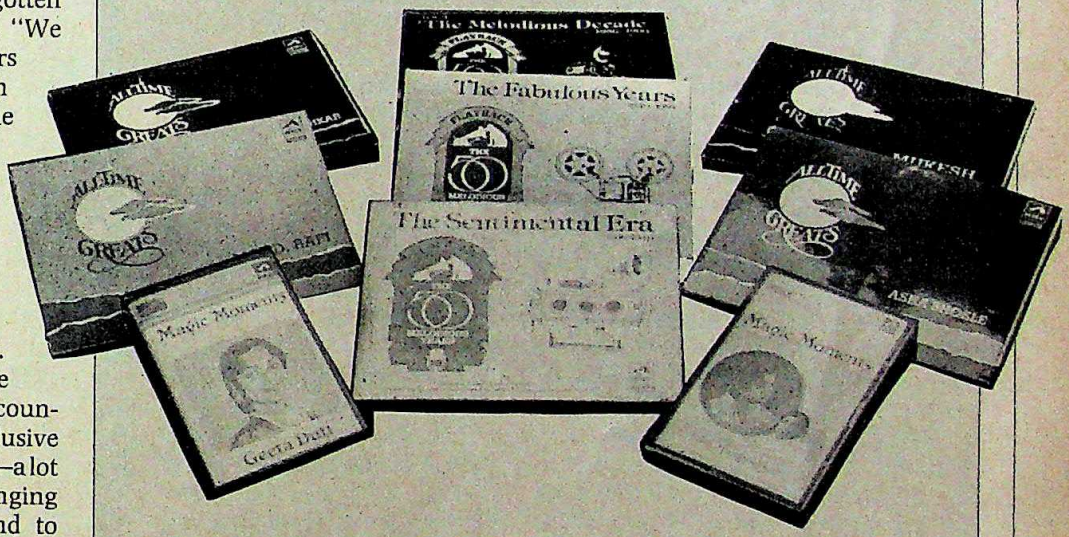
REMEMBER those old 78 rpms lying stacked away in the garage? Old forgotten hits that haven't been heard since the mid-'60s when the sleeker, slimmer long playing records came along with their stereo superiority? For many people, now in their 40s and 50s, their sudden reappearance on the market is occasion for a real old-time high. Inder Khanna, 54, a Delhi businessman remembers relaxed evenings, sitting in the verandah while film tunes floated on the breeze: *Aana meri jaana meri aana Sunday ke Sunday*. "That's the way it was," he said, "just unrushed, happy times."

Recently, someone presented the Khannas with a cassette bursting with old film music that brought back memories of their youth and the forgotten pleasures of going to the cinema. "We hadn't heard these songs for years and years, they disappeared with the old life," he said. Now the market is suddenly flooded with nostalgia. C. Ramchandra, G.M. Durrani, Noor Jahan, Shamshad Begum, Mohammed Rafi, Suman Kalyanpur are all back on the racks, bringing memories of a time when the living was easier and the music less synthetic.

It is also bringing HMV—the oldest recording company in the country and the only one with exclusive rights to almost all the film singers—a lot of money. Last year, playback singing completed 50 years in India and to commemorate the occasion, HMV decided to package the past in a series of cassettes and tapes. So great has been the response to old film music that an excited HMV President Pradip Chanda said: "We will make more money this month than we have in the past five years. We're close to that gold-mine."

For a company that almost closed down a couple of years ago, this is a remarkable comeback. For the last five years, HMV has suffered setback after setback. Its overheads were skyrocketing, piracy almost killed it and the only thing the company seemed to be recording were losses. Last year, cumulative losses stood at a staggering Rs 17 crore. Fifty years of playback singing happened just in time to pull the dog-and-gramophone company out of the red. "This is a tribute to the film classics," said Sanjeev Kohli, national manager, artistes and repertoire division. "The revival started last year and will continue all of '87."

Kishore Kumar and Lata Mangeshkar in an early concert: immortal music



The market is suddenly flooded with nostalgia, bringing back memories of a time when living was easier and the music less synthetic.

For the past several years, HMV had been busy coping with the pressures of current demands, man-in-a-rush music that came and went with the whim. It had no time to even look at its catalogue of copyrighted artistes and songs. It almost exclusively owned Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhosle, Hemant Kumar, Mukesh, Geeta Dutt and all the old time greats. What it had not realised was that consumer requests for old numbers had been piling up. "What we are doing now," as Chanda says, "is catering to that craving."

The collection, which is being released in phases, is spread out over several records including *50 Years of Playback Singing, Magic Moments, All Time Greats, Yaadon ki Manzil*. It takes off right from the first playback song ever recorded—*Kit gae ho khewanhaar* by Saraswati Devi. Nostalgia-lovers can once again listen to the charged energy of Kanan Devi's *Toofan Mail*, the quiet passion of G.M. Durrani's *Neend hamari*

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khwab tumhare, the unabashed fun of Suraiya's *Ek tum ho aur ek main hun*, the irresistible lilt of Asha Bhosle's *Koyi aaya dharkan kaisi hai* and the seductive appeal of Rafi's *Khoya khoya chand*. "They still give me goosebumps," said Amrita Dhawan, 32, a housewife. Gul Khan, who is 26 but an avid collector of the oldies said: "When I heard *Duniya hamare pyaar ki yunhi jawaan rahe*, my God, I sat up. Such music is forever."

Customers are obviously tired of today's trite lyrics and the emptiness of oversynthesised pop. Says Chanda: "Good creative film music doesn't happen anymore. It's all a take-off." While HMV will continue to service current demands, the response to the goldie oldies has taught the company just how powerful an intoxicant nostalgia can be.

When the HMV ship started sinking, corporate titan R.P. Goenka was brought in as chairman to steer it out of the red. The company then made two smart moves. First, it figured out that this project could be handled at marginal costing. All the music already existed with them, just waiting to be breathed back to life. Second, it put it all together. Old hits had been floating in and out of the market, but no one had gift-wrapped it the way it's been done now. HMV will bring out roughly 100,000 pieces in each title. In the first six months, the company had sold 40,000 pieces already.

Old may be gold, true, but it is nevertheless irreparably tarnished. Many of the songs sound like those scratchy 78 rpms tucked away in the garage. Which in fact is exactly what they are. When HMV decided to pull the past out of its hat, it found, funnily enough, that it had the rights but not the records. "We had to literally go hunting around for people who might still have some of their 78s left," said Kohli. So, much of the music on the nostalgia collection sounds like violins playing in the foreground while someone is popping corn in the back.

But, as Chanda explains: "It is not just an audio experience, people want to close their eyes and listen to their past." The real treat is for the music collectors who haunt the *galis* of Chandni Chowk for rare records. Said Masroor Jahan, 47, an Urdu writer, when she heard old favourites like *Dilwaale, Hawa mein udta jae, Mere piya gae Rangoon*: "I used to sing these songs in school." And her son, Gul Khan, says: "My mother and I sit and hear the same songs together. I can feel her emotions. Music has bridged a generation gap for me." And bridged a financial chasm for HMV.

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA

NARMADA PROJECT

Churning Controversy

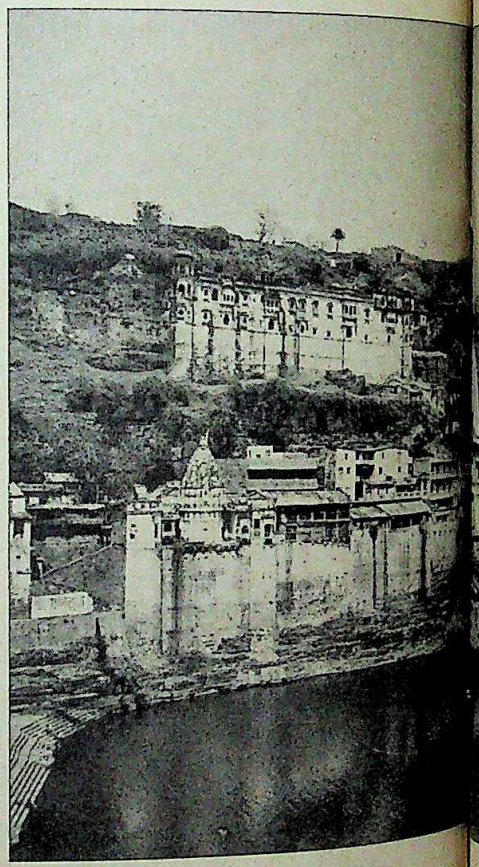
GRANTED environmental clearance by the Rajiv Gandhi Government last month, the Narmada Sagar and Sardar Sarovar dams in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat respectively are churning up controversial waters. The dams, which will jointly cost Rs 10,000 crore, form the heart of the Narmada Valley Development Project, the largest and most ambitious river valley scheme in the country.

Politicians in both Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have hailed the clearance as the "dawn of a new era". But environmentalists insist that the socio-ecological damage will be far greater than in any other comparable project. The dams will inundate a total of 1.12 lakh hectares of land—the biggest submergence that has ever taken place in the country—and lead to the largest human displacement (1.25 lakh people) caused by any project in the world.

Seen in its entirety, the mammoth river project envisages the construction of 29 major, 135 medium and a staggering 3,000 minor dams in Madhya Pradesh alone. According to government claims, the two dams, when completed, will irrigate 19 lakh hectares , benefiting about one crore people, and create an installed power generation capacity of 2,250 MW, which will earn the states some Rs 2,000 crore a year by the sale of electricity alone. The irrigation is expected to produce some 80 lakh tonnes of foodgrains annually (gross value: Rs 445 crore), besides increasing the production of cotton, sugarcane, vegetables and fruits. Moreover, the dams are supposed to check floods, generate pisciculture and employment in the area and supply water for domestic and industrial use. "The project," says Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Motilal Vora, "will change the face of the state."

That, unfortunately, is exactly what environmentalists fear will happen. And certainly not in the way that the Government envisages. According to them, the scheme will lead both states to an ecological disaster. Their apprehensions centre around the phenomenal human cost: about 1.25 lakh people in 435 villages of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat will be displaced and the township of Harsud in the district of Khandwa will be completely wiped out. Kalpavriksha, an environmental action group, charges that "people have been sacrificed on the altar of political and economic expediency."

Narmada Valley Development Authority Chairman Sushil Varma maintains, however: "Our topmost priority will



The Narmada at Omkareshwar: ambitious project

not be construction of the dam but rehabilitation of displaced persons." But the fact is that there just isn't enough land available in Madhya Pradesh to rehabilitate all the people displaced. Gujarat is offering refuge, but according to a survey carried out by the National Institute of Urban Affairs, only 5 per cent of the affected families are willing to move. Varma hopes to purchase land for the displaced in the command area at market

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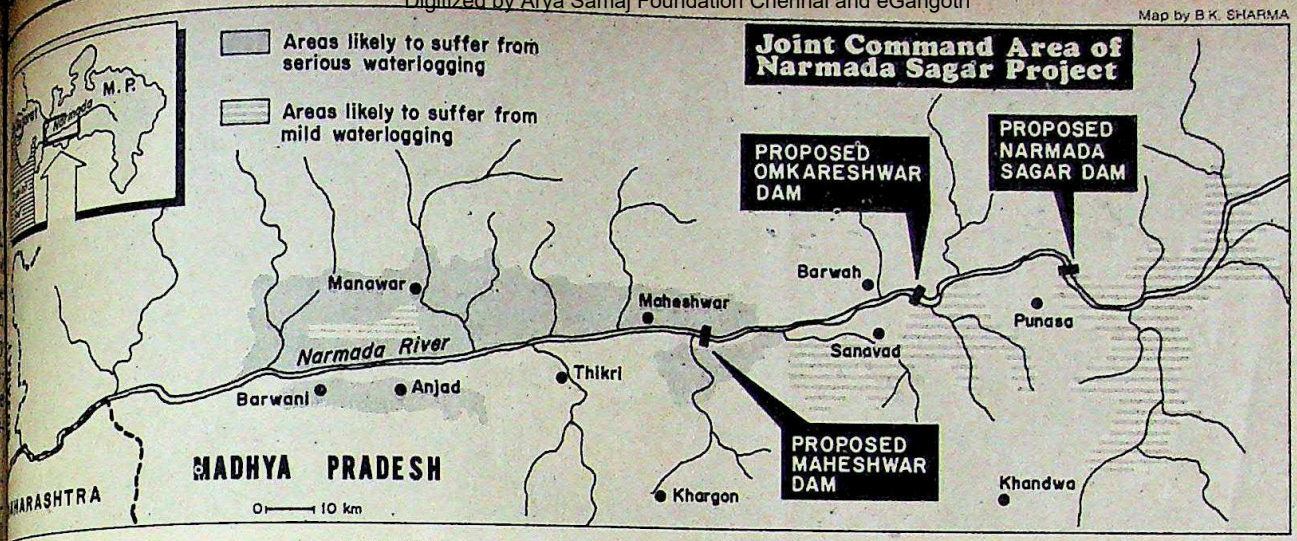
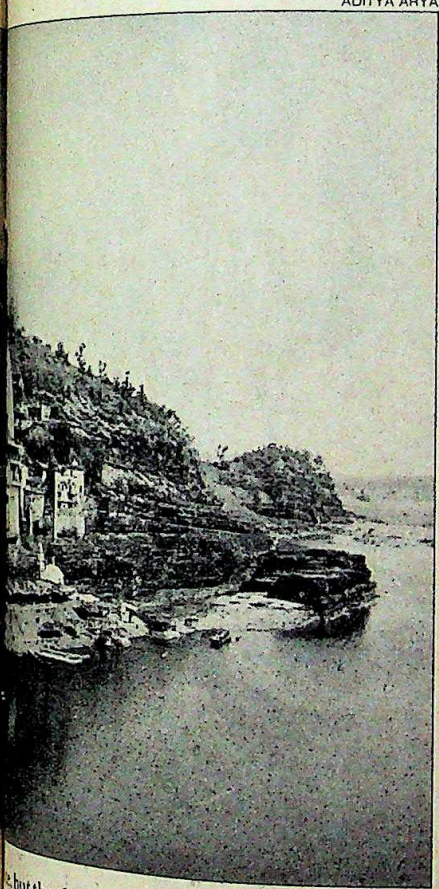


ADITYA ARYA



e, but the threatened villagers point to fact that people displaced by dams there have still not been given alter- e land.

The Narmada Sagar and Sardar ar dams will also cause the largest mergence recorded in the country, 1 lakh hectares, inundating, in the ess, 45,000 hectares of rich rain ts and 40,000 hectares of fertile black n soil and pastures and orchards. e long-term implication of the ecologi- damage is enormous. Some of the ntry's best deciduous forests (estimated value: Rs 330 crore), will be completely destroyed and the Forest Research Institute computes the total environmental loss from the region at the rate of Rs 1.2 crore per hectare for 50 years. The World Rainforest Action Network has decided to pressurise the World Bank against funding the Narmada project.

THE state Government has promised to afforest twice the area of land coming under submergence and has prepared a plan for compensatory afforestation of 90,000 hectares of denuded and degraded forest land at a cost of Rs 162 crore. But what environmentalists want to know is whether this artificial forest can ecologically compensate for the rain-fed, natural forest. Moreover, it will take the Government 12 years to afforest the area and another 30-40 years for the trees to mature. Meanwhile, the submergence of such a vast tract of forest will increase all kinds of human pressure on adjoining forests. Ecological predictions are that such pressure will lead to silting in the river and decrease the lifespan of the dams. Varma admitted that the danger was there but it could be dealt with. "We have undertaken three pilot projects to prevent silting in the catchment area," he said.

Apart from the forests, an estimated 23 km of railway track (cost of relaying—Rs 80 crore), about 85 km of roads, 45 km of telephone lines, 19,000 buildings and 3,310 drinking water wells will also be submerged.

Adding further weight to the ecological argument is the grim warning issued by seismologists at the National Geophysical Research Institute, Hyderabad, that the gigantic dams that are proposed to be built on the river Narmada may trigger earthquakes in the seismologically active river valley. An earthquake with a magnitude of 7.0 on the Richter scale struck and damaged the Koyna Dam in Maharashtra—a region that was totally non-seismic before the building of the dam. The Narmada dam—which at 914 sq km will be the largest man-made lake in India—may trigger quakes even more powerful. "The Government is playing with fire," warned the Madhya Pradesh Geological Association. Varma admits the existence of seismicity but argues that "there are measures to fight it".

Further, according to a study conducted by the Indian Science Institute, almost 40 per cent of the total command area—one lakh hectares of black cotton soil—would suffer from chronic waterlogging. Water-logging increases salinity and renders soil infertile. Project spokesmen, however, claim that they intend to avoid water-logging by digging wells and installing enough tubewells to draw out the excess water.

Whatever is ultimately decided in the case of the Narmada Valley Development Project, the debate has highlighted the opposing concerns of the forces of government and those of environmentalists. Ecologists think that the region could be paying too high a price for its development. Varma, on the other hand, while contending that "development and environment are not contradictory", also makes the official stand clear: "Poverty and environment cannot go together." And there lies the rub.

—N.K. SINGH

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RADIATION

Row on Rays

IT is one of the more bitter battles to have divided the scientific community in recent years. Across the country, amid claims and counter-claims, researchers are advocating the peaceful uses of the atom while medical scientists are opposed to its use fearing risks from radiation. The issue: how safe is it to eat food that is passed through a shower of atomic matter in order to disinfect it and increase its shelf life?

For more than 10 years, advocates of food irradiation—nuclear bombardment with gamma rays and electrons, to sterilise or kill substantial amounts of bacteria—were kept at bay. All evidence pointed to the alarming health risks—like cancer and other forms of cell damage—in consuming irradiated food. Even the pressuring by Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) scientists and the Department of Atomic Energy did not convince Health Ministry officials who refused to clear the use of irradiation technology, keeping public health and safety as the overriding priority.

Early this year, atomic scientists appeared to have notched up a victory when they got the go-ahead from the Health Ministry to irradiate food meant only for export. The Commerce Ministry, the Spices Export Promotion Council and the Marine Products Exports Development Authority had argued that spices and shrimps have high export potential and foreign buyers prefer irradiated hauls to preserve food quality longer. The argument also ran that irradiation would improve the blending quality of spices and restrict the salmonella bacteria that spoil shrimps in cold storage.

But by last fortnight, criticism of the decision had started mounting. "The reservations about food irradiation all over the world should not be lightly brushed aside," warned Dr C. Gopalan, former chief of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and president of the Nutrition Foundation of India.

Research findings by the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), Hyderabad, on the harmful effects of freshly irradiated wheat fed to mice and men, in the mid-'70s, had indicated that irradiation can cause malignant changes in the blood cells. Its observations were reconfirmed by laboratories in West Germany and the UK. Indignant BARC scientists bitterly contested the NIN findings. But the intervening expert technical committee appointed by the Government, and headed by Dr M.S. Swaminathan, left the issue unresolved. Dr P.V. Sukhatme, a statistician, and Dr P.C. Kesavan, a geneticist, who were later appointed to investigate the data did not recommend clearance of irradiated food for human consumption.

Undaunted by the set-back, BARC scientists continued with their laboratory research on irradiation on ham, salami, cocktail sausages, legumes, pepper, chilli, corriander, turmeric and mangoes, all of which can be preserved for a longer time and exported. They were convinced the technology had a future with small countries like Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia, joining bigger users like the US and China. However, most of the 30-odd countries using irradiation technology continue to harbour reservations about the process due to possible long-term health hazards. Even in the US, where the technology was pioneered, food preservation through radiation is largely meant for experimental uses like space research. For instance, American astronauts on the Appollo mission consumed irradiation-treated ham.

"This is a technique with definite advantages and some difficulties," says BARC Director Dr P.K. Iyengar: "If there are takers for irradiated spices, shrimps, onions or potatoes, why should we not export these items?" A joint team of the Food and Agriculture Organisation, International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Health Organisation has said that food irradiated up to an average of one mega rad is safe and does not pose any toxic hazards. BARC doses are far below this limit.

Yet, as NIN Director Dr B.S. Narsing Rao says: "There is no simple way to find out whether foods have been irradiated, and even if it is known, the exact dosage cannot be calculated as in the case of pesticide residues in foods." BARC's only defence is that international guidelines are followed in keeping irradiation levels down. Iyengar says that progress has been slow as irradiation is wrongly associated with induced radioactivity: food does not become radioactive, just as dental and chest X-rays do not make teeth and lungs radioactive. But health officials have held that the process should be regarded as hazardous until proved safe. Equally important is the fact that irradiation has not been shown to be a commercially viable alternative to chemicals in food preservation and fumigation.

BARC is nevertheless going ahead with its plans to take up techno-economic studies on food irradiation in some villages and develop a mobile irradiator to cut down on transport costs and huge storage facilities. But, for the moment, for a population already exposed to a wide range of toxins, malnutrition and food adulterants, the hazards of irradiation of their food is something they can do without.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

Illustration by AJIT NINAN

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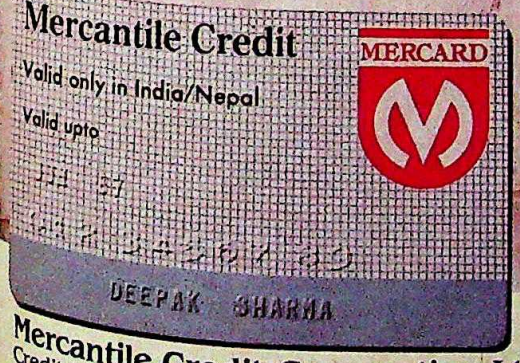

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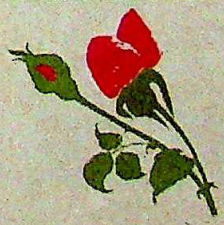

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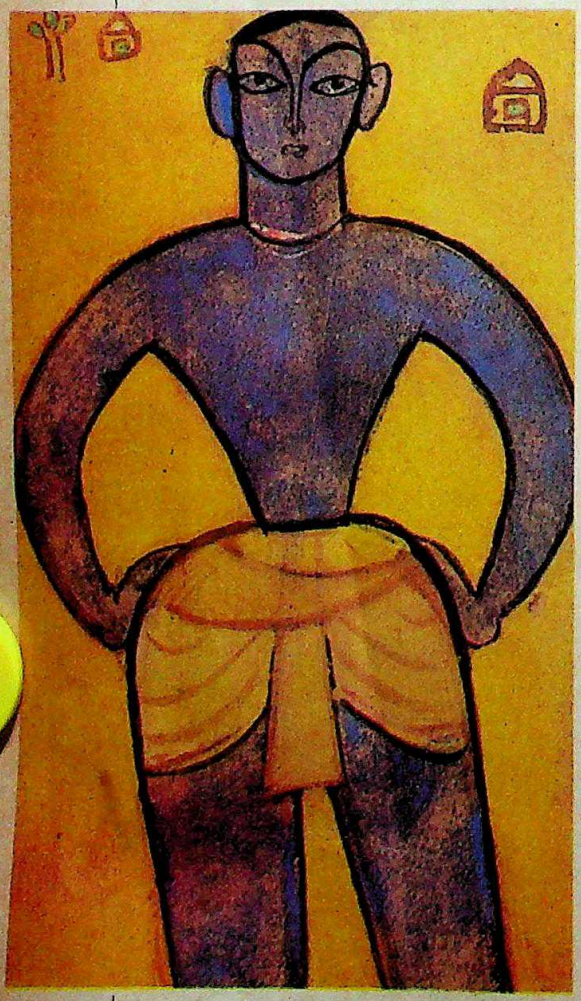
JAMINI ROY

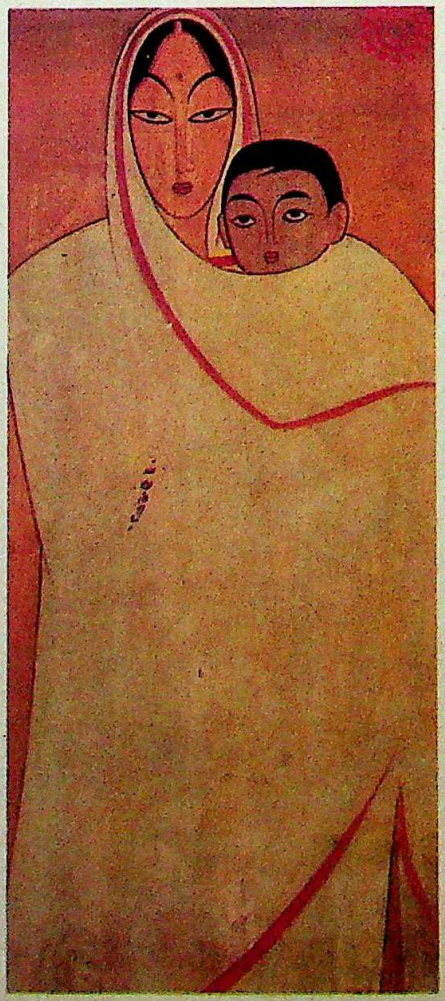
An Indian Sensibility

HE was an art machine who churned out an incredible 20,000-odd paintings in his lifetime, producing over 10 paintings daily during his prime and never selling any for more than Rs 350. He chose the 'low road'—through the common folk art of Bengal—to achieve his artistic aims and championed the ordinary middle class as the upholder of art, but ever increasingly it was the rich and the powerful who thronged to him. He rejected his training in western art and searched obsessively for Indian roots, and yet it was foreigners who bought most of his works. He believed that ordinary people were more important than governments—he had once refused an invitation to Delhi from the then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru to receive an award—but Indira Gandhi declared him a "national artist" and after his death in 1972 ordered that a part of his house be preserved and turned into an art gallery.

Jamini Roy, the artist, nevertheless managed to attain a basic goal: international recognition for producing truly timeless works of art. And last fortnight exhibitions in Calcutta, Bombay and New Delhi commemorating his 100th birth anniversary, once again testified to this growing recognition. Another telling indicator is the ever increasing value of his works. In one Calcutta gallery, last fortnight, one of his oil paintings depicting a Santhal woman with a child sold for Rs 50,000. In the West, his paintings have of late changed hands for upwards of $ 10,000 (Rs 1.29 lakh), because the export of this "national artist" is banned.

"He could have been a millionaire many times over if he had wanted to," says the artist's youngest son, Moni Roy, who has inherited a part of the rambling house in South Calcutta's Ballygunge Place, built by his father in 1949. Moni and his three brothers had also inherited





(Clockwise from top) Santhal Woman and Child; *Three Pujarinis; Mother and Child; Blue Boy*: timeless works

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...700 paintings and 700 sketches ...which they have been gradually ...over the years. One particularly ...example of the artist's line drawings ...sold by the youngest son for as much ...35,000.

...day, Jamini Roy paintings are ...by the National Gallery of Mod... New Delhi, the Academy of Fine ...Calcutta and a few private collec... The supply is chiefly from the surviv... of the artist and about 15 families ...ated with him, who both bought ...were gifted the pieces.

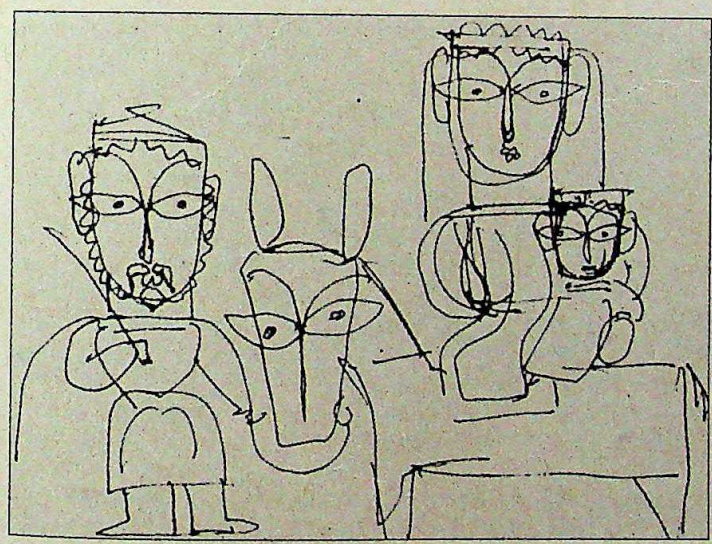
...Jamini Roy's works would have had ...better market, had it not been for the ...fakes floating around," laments ...hoot Art Gallery's Dr Prakash ...wal. A major problem, explains ...wal, stems from the belief that the ...'s son Amiya (Potol) Roy produced ...fakes before his death last year. A ...number of Jamini Roy paintings ...repetitive subjects—stylised an... goods and women—consequently ...as little as a thousand rupees. Many ...paintings were at best sketched by ...ist and then given to Amiya for ...ing. These are the ...kes', says Kejriwal ...ly experts can tell ...from a genuine work.

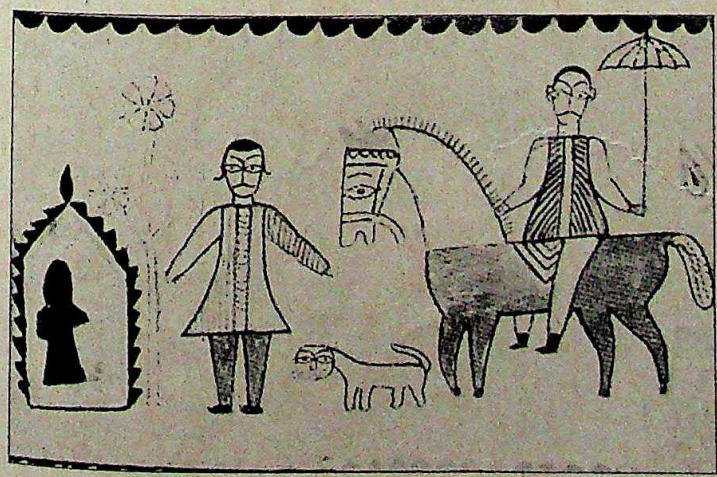
...n the artist had per...alised that his simple ...(a Bengali folk art) ...could be copied and ...sign his paintings only ...time of handing them ...a buyer. Panchanan ...the artist's faithful ...who helped him mix ...recalls that there ...over a thousand un...paintings in the house ...Jamini Roy fell seri...ill in 1970. Until his ...Panda would bring ...intings to sign during ...riods when his condi...improved. "He signed ...ds of paintings but ...now there are many ...gs in the house with...his signature," says ...But experts say that ...of the unsigned paint...will sell since they repre...more complex and ...ible-to-imitate styles.

...ugh Jamini Roy painted fast, he took weeks to think of themes which he would work out through rough sketches done late at night while lying in bed after his 7 p.m. dinner. Once he found a theme, he would express it through a series of related—and often very similar-looking—paintings. Moni recalls that during an exhibition at his Baghbazar residence in 1943, "seven foreigners all fell for one particular painting and all of them were determined to buy nothing but that one." The artist solved the problem by making them wait while he did seven different paintings—each of them on the same subject and only slightly different—and sold them to the astonished but pleased foreigners.

Jamini Roy could afford to be prolific because of his total mastery over his lines. In the years following his conscious decision to break with the western style of painting—which he had successfully practised till the age of 35 mainly through portraiture—Jamini Roy developed an entirely new, personal style, rooted in the Patua folk style.

So impressed was French art critic A. Herve Masson with Jamini Roy's works that he promptly counted him amongst the "greatest contemporary masters", comparing him with the great Fauvist, Henri Matisse. Other European critics were equally impressed , calling him the artistic "Prophet of India". For, here was a style that looked Indian, instead of being merely an Indianised version of western artistic modes. Moreover, it was the first time that an Indian artist had succeeded in evolving a technique and style to express apparently primitive, almost crude forms.





It would not have been difficult for Jamini Roy to maintain a less rigorous regime, painting less and charging more. His reputation had been firmly established by the late '30s and from then on had started the flow of celebrities to his house. Even Mahatma Gandhi visited him in the early '40s to see for himself the artistic ascetic working with fanatic fervour in a simple house in North Calcutta's crowded Baghbazar area. Among his famous fans was also the late Mrs Gandhi.

"My father was interested in ensuring that people who bought his works were genuinely interested in art and would take good care of them," says Moni Roy. There were occasions when Jamini

...(from top) Jamini Roy; ...ing *Flight to Egypt*; ...tempera work

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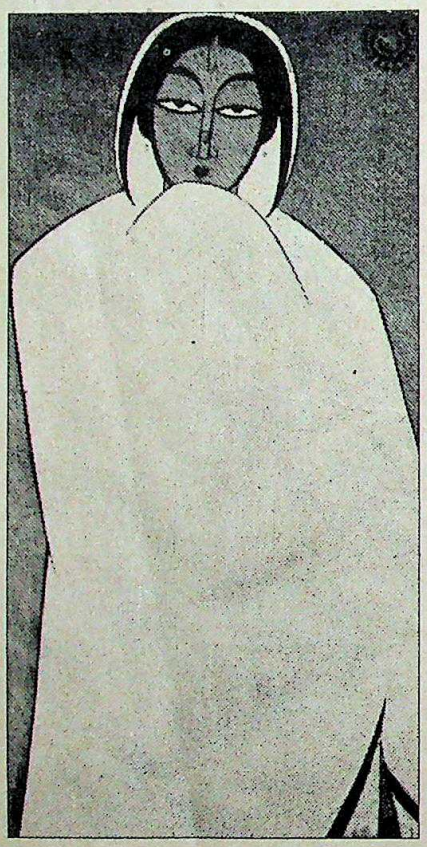
Roy turned down offers from the 'upper class society-types' interested only in acquiring his works for their snob value. At times he even bought back his paintings from people who did not take proper care of them.

The Jamini Roy Art Gallery opened last September—seven years after the Left Front Government acquired the portion of the house where the artist had worked. Unfortunately, his studio is now an office for the gallery, furnished by an ugly rexine covered table and a large, dusty file rack. The state Government maintains the 227 paintings bought from his sons and periodically displays them at the gallery.



Bengali Woman: personal style

It is this collection that provides middle class art lovers access to Jamini Roy's works for, as the recent exhibitions at Calcutta's Birla Academy, the Chitrakoot Art Gallery and Delhi's Dhoomimal Art Gallery showed, most of the artist's works are privately owned and inaccessible to the general public except on special occasions. This is ironical because Jamini Roy deliberately kept down the price of his paintings in order to encourage middle class art lovers to buy and display paintings.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

ANDHRA PRADESH

Wage Verdict

THE labourer is worthy of his hire—even if he does happen to be a convict. In a landmark verdict last month, Justice P.A. Choudary of the Andhra Pradesh High Court has declared that a prisoner has the constitutional right to earn his living and more important, that the state Government is obliged to give him work and pay for it.

Till now, convicts in most state prisons have been working at various jobs; carpenters, weavers, blacksmiths, painters and cobblers, but have never been paid a decent wage. Four years ago, prisoners in Kerala jails took the issue to the state high court demanding a wage of Rs 8 a day. The court agreed but the Kerala Government stayed the fiat by appealing to the Supreme Court.

But the Andhra Pradesh case is likely to finally establish the standards for prisoner's work and the wages they can earn. The case itself was brought to the court in March 1985 by Bhaskar Vijaya Kumar, 26, a final year law student at the Andhra University, Vishakhapatnam. Kumar, who visited the Central Prison while preparing for his criminology paper, was appalled to discover that prison administrators were paying a pittance of 50 paise a day to an unskilled worker and Re 1 to a skilled one. "It was disgusting to find the law abused in an institution intended to reform those who did not follow it earlier in their lives," he says.

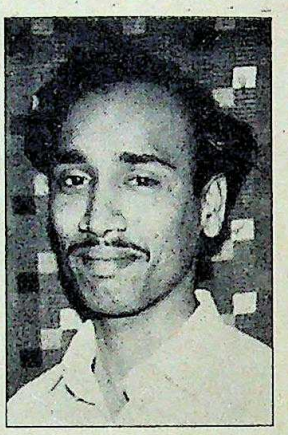
Kumar promptly petitioned the high court and charged the state with violating its constitutional obligations: "The state is perhaps contributing indirectly to aggravating the poverty of some prisoners' families by not providing the convicts the increased minimum wage."

The state retaliated by questioning Kumar's right to raise the issue since he was not an affected person, a stance Justice Choudary overruled. The Government then contended that all expenses on the prisoners—including food, clothing and medical facilities—had to be computed in determining the wage and that the total cost would exceed the standard minimum wage for workers outside jails. Choudary, however, called the payments "woefully inadequate" and directed the state Government to constitute a committee of penalogists, sociologists and economists to fix a scale of wages which would be fair to both prisoners and those doing the same jobs outside.

The judgement was obviously long overdue. But the irony is that Andhra Pradesh pays one of the highest wages to prisoners and has, in fact, revised wages twice in the past eight years—a skilled prisoner gets Rs 3 a day and an unskilled one Rs 2 a day. And, according to state Prisons Directorate officials, since another Rs 8 a day is spent to meet their living expenses, prisoners cannot complain of injustice. But most other states have so far been paying a pittance and prisoners are nothing more than slave labour. The new judgement finally promises to offer adequate compensation to prisoners toiling in the dark reaches of the country's prisons.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

Kumar (left) and Justice Choudary



The landmark verdict of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, by which the state Government is obliged to provide a prisoner work and pay for it, is likely to finally establish the work and wage standards for prisoners.

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◆ What extends **Rajiv Gandhi**'s range and keeps him roving? Right: his spankingly new silver grey Range Rover Vogue—gifted by the King of Jordan, in the exhaust wake almost of the Mercedes 500 SEL he gave the year before. But the new vogue took the car-happy prime minister on a bumpy ride; several questions are being asked about his Brezhnev-like fad. Why had Rajiv imported the jeep in the name of the special protection group chief, bypassing the customs duty rule that all heads of government must follow? Why did he accept such gifts (Malaysia is rumoured to be presenting him yet another)? What was wrong with a swadeshi car? If Rajiv's political career goes into reverse gear, his automobile addiction could backfire rather badly.

◆ **Slava Zaitsev** looks as if he will break into dance any moment—spiky upturned hair, florid pink Christian Dior scarf flung with measured abandon round the neck and offset by earthy exuberance—but it is only design that this talented one-man Soviet fashion industry breaks into. The man behind the Zhivago look in the West might add a touch of India to Soviet haute couture. Here to organise a textile exhibition and fashion shows for the Festival of Russia in India later this year, his sketch pad overflowed with ideas. Says Zaitsev: "The potential (for fashion) was always there in Russian folk traditions."

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Rajiv with Rover: car happy

JYOTHI VENKATESH

Jayaprada: sisterly love

PUSHKARNA

Zaitsev: deft designs

◆ **Jayaprada** is in the family way. But in her case, it is dynastic succession. The perfect beauty has launched her first film as producer: and brother Shriram Kumar makes his debut. Her other brother is already in films and this time the family cast do a Tamil and Telugu version of *Rocky*. The movie has Shriram in the role Sunjay Dutt played in the Hindi version. Says Jayaprada: "Acting runs in my family. Besides myself, my brothers are both equally good in acting. I have launched the film to give a break to my brother, Shriram."

◆ Sunset Boulevard now crosses Carter Road. Talk in tinsel town is that middle-aged *enfant terrible* **Mahesh Bhatt**'s just-completed film *Kaash* is based on the rise and fall of Rajesh Khanna and has a *coup de grace*: **Dimple Kapadia** plays the superstar's estranged wife; the superstar is Jackie Shroff. But Bhatt denies taking many a leaf from Khanna's turbulent life: "My film is about the trials of a superstar who falls out of grace. Mine is an inspired subject about a father and a son and of an estranged wife." Parallels with persons living or separated are purely coincidental.

Jackie and Dimple: *Silsila* II

JYOTHI VENKATESH

◆ From the schoolroom to the studio, wasn't a long distance. And to a national award, the step was even shorter. For **Monisha Unni**—at 16, perhaps the youngest actress ever to win the best actress award, for the Malayalam film *Nakhakshathangal* (Nail Marks)—the fact that it was her first film was great.

Unni: youthful success

But the unpretentious star gives the credit to director Hariharan. "I simply did what I was told to," she says.

She is still only in the 10th standard, reads Nancy Drew and Agatha Christie and insists: "I will not do any intimate scenes or wear revealing clothes." Brave new words.

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FOCUS THIS FORTNIGHT

The Agony of Meerut

The devastating riots that swept through Meerut and its adjoining areas were frightening in their intensity. The abnormal death toll is a warning that communal tensions have been allowed to reach a dangerous level and other Meeruts can erupt elsewhere.

COVER STORY 30

A Delicate Balance

The Haryana elections will be crucial. INDIA TODAY commissioned psephologist Prannoy Roy to analyse election results in Haryana over the past 10 years and pinpoint the most important factors that will determine the outcome.

SPECIAL REPORT 74

Chinks in the Armour

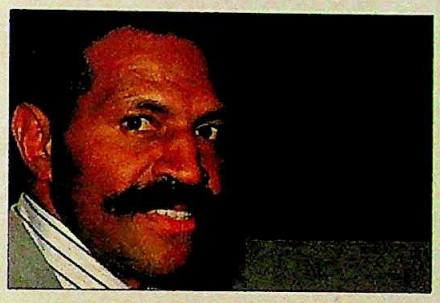
Contrary to optimistic statements in Parliament, India's prestigious Main Battle Tank project still has serious design flaws according to the latest evaluation tests carried out by Army Headquarters. Costs have also escalated.

DEFENCE 78

Flying through Turbulence

Rajiv Gandhi's pilot friend and close aide Satish Sharma is the latest focus of controversy over his lavish life-style and his role in the Prime Minister's establishment. A report on the man and the controversies along with an exclusive interview.

SPECIAL REPORT 90



A Communal Coup

The military takeover in peaceful Fiji by Lt-Colonel Rabuka threw out the allegedly "Indian" Bavadra government and replaced the island's democratic system with a new one that will ensure Fijian control, seemingly for all time to come.

GLOBE TROTTING 102

India's Vanishing Wildlife

The past three decades have seen the systematic decimation of India's once-rich wildlife. Species after species has moved onto the highly endangered list. Even wildlife preserves have become areas of conflict. A report.

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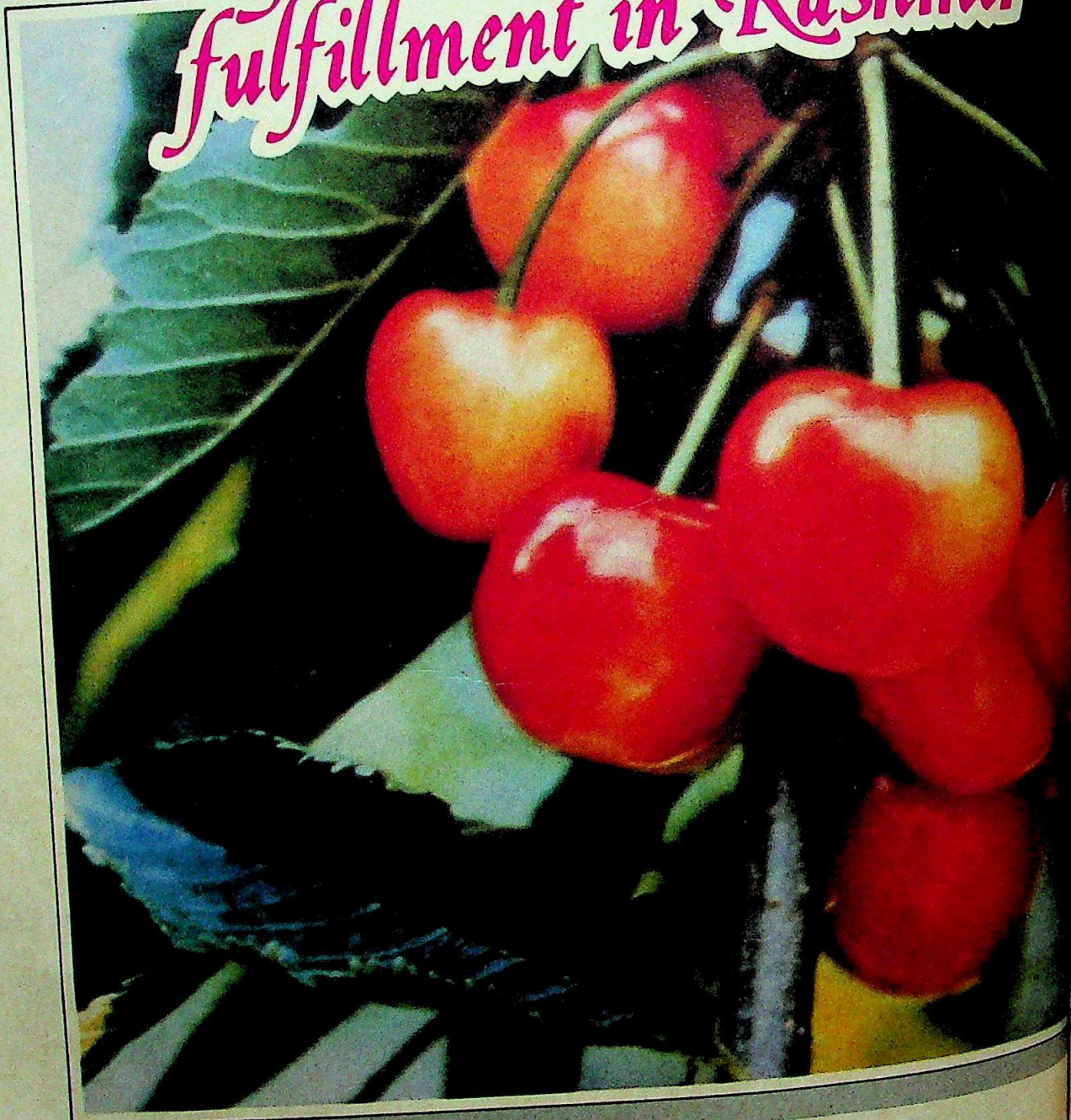
This is just a glimpse of fulfillment in Kashmir



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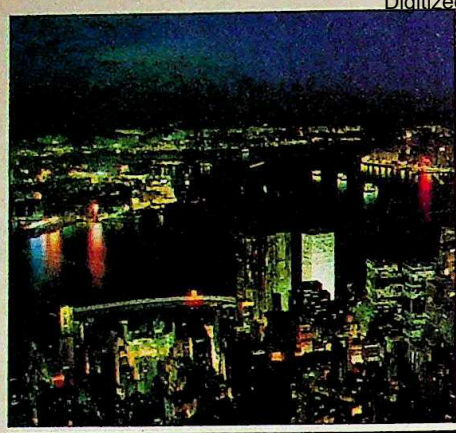

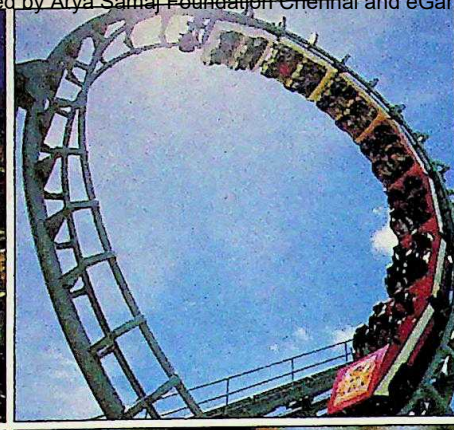

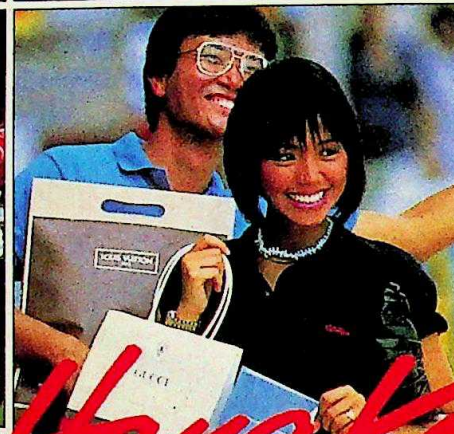

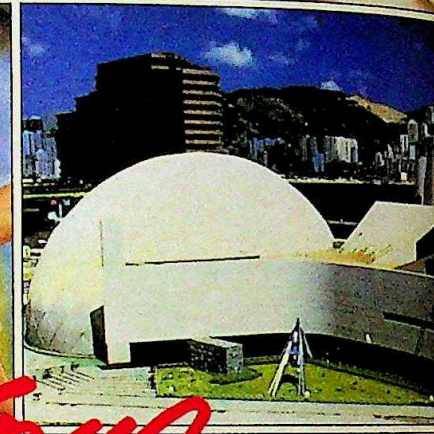

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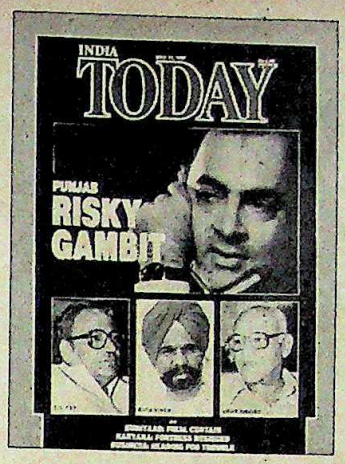

COMPLEX CURE

Your cover story ("A Risky Gambit", May 31) is an excellent journalistic piece with a critical analysis of the complex situation in Punjab. The need of the hour is to avoid a further alienation of the Sikhs and replace violence with love.

Kanyakumari — G. DAVID MILTON

■ President's rule in Punjab is a right move. But it is unfortunate that this decision was not taken earlier—in which case the situation would now have been under control.

Ludhiana — CHARANJIT SINGH

■ President's rule provides a chance to the ruling party to enhance its falling credibility. Rajiv's words to Barnala: "You and your government will be judged by the firmness with which you act," ironically applies to himself now.

Madras — T.R. SRIDHAR

■ With elections in neighbouring Haryana round the corner, Rajiv Gandhi has only reinforced the suspicion that he is more concerned with election success than with long-term stability in Punjab.

Ahmedabad — M.V. RAVINDRAN

■ It is tragic that the Government continues to ignore the country's interests, for the sake of petty politics.

Gwalior — SANJEEV RAINA

■ Your conclusions on Punjab are biased as you seem to be concerned only with the ways that the administration appeases the 'Sikh psyche'. But what about the sentiments and plight of the non-Sikhs in Punjab who constitute almost 48 per cent of the population?

Delhi — PARJAN KUMAR JAIN

■ Before President's rule, Punjab was ruled by two B's—Barnala and Balwant Singh, and now after the imposition of President's rule, it is ruled by two R's—Ray and Ribeiro. But will both be able to free Punjab from the two M's—the militants and the military?

Amritsar — KAMAL JIT SINGH AHLUWALIA

ERODING VALUES

Kudos for your editorial ("Disintegrated Circuits", May 31) which rightly highlights the decline of national institutions. This problem is compounded by the deterioration in moral values in public life due to individual self-interest.

Coimbatore — N.P. LAKSHMINARAYAN

CORROSIVE CULTURE

Your article ("Criminals in Congress", May 31) gives a vivid picture of the situation in Madhya Pradesh where the Congress(I) has been winning elections only by money-power and goondaism. It is a sorry comment on the current state of affairs that any honest police officer or bureaucrat who tries to oppose these elements is transferred to other places.

Bhopal — ADIL FEROZ

■ The pathetic picture of the two-year-old boy with acid burns illustrates the fact that ours is a sick society, motivated by greed for power and material gain.

Bangalore — G.I. D'SOUZA

SPEAKER'S SERMON

Your interview with Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker P.H. Pandian exposed the man ("Legislature is Supreme", May 31). Such interviews allow a deeper understanding of our politicos.

Madras — S. RETNASWAMY

■ Peoples' representatives are elected by the people and are for the people, but they do not discharge their duties gratis. They get huge perks, a fat salary and a pension to boot. So it is amazing to see Pandian's logic that the media should distribute their publications and theatres should screen films for free.

Madras — T.M. SUNDARARAMAN

TEACHERS' TRAVAIL

College teachers today ("Moonlighting Mania", May 31) face innumerable problems. When the so-called 'makers of the nation' lead such a miserable life, it is hard to expect that the careers of students will not be affected. The Govern-

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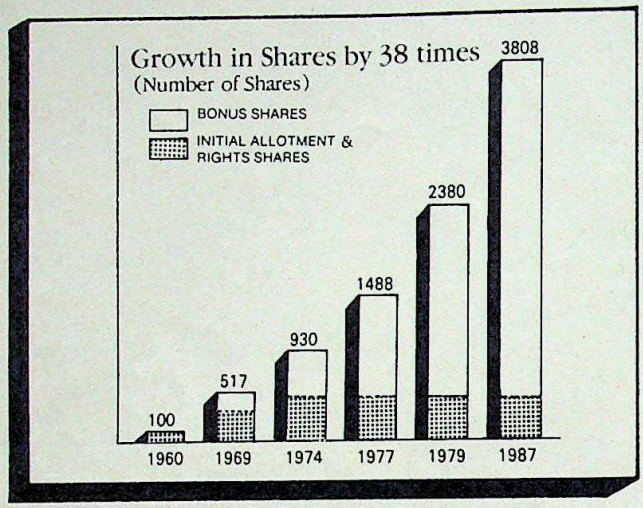
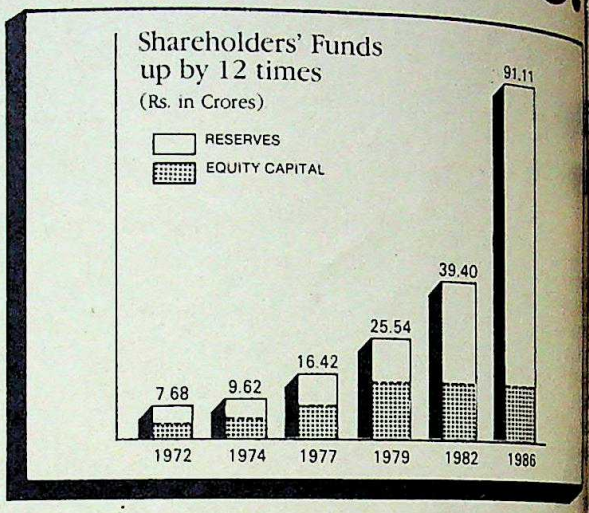
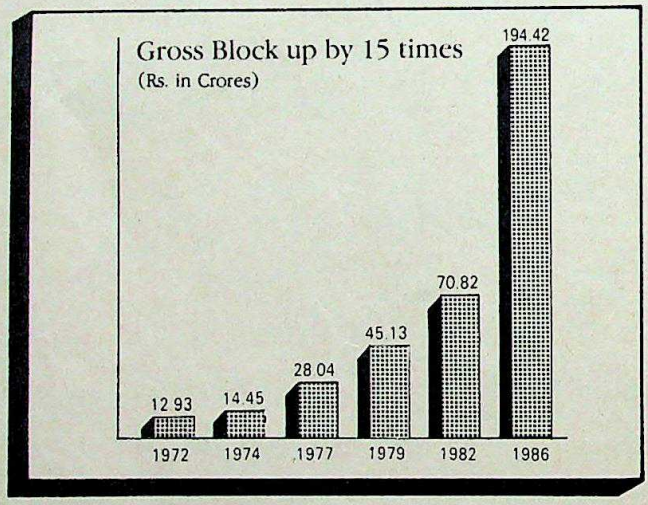
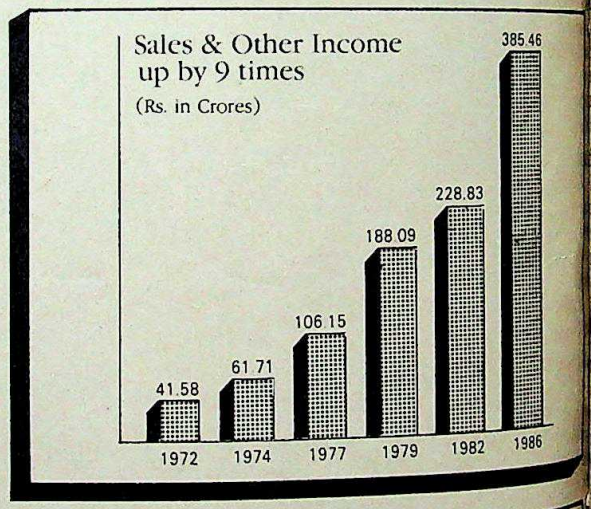
An issue of confidence.









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* Market price of Equity Share Rs. 50.25 as on 13th April, 1987. ** These Shares would be entitled for pro rata dividend for 1988.

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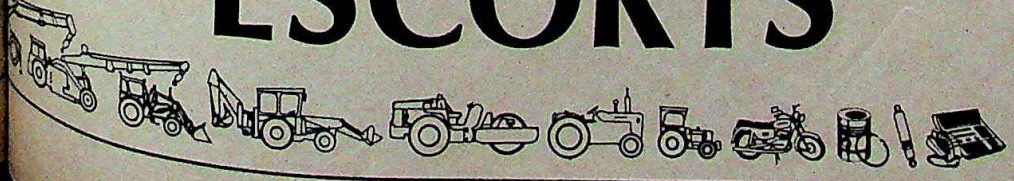

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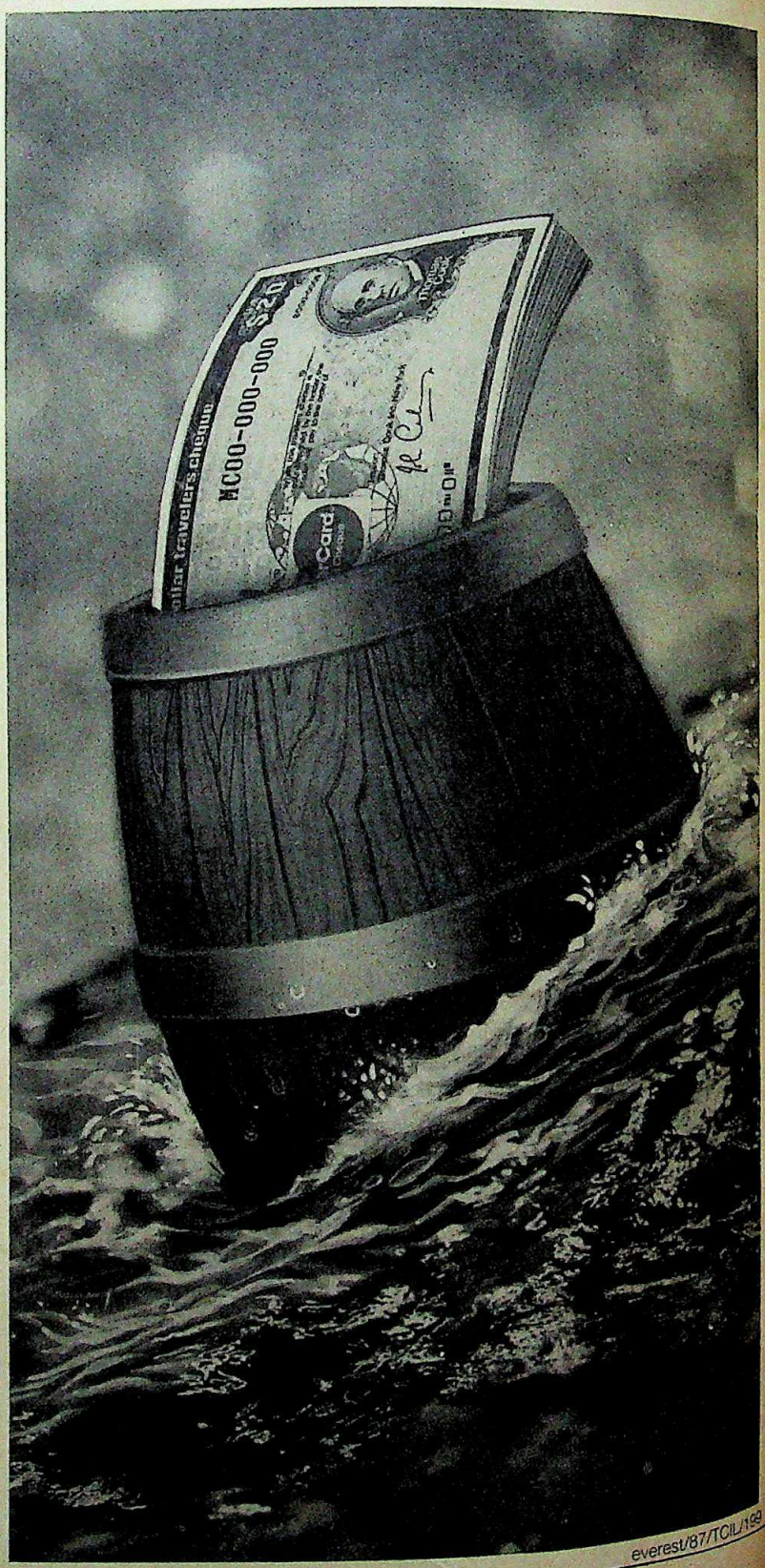

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ment must make a genuine attempt to improve their working conditions.

Muzaffarpur — RAJ KUMAR JHA

■ Sky-rocketing rents and the dizzying rise in prices since the salaries of university teachers were last revised in 1973 have led to the present scramble to make both ends meet. And because of the delay in implementing the Mehrotra Committee report, less competent people will continue to join the profession.

Delhi — VINOD CHOWDHURY

■ In spite of the perspective taken by your article, I am convinced that there are hundreds of Delhi college lecturers who, regardless of their 'poverty', would not like to change places with a senior government officer or company executive. Still, the Government's indifference towards bettering their lot is wrong.

New Delhi — DAMODAR AGRAWAL

■ A lecturer is much better off than a gazetted officer. A young college lecturer gets the same emoluments as a young gazetted officer but works fewer hours per day and gets longer vacations.

Bharuch (Gujarat) — DR S. KUMAR

LASTING LESSONS

SPICMACAY ("Reviving the Gurukul", May 31) has been doing good work. But it needs publicity to make it more effective throughout the country.

Muzaffarpur — YASHWANT PARASH

CURTAIN CALL

Buniyaad ("Bringing Down the Curtain", May 31) enlivened every Tuesday and Saturday TV for so long that it is going to be sorely missed. The director deserves all praise for his authentic portrayal of the partition sequences.

Jamshedpur — B.N. BOSE

■ Kudos to Ramesh Sippy for extracting the best out of the *Buniyaad* team. At the same time, I do agree that the serial failed to fulfil its initial promise of a tryst with recent history. Historians took a back-seat in correcting the aberrations of Mandi House.

New Delhi — SOMNATH DHAR

RUTHLESS RAIDERS

It is unfortunate that the press thinks that anyone who is arrogant with the business community, like V.P. Singh, is pious ("Repressing Reforms", May 31). I wish Rajiv Gandhi would constitute an inquiry to probe the high-handedness of officials during raids ordered by the former finance minister.

Calcutta — PANNA LAL MUNDHRA

MARUTI MANIA

Your article on Marutis ("A Brash New Culture", May 31) was interesting but it seemed to attribute road recklessness to the advent of Marutis. From my own experience, Indian drivers are maniacs who are gifted driving licenses from corrupt road officials. They're unsafe in any car.

New Delhi — NIRAJ DAWAR

■ Here are some more puns recently spotted on Marutis—the newest rage on the roads: 'I am a baby Merc', 'I am small and sweet and a ride with me is a real treat', 'Some babies don't stay at home'!

Secunderabad — ANOOP AGARWAL

■ It is ironical that an article about increasing deaths on the road—which begins with the ghastly incident of Kapoor's family dying when their Maruti crumpled against a small tree—should be followed by a story which has youngsters raving about the new peppie Maruti culture.

New Delhi — RADHA KRISHAN

SMOKING GUN

Congratulations on your exhaustive coverage of the Bofors scandal ("Bofors and After", May 15). Had it been any other country, the Government would have resigned at once.

Comtai — DIPANKAR PATTANAYAK

■ The disclosures made in the cover story pose vital questions concerning the security of the country vis-a-vis defence acquisitions. It would be a dangerous mistake to handle this unprecedented situation in a clumsy and inept manner.

Kottayam — V.K. SATHYAVAN

PEACE CALL

The special report ("The New Offensive", May 15) brought to the fore the plight of the Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka. India should step up its mediation efforts to bring peace to the strife-torn country. Terrorism in any form has never succeeded and will never be able to achieve anything but grief and despair for the victims' families.

Aurangabad — HONED TUNKIWALLA

FIGHTING FIT

Ribeiro is right in his interview ("No Chance for Success", May 15) that no fight against terrorism can be won unless the hearts of the public are won. It is high time the Government realises the complexity of the situation and gives him a free hand in tackling terrorism.

Karimnagar — K. SRINIVAS

■ Ribeiro has done a great job in fighting terrorism. It is a pity that politicians who are not doing anything themselves to curb terrorist activities are becoming a hurdle in Ribeiro's path.

Bhilai Nagar (MP) — B.S. SUBRAMANAYAM

KILLERS ON WHEELS

Your special feature ("Death on the Roads", May 15) was a real eye-opener. Easy availability of licenses, lack of road planning and poor enforcement of regulations are the main reasons for this escalating tragedy.

Gurgaon — MANDIP KAPOOR

■ Your traffic story was an excellent survey of the terrible rise in accidents. Every year, Gujarat alone loses as many people on the road as the number who perished in one Bhopal tragedy. The authorities should take offenders to the places where they can see the horrific effects of such accidents and educate them about the effects of rash driving.

Ahmedabad — NARENDRA THAKKER

WELCOME VERDICT

The Supreme Court's verdict ("Historic Win", May 15) has ended the long-drawn deadlock on the role and status of district police chiefs. They are now directly responsible to their immediate superior in the police bringing to an end the bureaucratic raj.

Cochin — S.K. NAIR

■ The historic judgement has shaken the whole country and given a new dimension and image to the police.

Bombay — D.S. SOMAN

HIGH-HANDED

Your report on New Vrindavan in West Virginia ("Palace of Intrigue", May 15) shows how unfair the US Government is towards a religion that is attracting thousands of Americans and inspiring them to adopt a new way of life.

Ratlam — M.R. SISODIA

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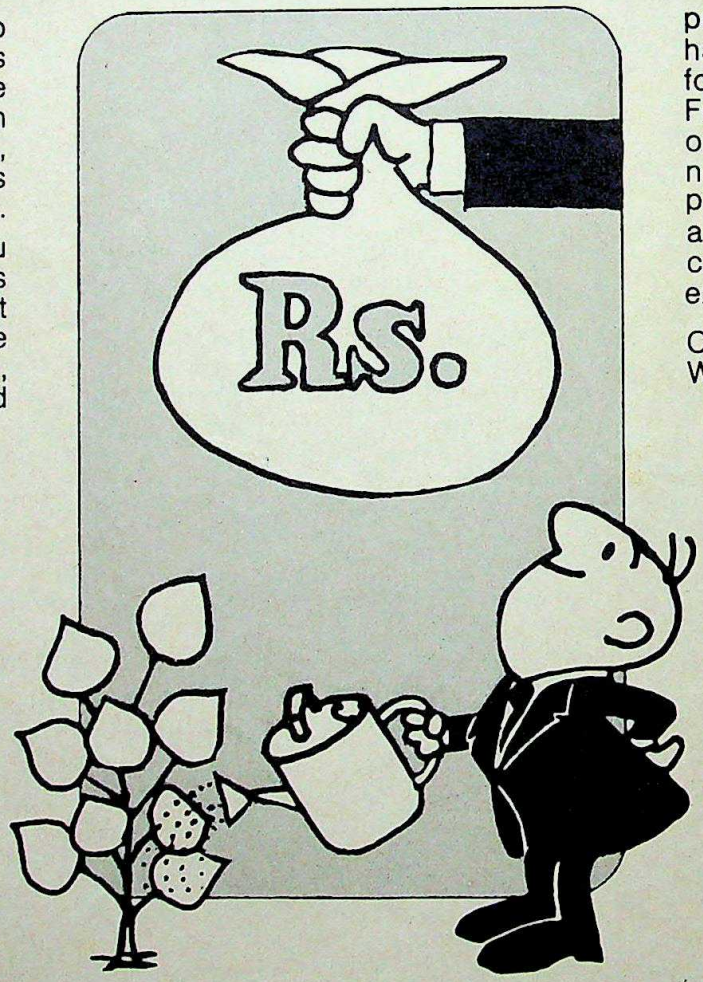

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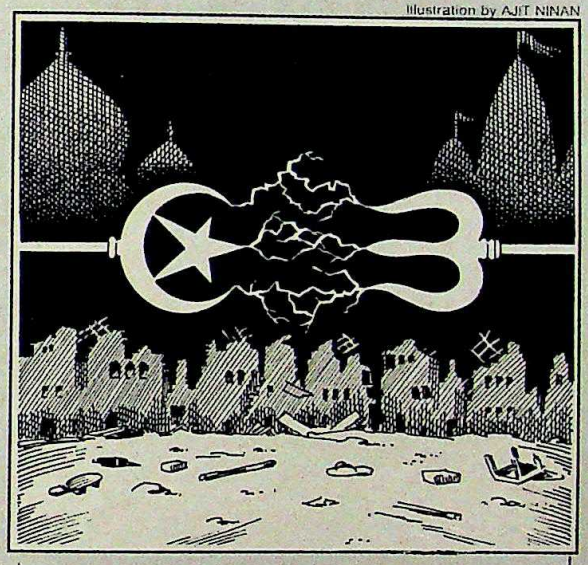
A Deadly Confrontation

ALIGARH in 1978, Jamshedpur in 1979, Moradabad in 1980, Hyderabad in 1981, Meerut in 1982, Bhiwandi in 1984, Ahmedabad in 1985, now Meerut again. And the canker is spreading. All of Uttar Pradesh has been a communal powder keg these last several months. Gujarat has been transformed from a peaceful, industrious state, to a place where communalism has taken deep and seemingly permanent root. Punjab has a problem of a different sort, fundamentalism has raised its head in Kashmir, unlikely states like Kerala see communal politics in full bloom, and openly communal forces test their strength at the polls in one state after another.

It is not a new problem—the first recorded communal riot in the country dates back to 1714—and Meerut is not the worst that the country has seen. As many as 1,500 died, for instance, in the 1969 riots in Ahmedabad, and even more in the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984. But never before has the country witnessed such a prolonged period of tension of this nature, nor such a dangerous and rapid spread of the communal virus. Religious places have become major foci of dispute, and religious issues have come to the forefront in several ways (the Muslim women bill, for instance). The 'Hindu backlash' has been a political talking-point for three years and more. Large rallies have been organised by bodies associated with one community or another. As the tension mounted and was sustained, a Meerut almost had to happen. And if temperatures aren't lowered, it will almost certainly be another town tomorrow.

Illustration by AJIT NINAN



Several questions now need to be asked, and answered. What should be done to reverse the surging tide of communalism before it swamps the country? Why did the administration fail in Meerut, although notice had been served (so to speak) with a smaller riot a month earlier? What are the emerging contours of the problem?

It was easy to argue, before Independence, that the occasional communal riots were the result of the British policy of divide and rule. Now the reality is known to be more complex, taking in both the communalising of politics and the politicisation of religion, the jostling by different communities for a better share of the cake, the tensions created by cases of mass conversions, and the emergence in the forefront of organisations and leaders who speak only for their community. And a country that prides itself on the secular character of its politics has no effective answer to the menace.

Certainly, it is the mishandling of issues by the Government that has partly resulted in today's situation. The Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid issue should not have been allowed to fester in the manner that it has, and the Muslim women's bill brought about a further divide, with a reliance on fundamentalist opinion as opposed to more forward-looking schools of thought. For good measure, secular political parties have not hesitated to team up with communal counterparts, lending them a certain respectability. And although it was obvious even a year ago that tension was building up, little was done to defuse the situation.

Some of the old responses to the problem are now obviously inadequate. Tired bodies like the National Integration Council (though well-intended) have proved to be ineffective, and traditional strategies like peace marches have fallen into disuse. Periodic reviews at the highest levels have resulted in decisions to draw up lists of sensitive places, to form special peace squads, and so on. All of this, quite apparently, has had little effect. Even in Meerut, a town with a history of violence of this kind and a riot as recently as a month ago, the administration withdrew police forces too quickly, a mistake that was repeated in Delhi last fortnight.

A solution must of course include gearing the administration to be more sensitive to such flashpoints, and to take advance action. But corrective measures must go well beyond this. Culprits who indulge in rioting have so far been getting away scot-free, despite the ritual appointing of commissions of inquiry. This record in enforcing the law must change. Religious processions (which often provide the flashpoint for riots) cannot be banned in all cases, but they should be discouraged. Public address systems should be prohibited in places of worship, and the encroachment on public land for building places of worship prevented. The police itself is often affected by the communal virus, and the only effective solution is to have a proper mix of communities in the recruitment of policemen. In the field of education, textbooks and syllabi must be carefully screened to weed out any overlay of communalism. And in politics, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) has shown the way in Kerala by refusing to have truck with any of the communal parties, and others should do the same. They also must choose candidates for elections carefully so as to pack Parliament and the assemblies with people who have a secular outlook.

The initiative for all this must come from the top. And the leadership must be seen to be serious, not issue empty threats as Rajiv Gandhi did on Meerut, only for the riots to continue for five more days. Chief ministers like Bir Bahadur Singh must accept the responsibility of failure. The country needs to be reassured that the Government is serious about tackling the communal curse.

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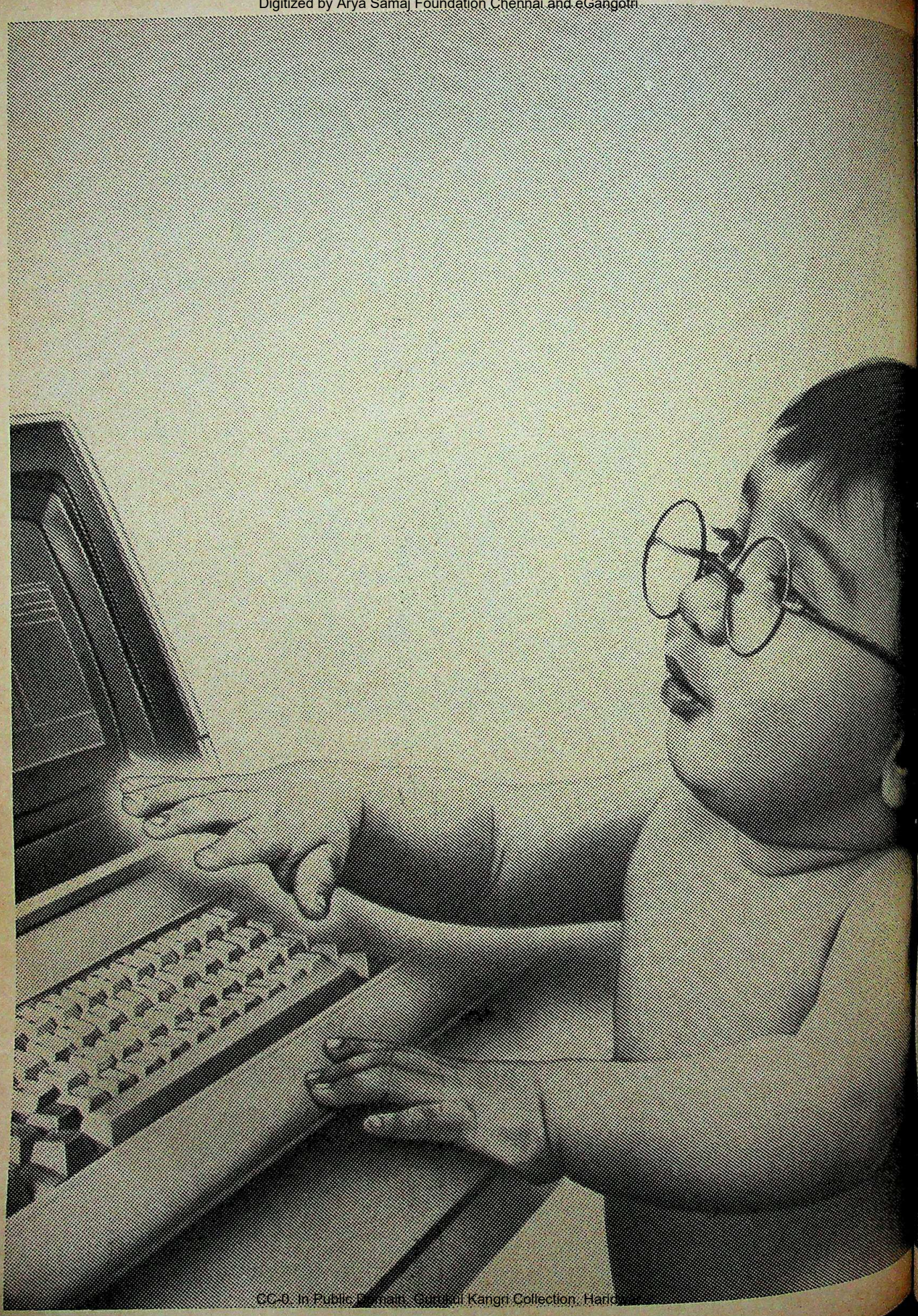

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• *Conspiracies are being hatched and they have their godfathers abroad. We will teach them such a lesson that they will remember their grandmothers.*

■ RAJIV GANDHI, at the New Delhi Congress(I) rally

• *Arms are a political commodity—we accept that.*

■ ANDERS CARLBERG, president, Nobel Industries, in *The Times of India*

• *The conversation stopper is to ask economists and businessmen to name one Rajiv reform fully enunciated, fully implemented and producing results. Some cite tax policy. Most answer with a long pause.*

■ EMILY MACFARQUHAR in *The Economist*

• *It is the turn of the south.*

■ RAJIV GANDHI, on the next presidential candidate, talking to newsmen

• *Now if killings continue in Punjab under President's rule will Buta Singh resign or will Zail Singh dismiss the Government?*

■ S.S. BARNALA in *The Sunday Observer*

• *The main issue is to catch economic offenders.... The Thakkar Commission will not look into this. They are deviating from the issue.*

■ V.P. SINGH in his speech at Allahabad quoted in the *Indian Express*

• *Any negotiation with the Chinese will be quite stiff. So far it seems to have been a case of an irresistible force meeting an immovable object.*

■ A.P. VENKATESWARAN in *Frontline*

• *Yes I have lost. I accept that I have lost to the media. Very comprehensively.*

■ AMITABH BACHCHAN in *Gentleman*

• *Both the President and PM are relying on the proverbial method of leaks and planted stories to fight their battles.*

■ S. NIHAL SINGH in *Sunday*

• *This approach (power-through-ballot-or-bullet) is on our priority list.... We have more ruffians than the Congress(I) and all we have to do is to form another wing called the "super-riggers".*

■ KANSHI RAM, president of the Bahujan Samaj Party, in *Surya India*

• *When you don't have a job, it's important that you still look like an actress. You must not ever look as though you need the role even if you're starving.*

■ ANITA RAAJ in *The Telegraph Colour Magazine*

• *No one ever expects the Indian team to win. Certainly not the Indian press.*

■ KAPIL DEV in *Sportsworld*

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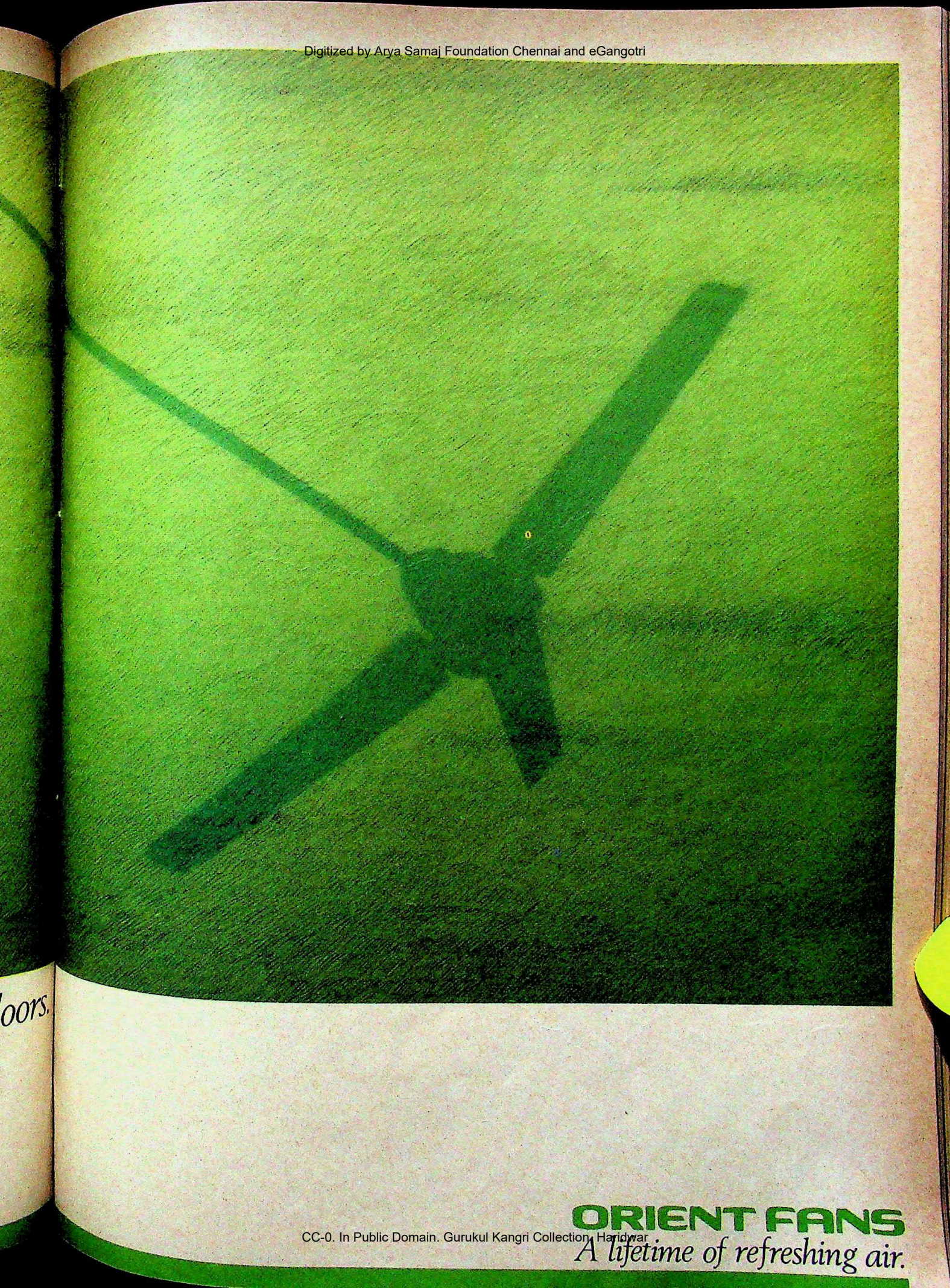

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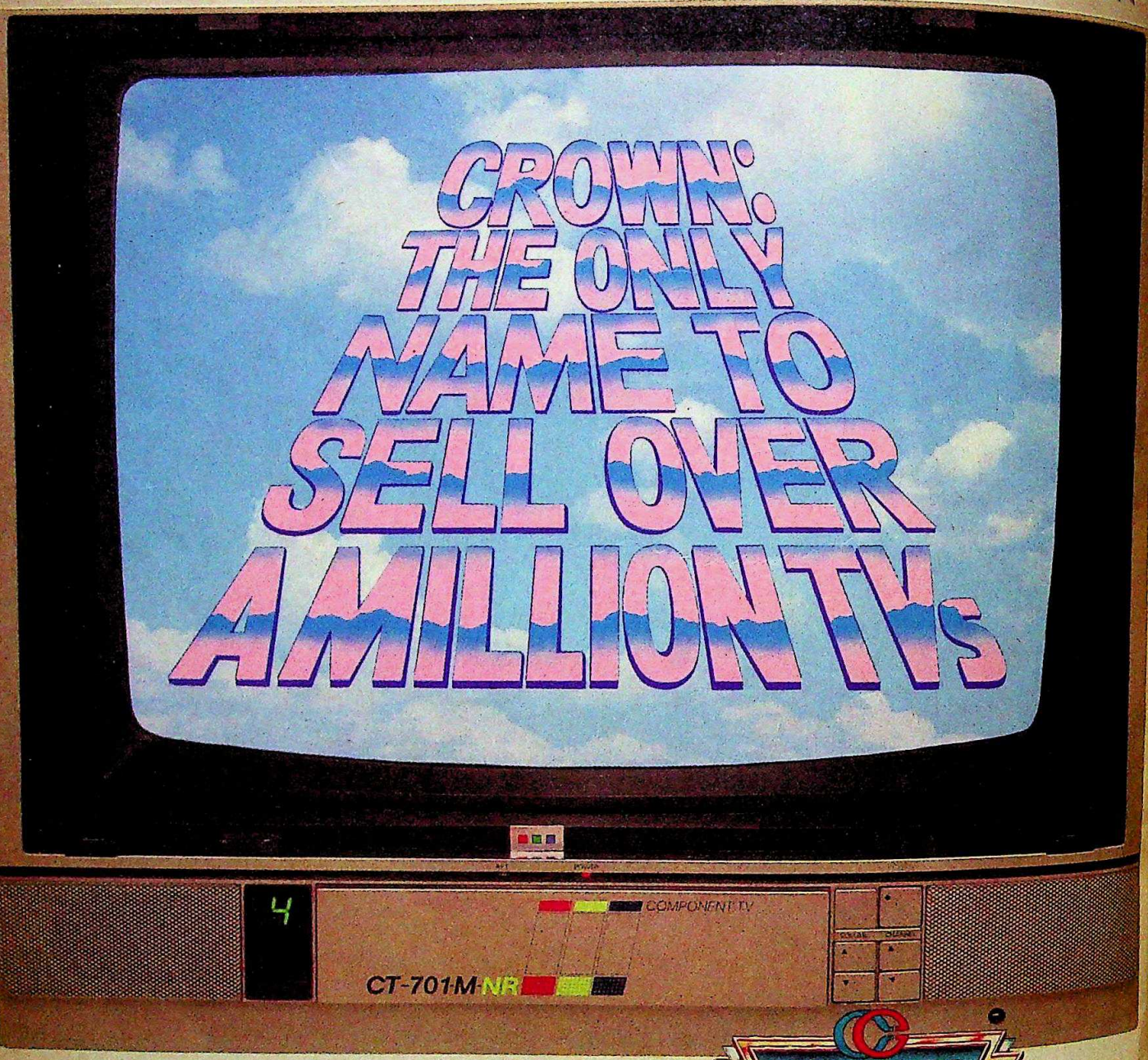

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BRIDE COLLECTOR

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

■ These days, a girl can never be too sure about the bona fides of her prospective spouse, even if her parents are the ones who screen him. There was this young man from Madras, Harikrishnan, who developed a penchant for marrying nubile, pretty women. The first one, Chandrika, he married in 1981 but soon tired of her—and his two kids—and sent her crying back home.

When playing on everyone's sympathies at his so-called 'divorced' state began to pall, he decided to remarry. This time, the victim was to be his paternal cousin. The wedding date was set; the festivities began.

But beware the wrath of a spurned wife! When Chandrika got wind of the dastardly plot, she went straight to the police. They finally caught up with their prey—only half-an-hour before he was to be joined in unholy wedlock—and unmasked his marital past.

The prospective bigamist was then whisked away by the cops, but he made a quick escape by promising he would live happily ever after with Chandrika. And the jilted bride was married off to another 'eligible' bachelor from among the invitees. Finally, all's well that ends well.

MONKEY'S SHARE

■ There was an unusual animal that invaded the stock-market last fortnight, causing palpitations of quite a different kind. Usually, it is an arena where excited investors out-scream one another in order to make a killing. And there is little that can unnerve these financial wheeler-dealers besides the rise and fall of stocks.

Two kinds of species frequent the exchange—the bulls, who keep the markets charged with their aggressive stance, and the bears, who hug their gains close to their chests. Into their domain at the New Delhi Stock Exchange, sprang a meddlesome member of the primate species—a monkey.

Bounding onto the trading floor, the ludicrous intruder had the other erstwhile inhabitants snorting and grunting in nervous rage. Chaos broke out as the long-tailed creature swung above cowering heads, grinning in mischievous abandon. The monkey business carried on till fate intervened in the form of a *bandarwalla* passing by. Unperturbed by the ape's antics, he netted his catch. And the usual pandemonium reigned again in the financial circus.

ASININE TRICKS

■ Some marriages are made in heaven. Especially those that are performed in order to propitiate celestial deities. A pious villager of Kuzhipirai in Pudukkottai district found a rather novel way of appeasing the revered rain god, whose wrath was conspicuous by his continuing absence.

In the hope that it would amuse his heavenly superiors into showering the village with manna, Somaram brought an asinine couple—a male and female donkey—to be wedded at the Vinayaka temple. He even persuaded the priests to bend the prescribed rituals to suit the occasion.

Amid much fanfare, and crackers, the villagers gathered around, a special pooja was performed before the rain deity on behalf of his four-legged devotees. Then followed a joyous procession, so that the braying newlyweds—the bride bedecked in a saree and a *thaali* hanging from her neck, and the groom in a dhoti and towel—could bless the entire village. Sweets were distributed thereafter. And with this mortal act to appease the immortal gods, the Kuzhipirai villagers celebrated their faith in the fertile results of animal wedlock. Ass yet, the gods have failed to oblige.

LADIES FINGERS

■ The travails of public travel in a big city are common. Whether in buses or trains, which are invariably packed tighter than sardines, there are always the dextrous pickpockets to look out for.

These inhospitable creatures have a special hunting ground among the hapless train travellers from in and around the suburbs of Bombay. And their quick hands work best during rush hour, when the trains stream out of Churchgate station, carrying the teeming multitudes.

The pickpockets are now spreading their nets wider than before—into the hitherto safe haven of the ladies' compartments. Having recruited and trained women in the light fingered art, they have now unleashed them on an unsuspecting female public.

Crowding into the doorway of the ladies' compartment of local trains, they wait till the train stops and the stampede to get out begins. And by the time the train glides out, the unfortunate travellers find that they have been divested of their necklaces and ear-rings, and, in some cases, their hand bags. The signs stating 'Ladies First' could have taken on a new and ominous meaning.

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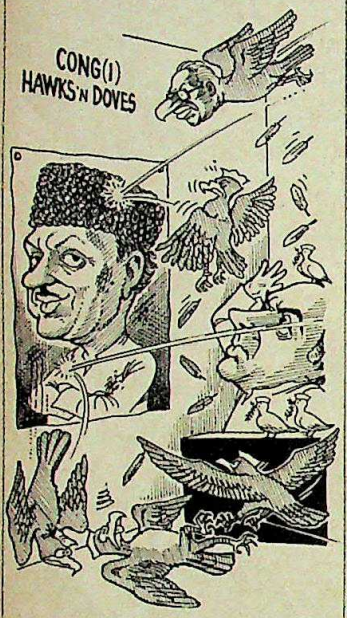
Sole Target

● For the last several weeks, the Prime Minister's Secretariat has been engulfed by a stormy debate on the public posture to be adopted regarding Vishwanath Pratap Singh. The moderates have been advising Rajiv Gandhi to



softpedal the issue and to rein in the more vociferous Congressmen who have been abusing the former defence minister in public. They have argued that attacking the former finance minister will simply give him more public credibility and keep him in the limelight, in the same manner that the Janata government treated Mrs Gandhi, who then made her spectacular comeback in the 1980 general elections. They say that if these tirades continue, Singh will be forced to aggressively retaliate in defence.

In the event that he is expelled from the party, the Congress(I) will be split down the centre. But so far, the hardliners, led by P. Shiv Shanker—the wily lawyer from Andhra Pradesh, who has firmly re-established himself at the core of Rajiv's inner circle—have prevailed. Shiv Shanker was also the man behind the recent paranoic Congress(I) Working Committee resolution about the destabilising foreign hand and he had successfully resisted several attempts from within the Prime Minister's Secretariat to soften its tone.

Preferred Customs

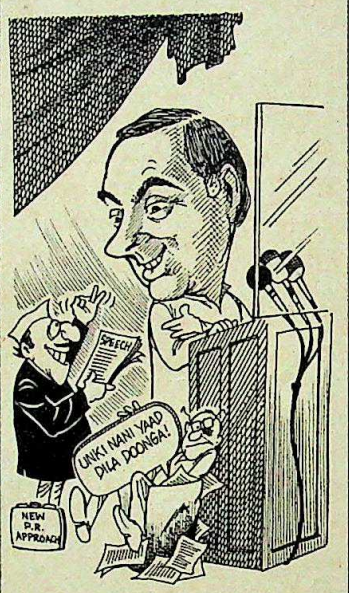
● Even as the country's domestic politics have changed, so also have the priorities of its would be civil servants. There was a time when the cream of the intellectual crop, freshly out of college, would make a bee-line to compete for the foreign service with the central services being given only cursory attention. But not any more. According to Union Public Service Commission sources, most entrants to the civil services have begun to mark customs as their first preference. Income tax follows a close second. The Indian Police Service and the Indian Administrative Service vie neck-to-neck for third place, with the foreign service limping way behind. One official said that the probable rea-

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

son was the incentive schemes in customs and income tax—in the form of bonuses for catching smugglers and tax evaders—which are more attractive. The foreign service seems to have lost its glitter because of the widespread impression that the foreign office is politicised and demoralised.

Pep Talks

● In his tough street talk to the masses, from New Delhi's Boat Club lawns, Rajiv Gandhi indirectly warned Uncle Sam that if the US continued to give arms aid to Pakistan, he would teach them such a lesson that they would remember their



grandmother *(unki nani yaad diladoonga)*. This has, not unexpectedly, resulted in a backlash of criticism that it was unseemly of the prime minister to talk like a goonda at a pep rally. He has now been advised to revamp his entire public relations approach and to place greater reliance on seasoned politicians for his public relations thrusts.

The search is now on for a politician who will be charged with rendering public relations counsel to Rajiv and dealing informally with the press. The appointee will be given a formal designation along with the rank of minister of state.

Rajiv is also considering recording regular informal 'fire side chats' for Doordarshan. The plan was first conceived in early January. But then followed the first of what was to be a series of mistakes by the prime minister. Foreign secretary A.P. Venkateswaran was sacked during a televised press conference and in the wake of the resulting outcry, Rajiv had to drop the TV plan. But now, with the heat still on, it is being reconsidered.

Nyet Yet

● It might turn out to be a *faux pas* instead of a *pas de deux*. The Russians plan to send the Bolshoi ballet—their best team that is—to Delhi for the Festival of the Soviet Union in India which begins later this year. But there is one big hitch: the Siri Fort Auditorium, where they are to perform, does not have an orchestra pit.

The Russians have said: *Nyet pit, Nyet* ballet. The Indian authorities have still not decided whether or not to make the requisite changes. An obstacle could well be the high cost involved: the 1,200 lights alone that are required would cost over Rs 2 crore. The Russians have even offered to send their own sophisticated electrical switching apparatus which controls the

lights. As time is limited, the Indians will have to quickstep their way to the finish unless they want to be out of step. The auditorium, now a recognised white elephant, gave Rudolph Nureyev some unhappy landings when he performed with the Opera de Paris ballet a few years ago.

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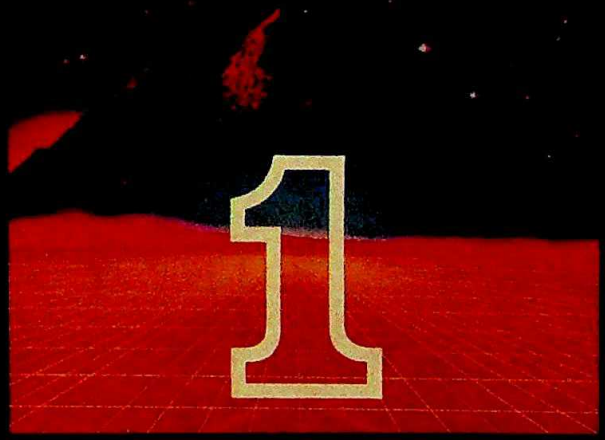

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Hysteria and Hate

HYSTERIA and hate fanned the embers of the fortnight that was into a menacing glow. At a party rally in New Delhi, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi hyped the hysteria with shrill and shallow warnings of external destabilisation and threatened to teach foreign grandmothers a lesson. Less than two days later, the communal conflagration in Meerut, barely 70 km away—and simultaneously in Delhi itself—proved that the real forces of destabilisation were purely domestic in nature. Meerut's communal curse was, in essence, as shrill a warning of the real threats to the country as the ruling party's portrayal of the imaginary.

BHAWAN SINGH

Rajiv hyped hysteria with shrill and shallow warnings.

Meerut was a disaster waiting to happen. If Meerut's agony stretched interminably into nine hate-filled days before sanity reluctantly returned, it was an ominous indication of the hair-trigger that India's communal gun now rests on. This was not just the most destructive riot in the town's dark communal history but a mirror to the ugly face that fundamentalism has been allowed to acquire.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Meerut reflected the ugly face that communalism has acquired.

Ethnic hysteria and hate had ghostly echoes in neighbouring Sri Lanka where, ignoring New Delhi's belated warnings, the Jayewardene Government launched its make or break assault on the Tamil militant redoubt in Jaffna. Whatever the outcome, the desperate lunge for a military solution is certain to disfigure the island forever and drag New Delhi into its violent vortex.

On another neighbouring front, the hysteria over the tightening military embrace between Islamabad and Washington had its diplomatic echoes in the New Delhi visit of Soviet supremo Mikhail Gorbachev's point man, Anatoly Dobrynin. At a subliminal level, the Dobrynin visit was a crucial reassessment of the relationship viewed in the light of altered realpolitik.

SHYAM TEKWANI

Colombo launched its final assault on the Tamil militant redoubt in Jaffna.

The diplomatic tightrope that New Delhi currently walks also had its domestic parallel in the announcement of the long-awaited Eradi Commission report on the sharing of river waters between Punjab and Haryana. The flood of statistics failed to smother the fact that the disbursement—and the Government's over-sensitivity to the coming elections in Haryana—gives further encouragement to the invisible forces in Punjab to preach their sermons of bile and betrayal and alienate the more moderate elements in the state.

Creative Eye

The Dobrynin visit was a realistic reassessment of Indo-Soviet ties.

Similarly, another disbursement announced during the fortnight—the allocation of tickets to Congress(I) candidates for the Haryana elections—encouraged further political instability. The resignation of a minister from the state Cabinet and the number of rejected candidates who have filed nominations as independents, indicate that the political mood is one of defiance and dissidence.

That defiance had its most visible manifestation in Uttar Pradesh where ousted defence minister V.P.Singh has ploughed a ragged furrow. The current instability in the political system was cruelly exposed by the state Government's panic-stricken moves to curb Singh's movements.

In that sense, the fortnight was an image of the probable course of future events. The communal and political eruptions were testimonials to the fact that the Rajiv Gandhi Government lacks direction and decisiveness. The true tragedy is that it is a time when the country needs those qualities the most.

—DILIP BOBB

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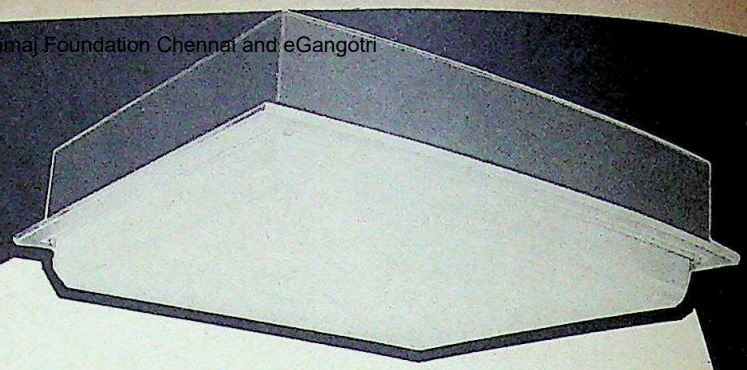

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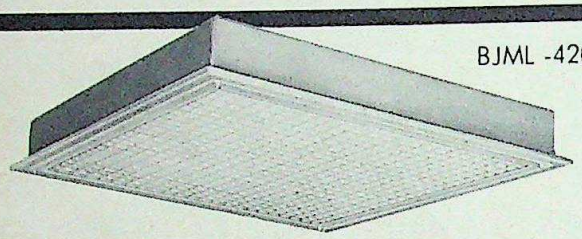

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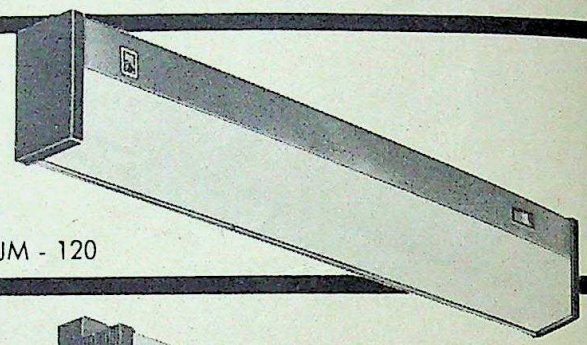

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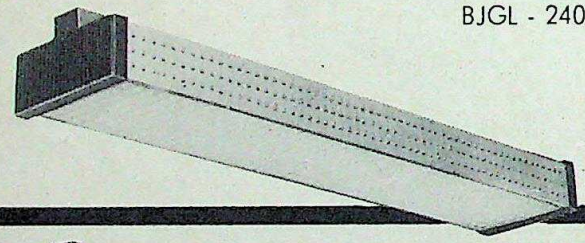

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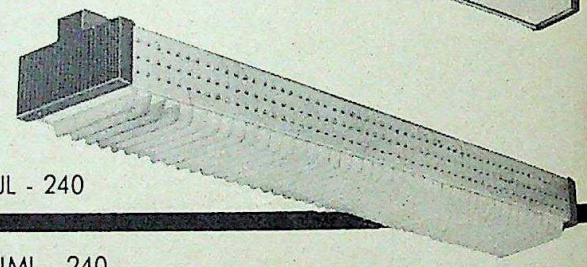

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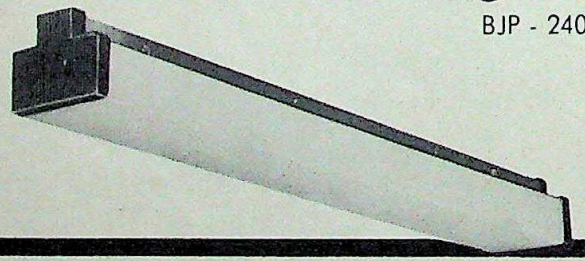

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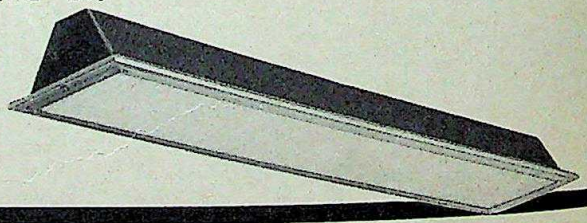

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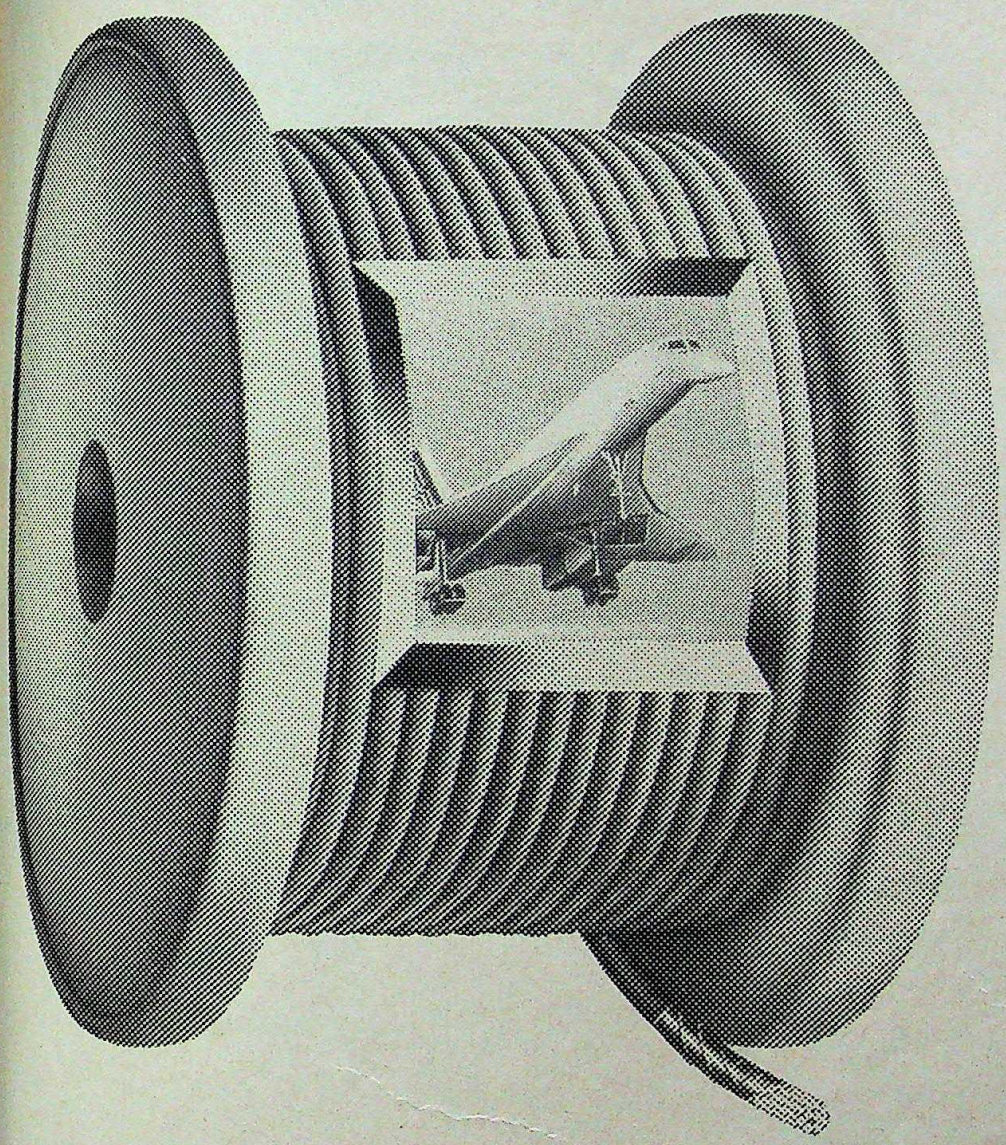

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Communal Riots

The Agony of

AS is almost always the case, last fortnight's bloody communal carnage in Meerut began with an insignificant event. On May 16, Ajay Sharma, a resident of Kotwali, was gunned down in a land dispute—something hardly unusual in that area. A case was registered and the police rounded up four people. Following the leads they provided, a police posse, with some back-up from the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), went on the night of May 18 to arrest Yameen from Hashimpura.

The resistance to the arrest was stiff, particularly since it was the ramzan period and the police had ill-timed their entry to reach around Iftar, the time when Muslims break their *roza* for the day to eat the evening meal. The police tried to force their way in, and in the melee three PAC men were dragged into the lane and their rifles snatched. Initially, it was only a fight between the police and the Muslims. But the affair soon assumed communal colour as a roadside stall—owned by a Muslim, but rented by a Hindu—was set ablaze and a shop owner nearby, Shashi Bhushan was stabbed to death.

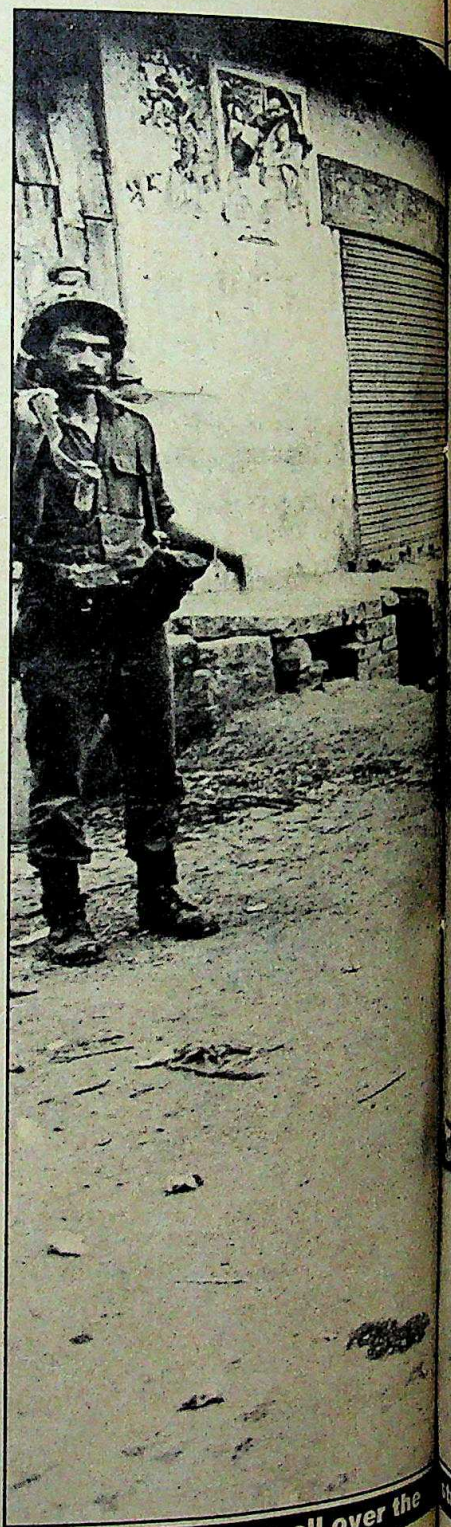
In the confusion during the melee, somebody came onto the loudspeakers of the Imiliyan mosque calling all "believers of the faith" to come out and protect their religion. Predictably, this brought not just the Muslims out but also the Hindus. According to District Magistrate Radhey Shyam Kaushik, echoes of this announcement were heard from masjids in neighbouring localities too, and soon it was a free-for-all on the roads. "Nobody knew who was killing whom and who was burning what in the dark. All we could see was fire at night and smoke in the morning," recalled Mehboob Mian, as he huddled in his room in Hashimpura.

In that first round alone, 15 people were killed and more than 350 shops and three petrol pumps reduced to ashes. Indefinite curfew was clamped in the area and the army conducted a flag march later that afternoon. Yet the arson had spread. By the next day the rioting had affected nearly every part of the city. Even places like Shastri Nagar, Saket and Civil Lines, which had never been affected by riots, reported incidents. Curfew was clamped throughout the city.

Soon enough, the violence spread to the walled city of Old Delhi, where eight people were killed in 24 hours and scores injured. And all of Uttar Pradesh, where the majority of India's Muslims live, became a high-tension communal wire threatening to spark off conflagrations of unimaginable dimensions. Over the next few days, Modinagar witnessed an exchange of fire in which two people were killed, four people died in a bomb explosion in Bulandshahr, another blast sent the army rushing into Hapur, and reports of tension flowed in from Ghaziabad, Muradnagar, Muzaffarnagar and Moradabad. Prohibitory orders were enforced in 36 districts, and a complete ban on public meetings was imposed throughout the state.

For the next 10 days, the only movement at daybreak in Meerut was that of men in helmets and war fatigues with Sten guns slung over their shoulders, inching their way out of their shelters and climbing aboard convoys of trucks. At night, the deserted streets were taken over by stray dogs chasing police vans and jeeps. Meerut's six lakh terror-stricken residents remained shuttered and bolted within their dwellings, as more than 13,000 members of the army, paramilitary forces and armed police laid siege to their city in the hope of stamping out the violence in every mohalla and bylane.

What had turned one of the busiest and most frenetic towns in north India into a ghost town, that resounded day and night to the rumbling of police trucks and the tramping of military boots, was the



Bodies lay strewn all over the

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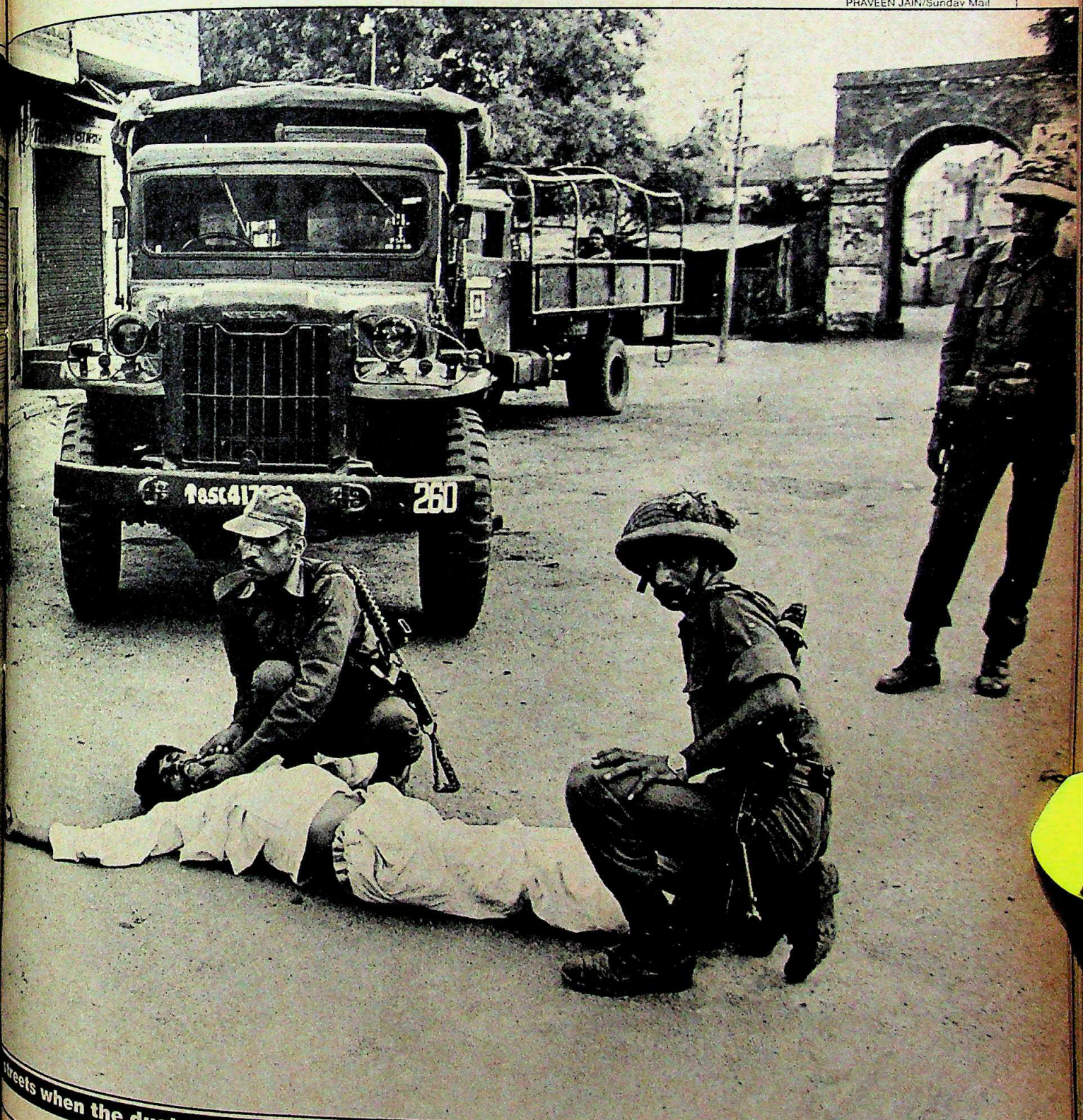
# of Meerut

PRAVEEN JAIN/Sunday Mail



ver the

treets when the dust settled. Over 150 people lost their lives, and 1,000 were injured.

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unprecedented communal frenzy in which more than 150 people died and 1,000 were wounded. More than Rs 20 crore worth of property lay destroyed, and business losses until the end of the fortnight were estimated at Rs 50 crore. A city which had thrived on jobs provided by tailors' scissors, handlooms, and sporting goods had almost overnight, it seemed, abandoned its peaceful tools of trade and taken up guns, bombs and knives.

The gruesome and bloody carnage suggested parallels with New Delhi's holocaust in 1984 and Ahmedabad's homicidal war of 1985. Barely two months earlier, police batalions had patrolled Meerut's streets following riots in which 12 people were killed. But in the first week of May, in what turned out to be a fatal blunder, the local administration, believing the situation to be normal, withdrew the extra police force. When the fighting broke out barely 10 days later, on May 18, the district administration found itself virtually crippled in its reaction because of the shortage of reinforcements. As heavily armed and slogan-shouting mobs belonging to both communities began fighting pitched battles, the 500-strong district police, immediately available, found itself hopelessly unequal to the task of containing the violence. By the time reinforcements were deployed, the damage had been done.

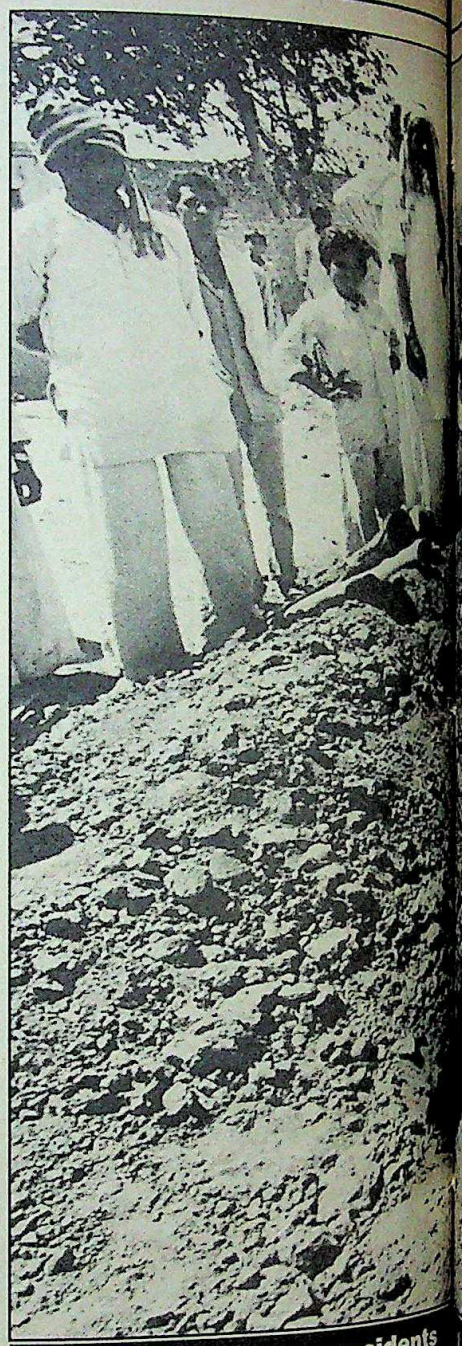
The withdrawal of the extra police contingents was particularly perplexing as, during the previous two months, intelligence reports had indicated that members of both communities had begun to stockpile huge quantities of arms. The state intelligence bureau had been constantly feeding reports to the Home Ministry that the threatened show of force over the never ending Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid issue could precipitate communal trouble in sensitive districts, particularly in Meerut, Rampur, Moradabad, Kanpur, and Allahabad.

The administration had also done absolutely nothing about local intelligence reports that had warned of a communal colour being put on Ajay Sharma's death, and which asked for intensive patrolling of areas affected by the April riots. But not only did the administration ignore these warnings, it even released those detained for disturbing peace in the previous riots. The administration had no clue about the level of preparations that were on "in case of a spark". Indeed, the evidence, both mental and physical, was overwhelming. There was a relay of announcements from places of worship, organised mobs in hundreds on the streets, and plentiful use of firearms. Yet the police and administration appeared oblivious of all the action.

The excuses continued till Home Minister Buta Singh, after a tour of the riot-affected areas, castigated the administration for not being geared for the riots. At that point, state Home Secretary Mata Prasad conceded: "It is no doubt our failure." Union Home Ministry sources confirmed that the state administration was taken by total surprise when the "unprecedented and un-anticipated violent activity in May" broke out.

One major cause of the flare-up, say Home Ministry sources, was the incompetence of the district administration. Its police officials were suspect, most of its inspectors and sub-inspectors had been sent to Meerut under political pressure from other parts of the state, and even the city Superintendent of Police B.K. Chaturvedi—who was finally transferred out and replaced by B.K. Gupta along with Varanasi's senior superintendent of police, G.L. Sharma, flown in as additional senior superintendent—was considered a controversial official. Although no changes were made at the civil administration level, the district magistrate was rendered virtually redundant when Minister of State for Home, Surender Singh Chauhan, pitched camp in Meerut and proceeded to take charge of the situation.

But as the riots continued even after the mobilisation of additional forces, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi summoned Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh to New Delhi for emergency consultations. Talking to newsmen at the Iftar dinner hosted by Union Tourism Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayed, Rajiv admitted that "communal conflicts were posing a grave danger to the country" and disclosed that he would visit Meerut the next day to take stock of the situation. But the following day it was Buta Singh who helicoptered to Meerut for a three-hour visit to the city. He ordered the confiscation of all arms, house-to-house searches and the immediate arrest of all 'bad characters'.



In silent outrage, the residents

The administration was also asked to re-establish communication with community leaders, and political leaders were instructed to form peace committees. These directions were given only after Union Minister for Urban Development Mohsina Kidwai complained to the prime minister—following her own visit to Meerut—that the district administration was treating the ordeal as a law and order problem and had failed to take such steps as convening regular peace meetings between community leaders.

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PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Maliana buried their dead, defenceless targets of the PAC's wrath.

For the first time in Meerut, house-to-house searches were conducted in all the sensitive localities, including Sohrab Gate, Jali Kothi, Shahpir Gate, Gudri and Kotla. The searches, conducted on a massive scale, involved a complete cordoning off of entire localities by the army, which would position itself in every lane, on rooftops and at every entrance to the locality. Then announcements would be made over the loudspeaker asking all male members of the house to come out with their licensed arms. Hundreds poured out and were escorted to nearby compounds. Then the CRPF women companies would move into houses and search the entire area.

There were large-scale seizures of firearms, including telescopic guns, pistols, single and double barrel guns and rifles with plenty of ammunition. Within a week, more than 2,500 people were arrested in Meerut alone, which has a total jail capacity of just 800. Detenus had to be shunted off to jails in Fatehgarh and Agra.

But just as things appeared to be returning to normal, there occurred a massacre that will probably go down in police history as one of the worst cases of police brutality. The news of this caused fresh eruptions in neighbouring areas in the state. Maliana, a small cluster of villages 5 km from Meerut, had not yet come under curfew. A PAC platoon had been sent there to keep the tension under control. The area has a population of around 35,000, of which 4,000 are Muslims. At 2.45 p.m. on the afternoon of Saturday, May 23, the PAC contingent arrived. Joined by some Hindu residents, they began burning down Muslim houses. It took them precisely two hours to complete the task they had assigned themselves. At the end of those two hours, nothing stirred in Maliana as people sat

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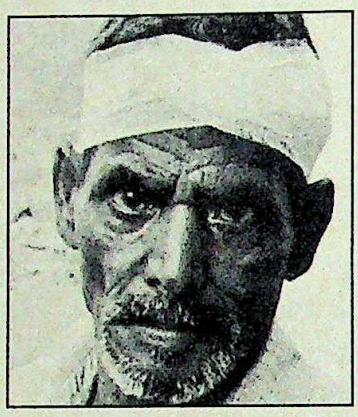
huddled together, gripped by fear as the stench of smoke and human bodies rose about them. Those who ran out to escape the inferno were showered with gunfire by PAC men positioned on rooftops. Scores fell to the bullets.

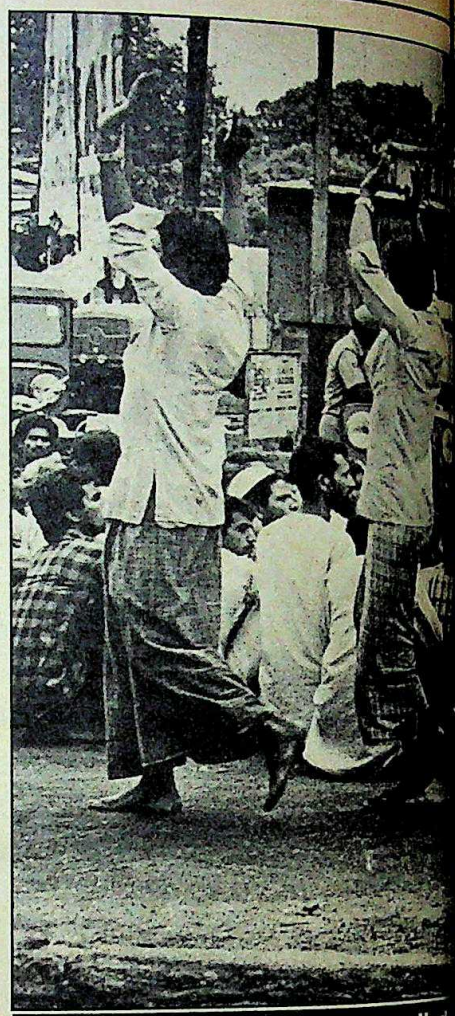
This happened just 70 km from the capital, but news of the massacre began to filter through only on Sunday evening. Monday morning's newspapers carried the official toll of "seven killed in police firing". In silent outrage the survivors pointed to charred parts of bodies in burnt houses. They pointed to blood trails and marks showing that bodies had been dragged out of houses down the lane. The PAC unit was quietly withdrawn and the army sent in, but officially the toll remained seven. Army officers admitted on condition of anonymity that they had personally counted over 50 bodies when they had arrived in Maliana.



While officially Meerut remained calm for the third day running and Id passed off peacefully, the reminders of the brutal killings in the town were still floating down the Ganga canal 30 km away. The Government said 16 bodies had been recovered from the canal, but once again the unofficial toll was far higher. All the bodies were naked, many had bullet injuries in the back of the head or burn marks on their backs. In a two-hour drive along an 8 km stretch of the canal, from Muradnagar to Massooree, INDIA TODAY reporters saw two bodies floating down the canal.

Shaheed of Nahal village said the bodies had been floating past for the previous eight days. He had counted 40 bodies in one day. Yusuf Mian, an irrigation department worker of Jhal Massooree, claimed to have seen 10 bodies a day in the canal for four days. But the most gruesome account came from Mehdi Hassan, a contractor who runs six *atta chakkies* at the canal weir at Jhal Dasna. Hassan, who supervises his *chakkies* by the canal the whole day, said that on May 26 he had counted 9 bodies and many more in the preceding days. At times, four or five bodies together would come floating down and get stuck in the iron grating across the channel weir. They would get the Irrigation Department's *bhangi* to pull the bodies out with a hook and dump them in the canal beyond the weir gate.

What made this potentially explosive



Hundreds of men were bundled

BIR BAHADUR SINGH

"We never expected this"

THE 52-year-old Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh is known for his political acumen and ability to survive crises. But last fortnight when communal violence in Meerut—for the second time in less than eight weeks—threatened to spread to other parts of the state, he was faced with the worst political crisis since he took office 20 months ago. Singh, who has recently been flying all over the country in search of new capital, found himself confined to the riot-torn city for a week. Curiously, the high death toll hardly seemed to have affected his morale. He spoke to visiting politicians and journalists with confidence, giving the impression that nothing new or serious had happened there. Senior Editor PRABHU CHAWLA *talked to him for more than an hour. Excerpts from the interview:*

Q. *What do you think was the cause of the riots?*

A. I can't give you a specific answer on this now. I have ordered a CID inquiry. But I must clear the impression that it is the worst-ever riot. In 1982, the riots continued for over two months and more people were killed then. We have been able to restore normalcy in Meerut in less than two weeks.

Q. *How many were killed then?*

A. I don't have the exact figures with me but the toll was definitely higher.

Q. *Do you also agree with the Union Home Minister Buta Singh's view that the riots were pre-planned?*

A. I can only say one thing. Both the communal and antisocial elements exploited the religious sentiments of the people to create a law and order problem.

Q. *It is believed there was tension in Meerut since the last riot. What preventive steps did you take?*

A. We never expected this. It had cooled down. But now it appears that plans were quietly being made. The CID and the Administration always maintained that nothing would happen. They had arrested the antisocial elements.

Q. *The state is acquiring a bad image now.*

A. I don't know why only Uttar Pradesh is making headlines. It is not the only state which is affected.

Q. *On the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid issue, you have been accused of following a pro-Hindu line.*

A. This is an absurd allegation. Did I take any personal or administrative decisions in this case? Courts in the country are independent and can't be forced to work on communal considerations.

Q. *What have you done as chief*

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BHAWAN SINGH

of their houses for search operations and entire colonies were screened.

minister in this regard?

A. I have given directions to restructure the entire police force, including the PAC, in the state. Their training programme is being reworked so that the policemen acquire a secular outlook. Special battalions are being raised in which all the communities will be proportionately represented. We are also reviewing school books to see that they are free of communal content.

Q. *But politicians always pander to communal elements during elections.*

A. That is not true of our party. We don't encourage communal elements. We believe in the protection of the rights of the minorities.

Q. *But your state police is full of communal elements.*

A. The entire force is not communal. We are looking into some specific complaints and will take stern action.

Q. *It seems that you are losing grip not only on the administration but on your cabinet colleagues as well.*

A. I don't think this is true. I enjoy the full support of my party and the Cabinet.

Q. *Don't you feel that your image as a business-like chief minister suffered?*

A. No. I meant business when I took over. I took disciplinary action and dismissed senior officials. I directed all my cabinet colleagues to be in office by 10 a.m., and not to leave the city without my permission.

Q. *But the law and order situation has worsened.*

A. Absolutely not. In fact, it is the best during the last five years. There have been no gang killings, roadside robberies, daylight murders and dacoities. Ours is the most peaceful state today.

Q. *As far as the communal situation is concerned, is the worst over?*

A. Yes. But we have to guard ourselves against any eventuality. It can be done through dialogue and persuasion. We are going to sort out the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid conflict with the help of local people.

Q. *Is there no immediate threat to your leadership?*

A. Yes, I believe so. I enjoy the full support of the party high command and have complete freedom to handle any political and administrative situation. There is no political crisis.

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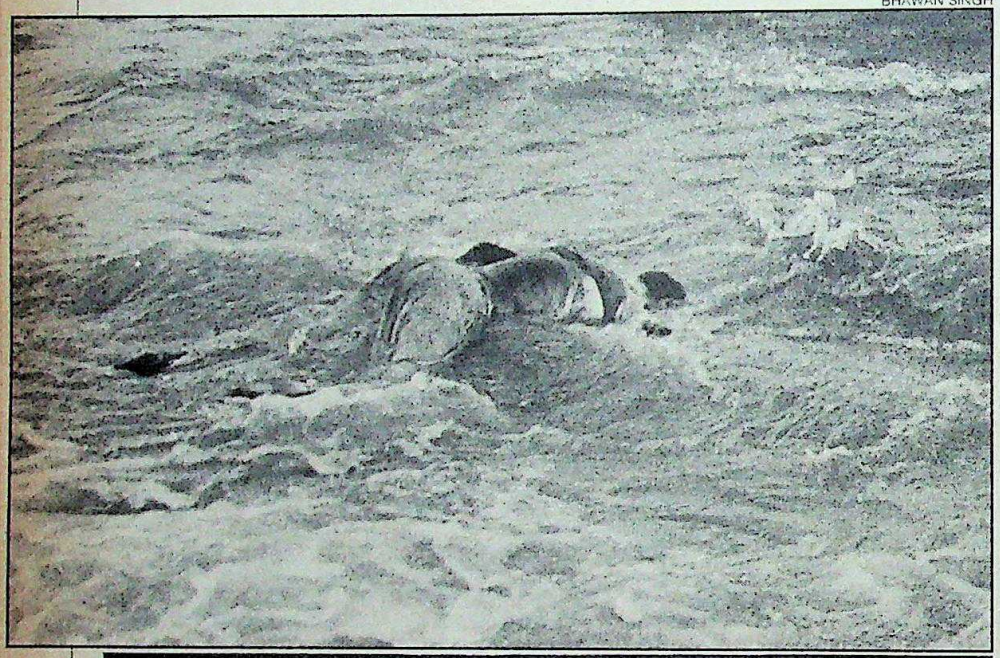
was the fact that the Ganga canal runs through predominantly Muslim territory through Ghaziabad district which adjoins Delhi. Inevitably, communal hatred was spreading into the rural countryside too.

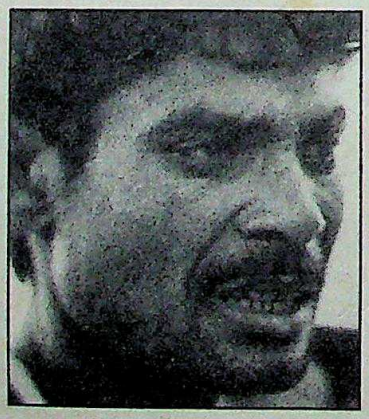
But in Lucknow, M.C. Dwivedy, PAC deputy inspector general, the de facto chief of the force, insisted that he knew nothing of any massacre at Maliana. And there was no official information on which company from which batalion, and under the charge of which officer, was sent to Maliana. But as the bodies started floating down the canal and the tethered

BHAWAN SINGH



The bodies were grisly testimony to police brutality

cord of tolerance came close to snapping once again, the chief minister finally announced a judicial inquiry.



But the PAC brutality was not the only element that cast its deathly pall over Meerut. In many ways Meerut today resembles what many Delhi localities looked like in the aftermath of the November 1984 riots. The town is pock-marked with burnt-out shops and houses, charred skeletons of dozens of buses and trucks still litter the main roads. And there were clear signs that some organisation and preparation had gone into fuelling the uncontrollable communal frenzy which swept the town.

But when compared to Delhi in 1984, there was one significant difference. In Meerut, both communities seem to have been gripped by a *junoon* (madness) and struck out at each other with equal ruthlessness. Selected Muslim shops in Hindu areas were looted and burnt down while Hindu shops in Muslim areas met the same fate. In past riots, the fringe elements of both communities and goondas were involved. This time almost all the Muslims are ranged against all the Hindus. "Political party labels have ceased to have any meaning in Meerut. Today, you are either Hindu or Muslim," said Mirajuddin Ahmed, 28, president of the Meerut Youth Congress, drawing a picture of a communally polarised society.

There was little scope left for humane behaviour, as two doctors belonging to the two communities discovered to their cost. Dr Atul Bhatnagar is a well-known surgeon who runs a nursing home in the town. Many of his Muslim patients were awaiting treatment when a Hindu mob surrounded the nursing home and demanded that the doctor hand over all the Muslim inmates of the nursing home. Bhatnagar refused and spirited away his Muslim patients to a hospital. The mob vented its anger on the nursing home itself, causing extensive damage.

A less drastic fate met Dr Sirajuddin Ahmed, who donated blood, a rare AB group, to save the life of a young Hindu, Rishi Ram, who had been grievously injured by a police bullet. The blood saved Rishi Ram's life but Ahmed was abused and pilloried by his own community members for saving the life of a Hindu.

Hakim Saifuddin Ahmed, a recipient of the Padma Shri and honorary physician to many presidents, including Zail Singh, said most of the *nafrat* (hatred) between the two communities had been caused by the Babri Masjid and Ramjanambhoomi action committees. "It has become so bad that if two buffaloes get into a fight, one will be labelled Hindu and the other Muslim," he said.

But why Meerut? There were several answers. With its proximity to Delhi, the town is particularly susceptible to national communal politics emanating from here. Every ripple in the capital is first felt in Meerut. "Any activist from Delhi with a few hours to spare, slips in to spread his message," said a political worker.

There is also acute trade rivalry in Meerut, known for its textile trade as well as local crafts like scissor-making. In textiles, it has traditionally been the Hindus who have owned the factories, and Ansari Muslims who have provided the labour force. The friction between the owners and workers adds fuel to the fire each time there is a communal flare-up. Demographically, the six lakh population of the city is divided almost equally between Hindus and Muslims. And they are both equally prosperous. The tensions are inevitable as each is intolerant of the other's well-being. Add to all this a weak administration, and the weight of the Babri Masjid dispute. A flare-up was inevitable. After last fortnight's carnage, confidence building was clearly important.

And the postponement of Rajiv Gandhi's planned visit to Meerut was a negative signal. "Why didn't Rajiv come here? Why does he only go visiting tribal areas?" asked a caustic official in Meerut. But prime ministerial visits apart, there was little doubt that communal tension could not be eased in the state and several parts of the country without a way being found to untangle the Babri Masjid issue, or taking cover behind the fact that it is a court matter. And there was equally little doubt that unless determined efforts were made to turn the tide against communalism in politics, with political parties taking the lead, the communal problem would continue to fester.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR with TANIA MIDHA, PRABHU CHAWLA, RAMINDAR SINGH and DILIP AWASTHI

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COMMUNALISM

Danger Signals

ON March 30 this year, the green lawns of New Delhi's stately Rajpath were carpeted by a very different kind of covering. For the first time in the nation's independent history, more than three lakh Muslims from all over the country had lined up on that stretch, shoulder to shoulder, to demand justice and an end to organised discrimination against their community. Though the crowd was disciplined and peaceful, the speeches made by their leaders, among them Imam Bokhari of Jama Masjid, were fiery and provocative. And when the throngs returned to their homes, they took back the message that they must henceforth begin to fight for what they believed was their due.

A week later, Ayodhya—the site of the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute—was witness to yet another massive congregation of the faithful. In this dusty town, over one lakh Hindus had gathered to vow to 'protect' the birthplace of Rama. They too gave vent to rabble-rousing denunciations and took a mass pledge that those present would go forth and liberate the birthplaces of all the Hindu gods.

These were not just simple religious gatherings. They were the culmination—indeed the apotheosis—of a simmering and carefully nurtured religious and cultural feud that threatens to divide the country into intolerant communal hate groups. That the two rallies, groupings of religious armies, had hit home with telling effect became evident as the two communities began fighting each other in different parts of the country, often at the slightest pretext.

A systematic build-up of the communal campaign had in fact been witnessed over the past several months. The Babri Masjid Action Committee had passed a resolution last month that the Muslims would take a vow on the last Friday of Ramzan—May 22—to wrest possession of Babri Masjid. If this didn't work, they said, the Muslims would go in for namaz en masse to the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. On the other hand, the Bajrang Dal had planned 'Jan Jagaran' yatras in different parts of the state from May 20. The organisers had announced that it would go ahead with the plan even if the Government banned these yatras. The Babri Masjid action committees formed in every district had started enrolling volunteers from all over the state from the first week of May for the march to Ayodhya to capture the masjid. Meanwhile, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad had started a parallel movement of organising 'balidan jathas' to prevent the Muslim activists from entering Ramjanambhoomi. The confrontation was predictable.

Yet, almost like the lull before a storm, 1987 had begun with little or no communal violence. But the number of people who have died in communal clashes this year already exceeds the total for all of 1986 (186). No major riot had occurred before March, when the Muslim rally was held. But by May 28, the death toll from the communal madness had begun to climb inexorably. Major riots broke out in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, and the tension spread to Maharashtra.

Delhi reflected Meerut's anger. Shortly before that, the sleepy Gujarati town of Bharuch saw Hindus and Muslims fight pitched battles, leading to the death of two people. The state Government, still reeling after the 1985 communal violence, alerted the entire state lest the trouble spread. In Maharashtra too, preventive steps were taken to arrest the spread of the fire.

The tension was palpable almost everywhere. Home Minister Buta Singh declared last fortnight that "religious intolerance is alien to the Indian way of living," but it seemed as if the opposite had become true, that communalism had, indeed, become the Indian way of life.

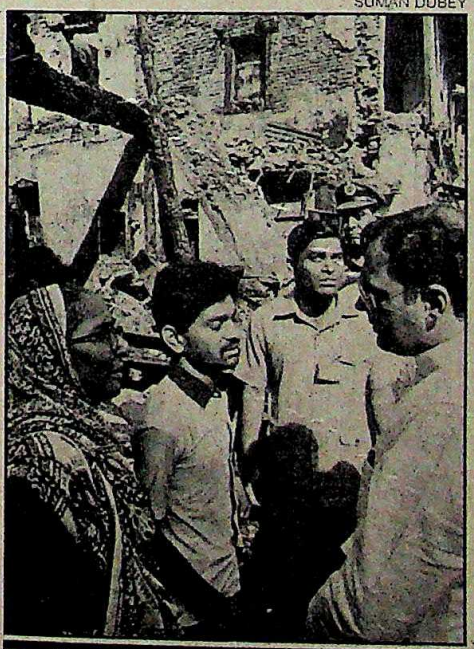
Close to 4,000 people have been killed in communal riots during the 1980s. That is almost four times the figure for the 1970s, which had seen a relative lull after the Ahmedabad riot of 1969, which saw 1,500 people being killed.

Certainly, the ranks of the communalists and their supporters have swelled. Communal organisations, numbering less than a dozen in 1951, have grown to

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Delhi echoed the Meerut riots, till curfew was imposed

SUMAN DUBEY



Rajiv visited Ahmedabad but delayed going to Meerut

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over 500 now, with an active membership that, according to government estimates, runs into several millions. Even as the number of religious-based organisations has grown, their leadership has been taken over by affluent and articulate personalities, replacing semi-literate or religious heads. One example is Syed Shahabuddin, the Janata Party member of Parliament, who was once a member of the Indian Foreign Service. In Hindu organisations too, former chief secretaries and director-generals of police have taken over the leadership of the militant Vishwa Hindu Parishad. The Uttar Pradesh unit of the parishad, for example, is now headed by S.C. Dixit, a former director-general of the state police.

In Bihar, early this year, a Hindu organisation named the All India Nationalist Hindu Forum was floated, boasting among its founders K.N. Singh, former chief justice of the Patna High Court. And in the south, young professionals—engineers, college teachers, doctors and advocates—have joined mushrooming communal organisations. Says P. Thangabalu, a Congress(I) Rajya Sabha member from Tamil Nadu: "Suddenly one finds that attachment to a communal organisation is not considered to be a bad thing." Added a senior Supreme Court advocate: "Why shouldn't people join communal organisations? It seems to make them instant leaders and gets them important positions in politics and government."

People with established criminal records, or who are suspect in the eyes of the police, have started using community leadership as a tool to gain respectability. Haji Mastan of Bombay is one example of a man who, during the last four months, has addressed over 50 meetings of his community in Delhi, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. In Ahmedabad, a candidate with a criminal record won the recent municipal election from four constituencies, and his victory procession led to violence twice in the city. In both Meerut and Delhi, many people with criminal records have taken over the leadership of local 'Hanuman senas' and 'Shiv senas', using them not only as shields to protect themselves against police action but also as crutches of respectability.

Because of the growing participation in religious rallies and functions, more and more districts are becoming communally prone. The number of districts affected by communal violence grew from 61 in 1961 to 216 in 1979. And according to one estimate, over 250 districts (out of a total of around 350) are affected by these tensions now.

But analysts say that the most important factor behind the growth of communalism has been electoral considerations. Most parties pander to minority votes in pursuit of vote banks. By one reckoning, Muslims can win only 10 seats all over the country on their own strength, but their votes—if polled as a block—can influence the outcome in at least 200 other contituencies.

Predictably, it is Uttar Pradesh that has borne the brunt of the problem. Ever since the opening of the Ramjanambhoomi temple on February 1 last year, more than 50 small and large communal riots have taken place, killing over 60 people and leaving more than 600 injured. This was before Meerut.

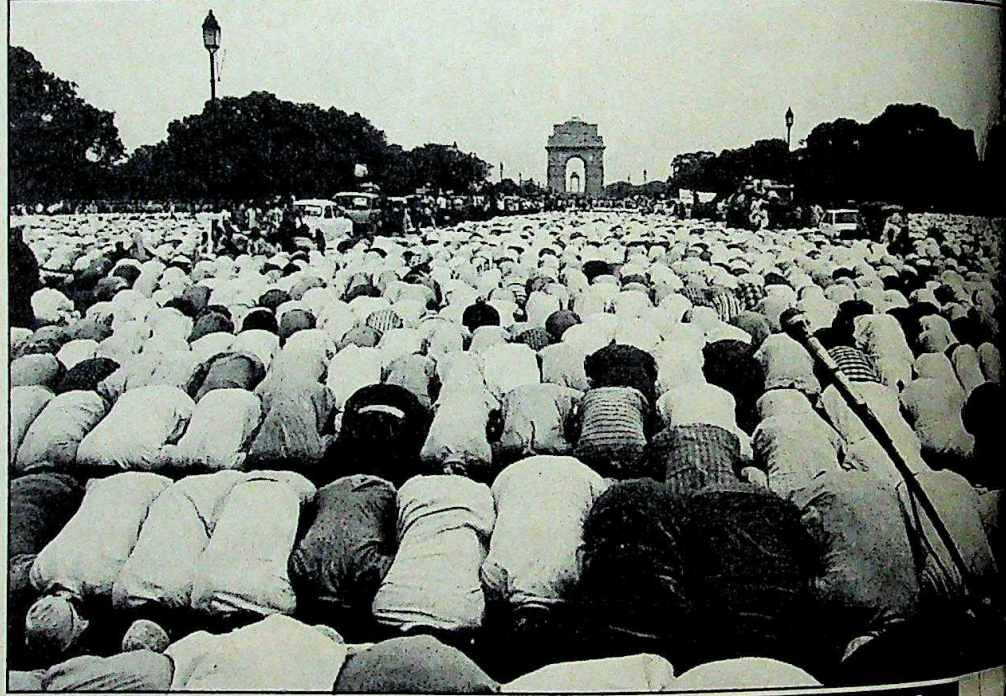
According to another secret study by the Uttar Pradesh Government and the Delhi administration, over 100 small communal incidents took place during the last two years over land disputes alone. In fact, a Union Home Ministry report has noted the unprecedented spurt in the construction of religious buildings throughout the country, and warned that this "may lead to violent situations if not controlled". In fact, it was this danger that prompted the passage of an act making encroachment on public land a cognisable offence in Delhi. But the law has never been implemented. Says a senior Home Ministry official: "The number of religious buildings poses a great threat to communal harmony. The greater the number of buildings, the greater will be the number of processions, meetings and use of public address systems."

The number of religious buildings in Delhi alone has risen from barely 560 in 1980 to over 2,000 now. In Uttar Pradesh, the number of large religious buildings registered with the local municipalities has risen from 4,000 to over 6,700 last year. In fact, a simultaneous and massive renovation campaign of all dilapidated mosques gave rise to rumours of money flowing in from the Gulf, and fresh tension. Soon Hindu organisations launched a fund-raising campaign for their own buildings.

But whether it is renovating buildings or religious processions that lead to communal conflagrations, the growth in the number and membership of communal organisations, or the new respectability they have begun to enjoy, the signs point to one stark fact: the steady spread of the communal virus.

—PRABHU CHAWLA and INDERJIT BADHWAR

PRASHANT PANJIAR



The rally crowds were told that they must now fight for their due

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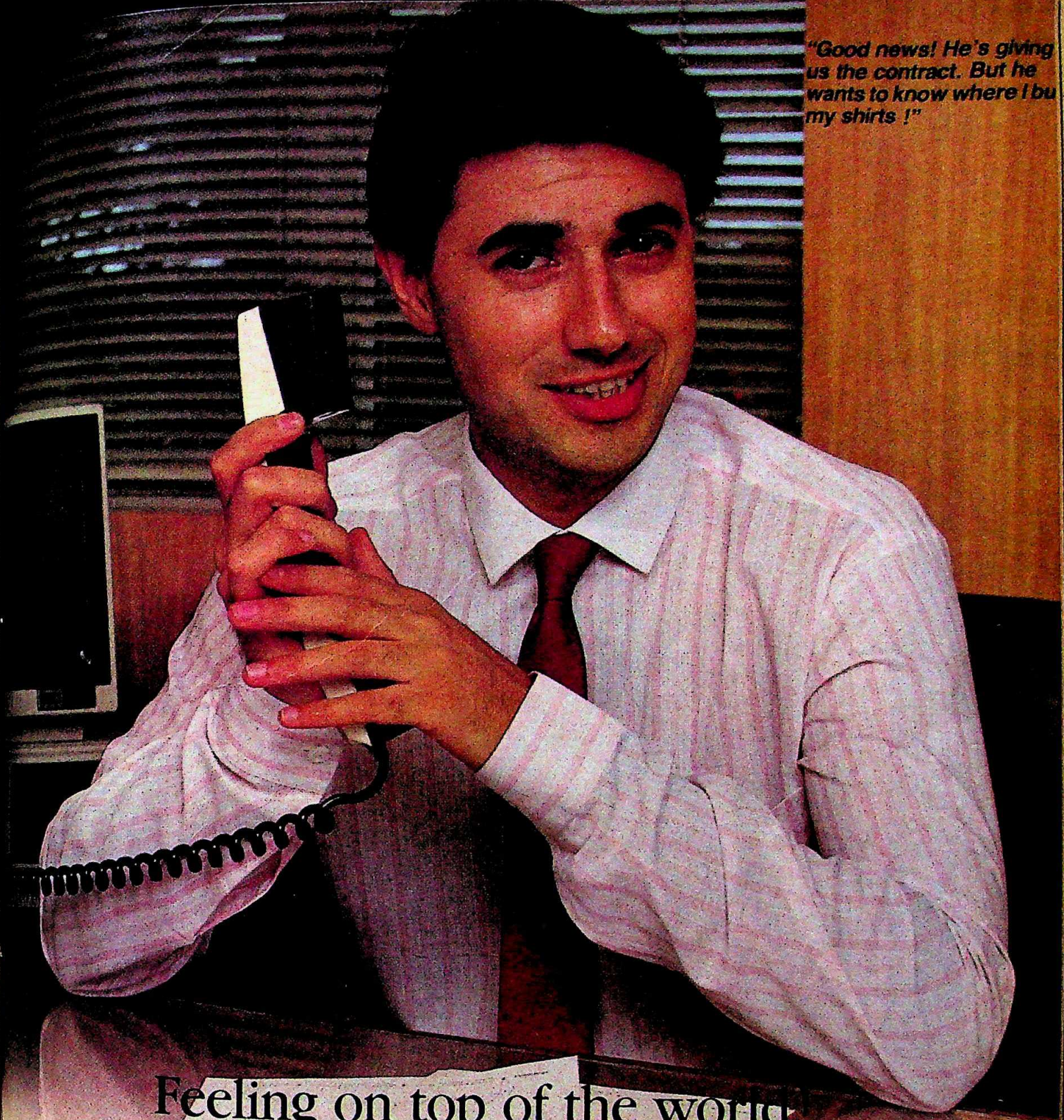

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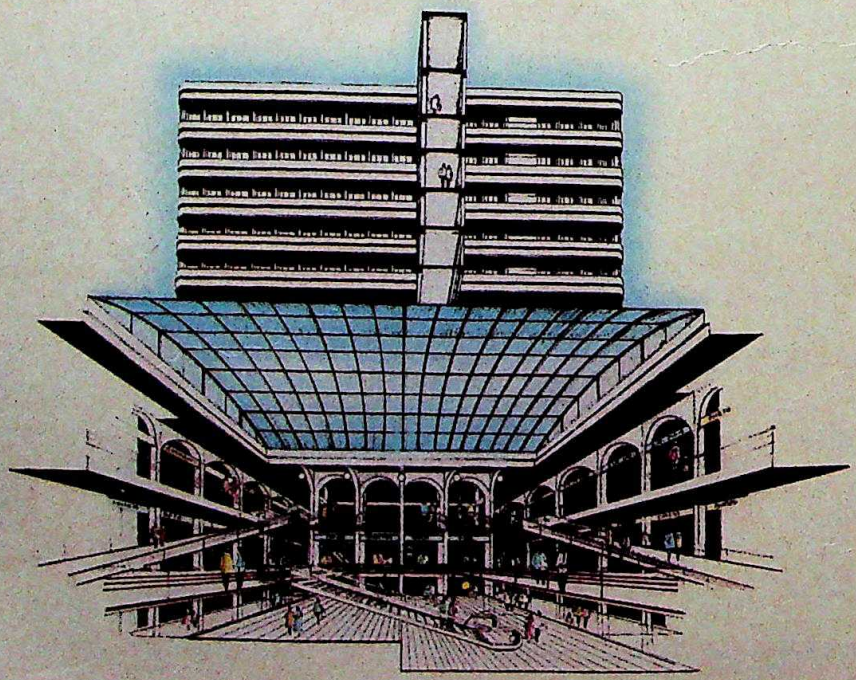

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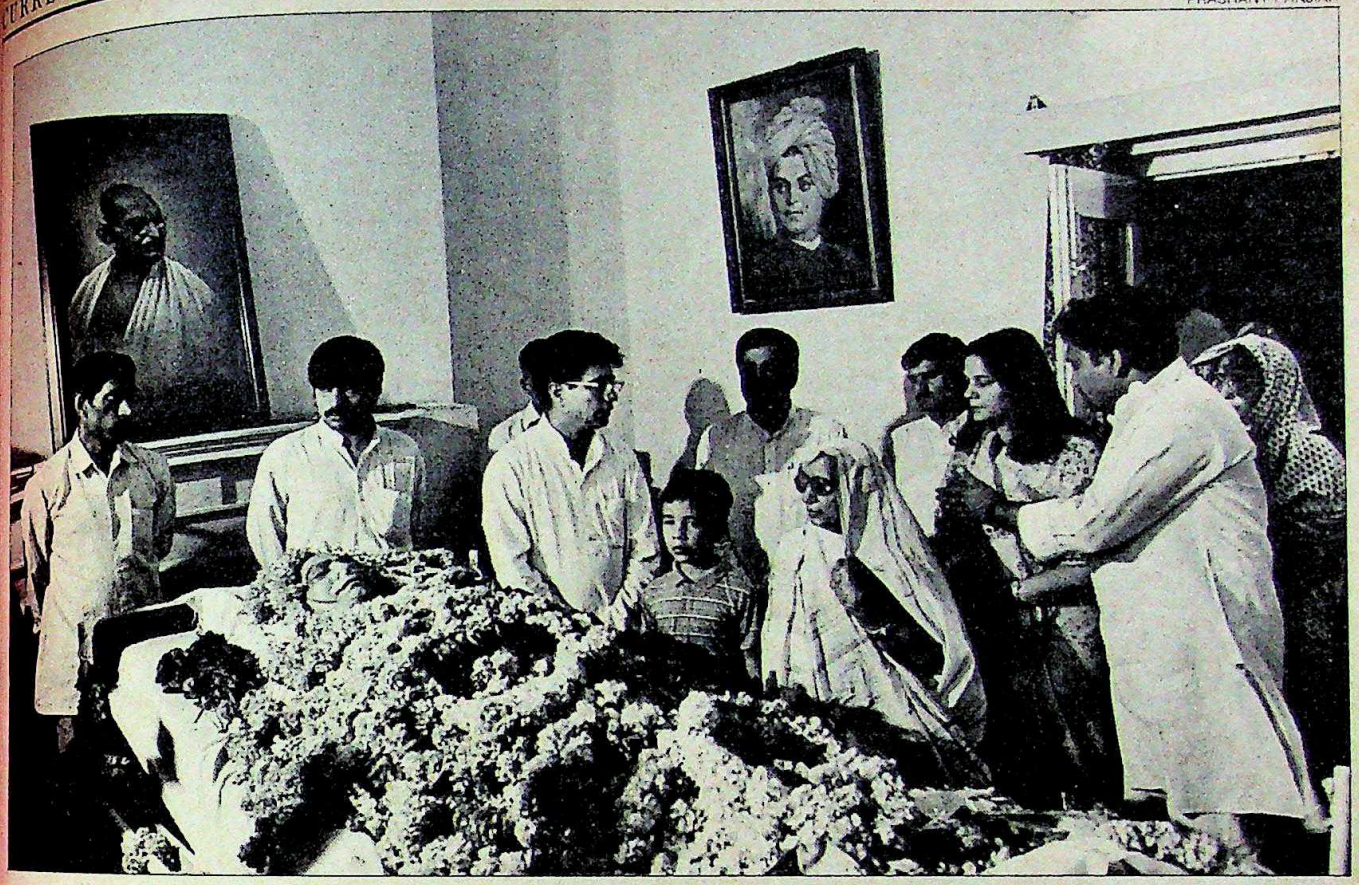

Son Ajit (centre) and family members by Charan Singh's body: a chapter ends

CHARAN SINGH

Death of a Rural Voice

HE died as he had lived, a broken and bitter man, the ultimate power he had so desperately craved, ever elusive, the party he had cultivated, in a shambles and his last days spent in pain and immobility. But to many, Charan Singh, 85, epitomised the politics of India—the hunger for power, the pettiness, the self-destructive contradictions and above all, the reluctance to accept political reality.

More than anything else, throughout the half century of his political life, the man they called the king of the Jats remained something of an enigma. A man of fiercely-held principles and ideology, Charan Singh was also the master manipulator, willing to switch sides at a moment's notice if it suited his political ambitions. His personal life-style was simple, reflective of his peasant background, yet there burned in that lean frame a remorseless desire to reach the ultimate seat of power—prime minister of India, an ambition he was to fulfill all too briefly and under the most dubious of circumstances. He wanted political immortality. He died a symbol of failure and self-aborted ambitions. Even when he knew his political dream was a mirage, he clung on to power, stubbornly refusing to abdicate in favour of younger and more energetic leaders.

Yet, when he passed away last week after a long and painful illness, it symbolised the end of a political era. He was among the last of a breed that is now almost extinct, a breed that spearheaded the freedom movement, inspired by giants like Lokmanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi, and was the political inheritor of independent India. For a man whose career was marked by violent fluctuations, the end came as something of an anti-climax. He had been confined to a wheelchair since he suffered a paralytic stroke on November 29, 1985.

He had been flown to the John Hopkins Institute in the US for treatment in March 1986 and was there for about a month. But the treatment did not seem to have done him much good. According to son-in-law J.P.Singh, medical superintendent of Delhi's Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, who attended to him over the last months of his illness, Charan Singh was a "very good patient and a great fighter" and never strained himself after his stroke. Though a bitter man after the Opposition was virtually wiped out in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections, he seems to have learnt to live with the situation and also his illness as time went by. During the last six months, he had begun to withdraw into himself and talked very little although his mind, according to Singh, seemed alert. Interestingly, though, he said nothing in public about the fact that the Lok Dal, the party he created, was being torn asunder in a succession struggle.

On May 28, when he returned from being wheeled around the garden by a nurse at 6.30 p.m, his condition seemed normal. Soon after dinner, he went to sleep. When J.P.Singh returned home from a wedding, he received a call at 11.30 p.m. saying that Charan Singh was unwell. Dr Singh arrived along with a colleague, Dr K.K.Malhotra, a consultant in medicine, just before midnight. The octogenarian leader was already on oxygen. An electrocardiogram (ECG) was taken and it seemed satisfactory though the patient seemed to be in some discomfort. Two other doctors joined them.

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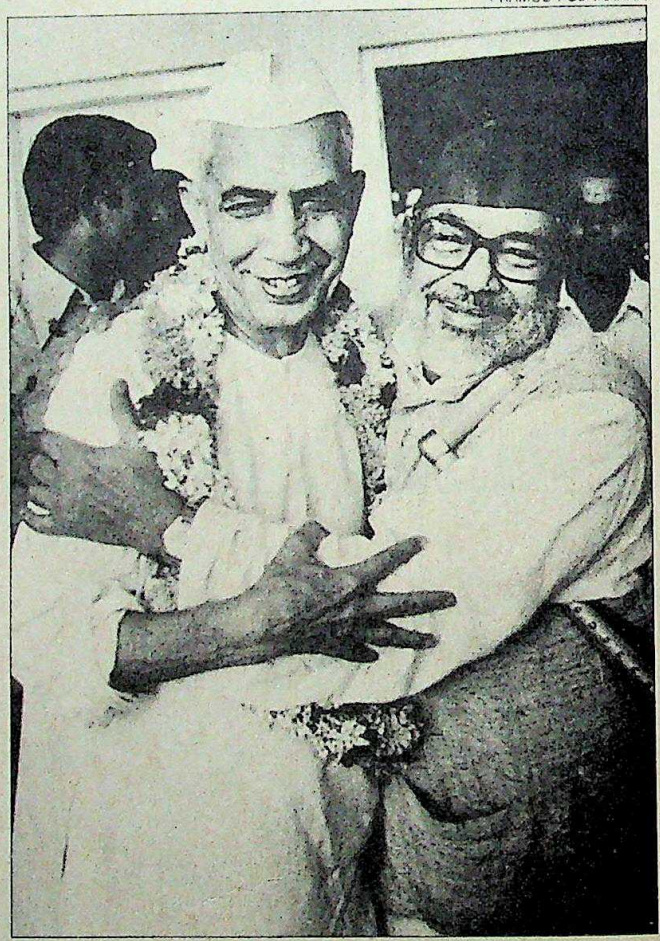
But an hour after midnight, suddenly the curves traced by the ECG machine turned into a flat line. Over the next hour-and-a-half, the doctors made desperate attempts to resuscitate him, but finally gave up at 2.25 a.m.

The next morning, the late leader's sprawling Raj-style bungalow was crawling with hundreds of people. Traffic had been diverted from the wide avenue that is Tughlaq Road. A phalanx of photographers stood in a row in the room, overlooking the rear lawn, in which the Jat leader's body lay in state, as people streamed by in a steady line. In an adjoining room, the women of the household and their visitors sat gloomily on the floor, while the VIPs covering a wide spectrum of the current political leadership filed past.

The homage was, however, hardly in keeping with the image. Few politicians have led so active a political life—and so controversial. Born into a peasant family in Meerut district, Charan Singh did his post-graduation from Agra University in history but, having also obtained a law degree, opted for a legal career. In 1925, he married Gayatri Devi who became a constant companion through the roller-coaster ride that his political career eventually became. After a brief legal practice he joined the Indian National Congress in 1929 and between 1932 and 1936 served as vice-chairman of the district board, Meerut. In 1935 he was elected to the Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly as a member of the Congress Party. By now, he had edged close to leaders like Govind Ballabh Pant who appointed Singh as his parliamentary secretary in 1946, a post he held for the next five years. His immediate ambition, however, was the chief ministership of Uttar Pradesh. He realised his dream in 1967 when he formed a splinter group called the Jan Congress and crossed over to the Opposition in the Assembly which regrouped under the banner of the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal (SVD) with Charan Singh as the leader. His political switch had been perfectly timed. The C.B. Gupta government was replaced by the SVD and Charan Singh was sworn in as chief minister.

But in a development that was to characterise his later career, the SVD experiment failed because of intra-party squabbles and lasted less than a year. In 1968, seeing his political future in threat, Charan formed another party, the Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD). In the subsequent state elections in 1969, the BKD emerged as the second largest party in the Assembly and Charan Singh as an undisputed leader in his own right. And with the Opposition unable to reach an understanding and the Congress unable to command majority support, Charan was appointed chief minister in February 1970, but once again for a brief spell of six months before the state was brought under President's rule.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Charan Singh after finally becoming prime minister in 1979: burning ambition

But his political appetite had now been whetted and his ambitions expanded correspondingly. In 1974, he joined other opposition parties in their bid to form a "national alternative" to the Congress under the banner of the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD). Charan's election as chairman of the BLD placed him for the first time as head of a multi-state party but brought him no immediate gains. He, along with other leaders, was arrested during the Emergency.

Mrs Gandhi's surprise announcement of general elections in 1977 succeeded in finally getting the opposition parties together under the banner of the Janata Party and they formed the first non-Congress government ever at the Centre. Charan Singh was denied his ambition of becoming the prime minister with the election of Morarji Desai and had to be content with the number two job, that of home minister and later, finance minister for a brief period. But his personal ambitions undermined the government. He resigned from the Janata Party in April 1979 and revived the BLD under the name of the Lok Dal. The resignation of his followers hastened the fall of the Janata government, and with the aid of his political enemies, the Congress (I), he finally realised his life-long dream of becoming the prime minister. It was never destined to last. Mrs Gandhi paid him back in his own coin by withdrawing her party's support and the government quickly collapsed. Charan Singh was asked to continue as caretaker prime minister till the next elections in January 1980.

The Janata Party was routed in the elections and Charan Singh's Lok Dal also split into a rival group headed by Karpoori Thakur. Between then and his illness, Charan tried desperately to establish himself as a leader of the Jats but his burning ambition and cantankerous nature ensured that he would never rise again to the heights he had dreamt of.

Though a man who commanded respect and even fear, Charan's strong differences with his cabinet and political colleagues and his blinkered anti-urban economic ideology—symbolised by his presentation of a disastrous budget as finance minister—were the main stumbling block in his desire to achieve political greatness. By his passing away, Charan Singh leaves behind a disputed legacy and an even more disputed political career.

—DILIP BOBB with SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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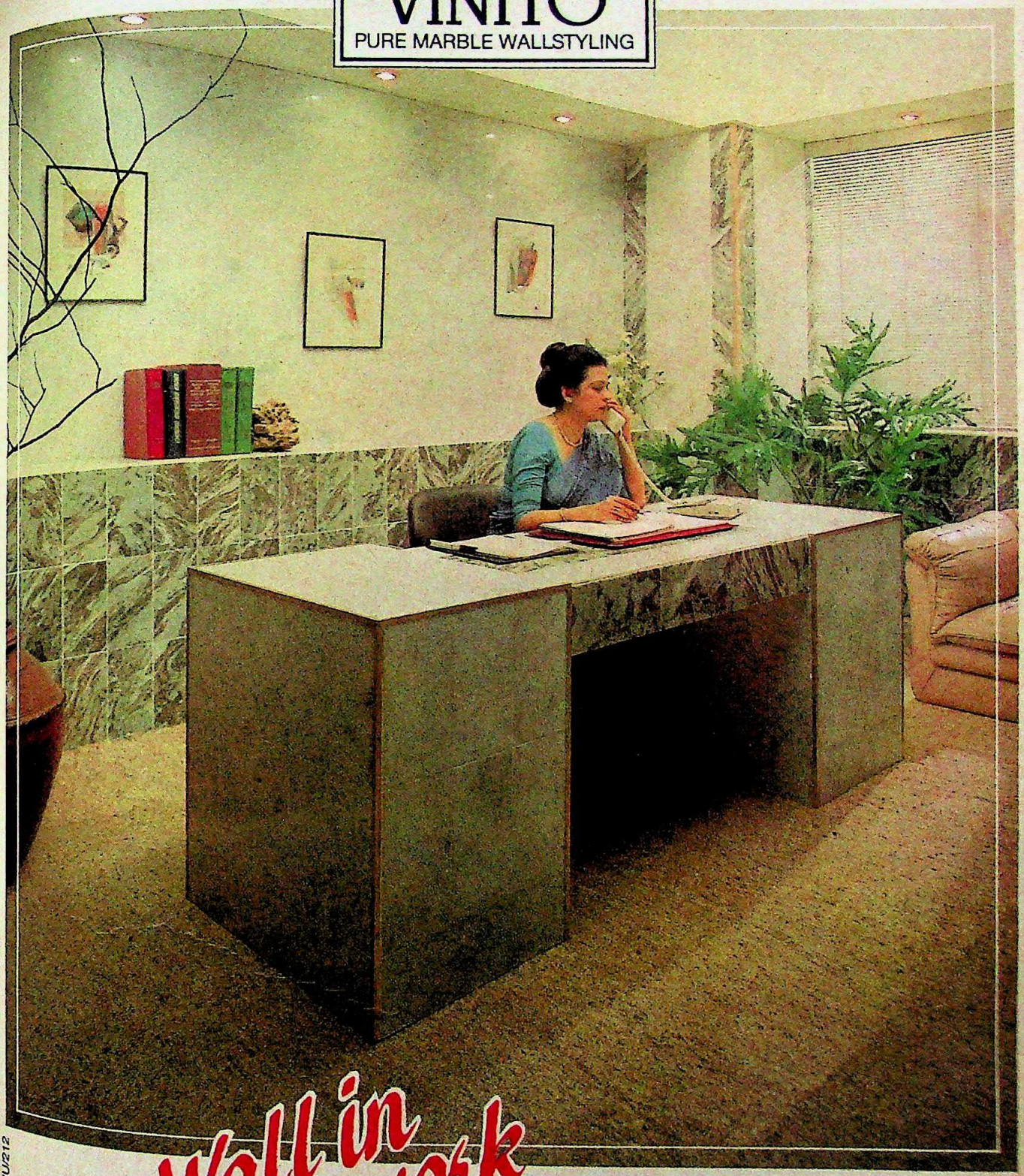

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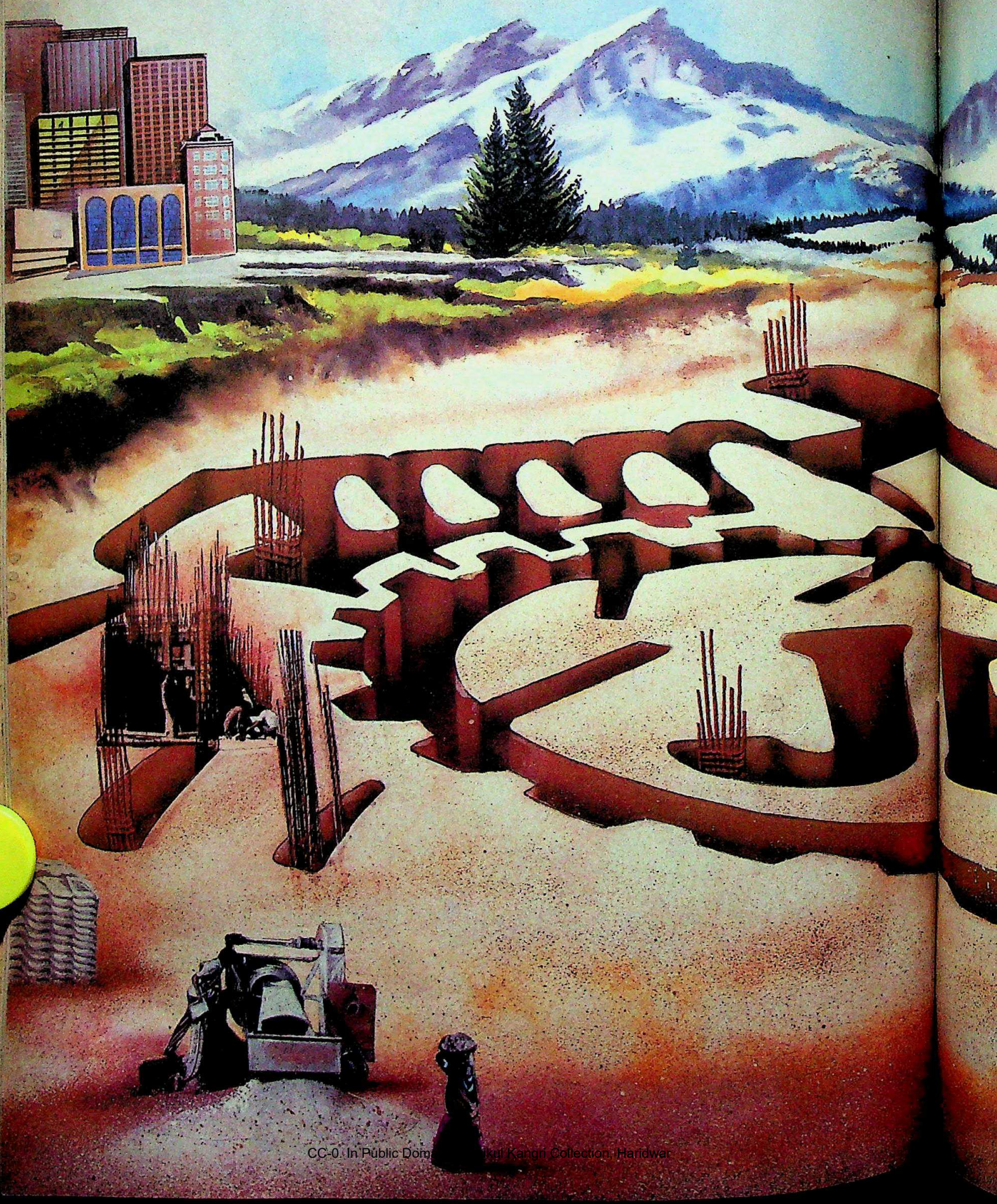

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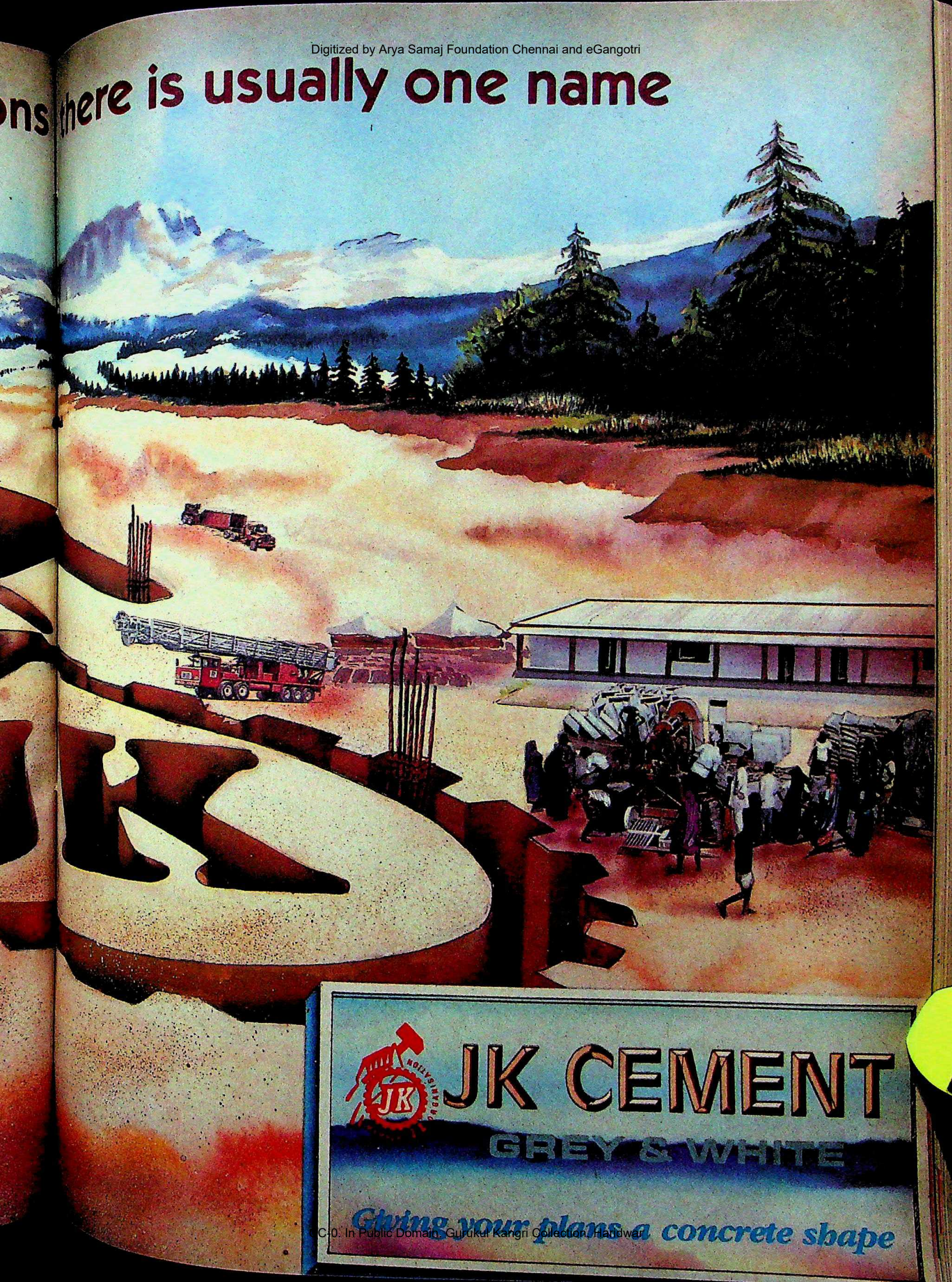

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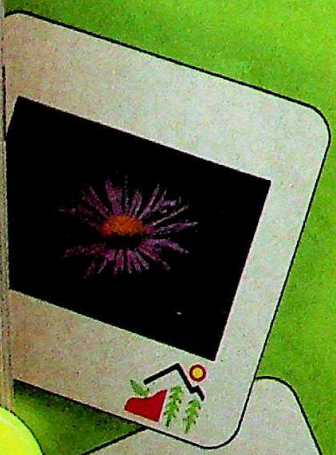

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ERADI TRIBUNAL

Muddying the Waters

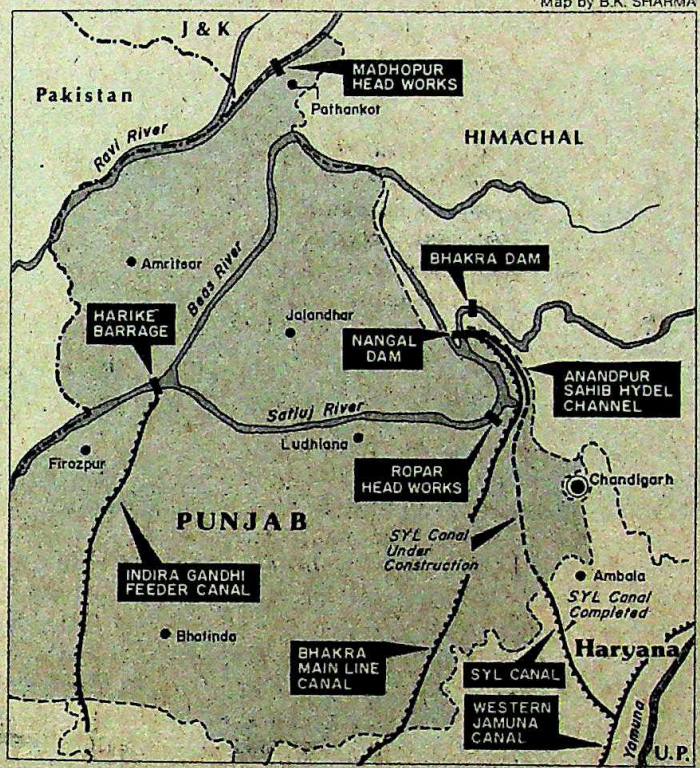
CONTRARY to its name and expectations, the Punjab accord, in the last 22 months of its existence, has generated plenty of discord. In Punjab, it was rejected by one faction of the Akalis and the bulk of the militants while neighbouring Haryana protested it had got the short end of the stick. Instead of clearing the path for the accord's implementation, the Mathew, Venkatramaiah and Desai commissions further complicated issues that were complex to begin with. Last fortnight the report of the Eradi Tribunal, set up to decide Punjab's and Haryana's share of Ravi-Beas waters as part of the accord, muddied the waters further. It reduced Punjab's share, doubled Haryana's allocation and left Rajasthan's share unchanged.

Not surprisingly, the report raised howls of protest in Punjab, where almost every political party rejected its findings. Former chief minister Surjit Singh Barnala warned that the Akali Dal(L), which he heads, would mobilise grassroots support for a protest movement against the Eradi award. The Akali Dal(L) General Secretary Manjit Singh Khaira accused Eradi of trying to doctor the accord while former finance minister Balwant Singh predicted that, if implemented, the findings would deprive 40 per cent of Punjab's irrigated land of water. "The Majha and Malwa areas will be turned into another Rajasthan," he charged. Even CPI(M) politburo member Harkishan Singh Surjeet complained that Eradi had needlessly injected fresh complications into the waters issue.

And though Haryana welcomed the Eradi verdict, there was some doubt whether this gift of additional water would boost the flagging prospects of the embattled Congress(I) in the June 17 elections to the state legislature.

In fact, the Ravi and Beas rivers have proved to be waters of discord for Punjab and Haryana ever since 1966 when the two states were carved out of the undivided Punjab. At that time, the composite state of Punjab was using 7.2 million acre feet (MAF) of water from the river system. After reorganisation, each state laid claim to a major portion of the water and several Centrally-appointed committees failed to find a solution. Then the Central Government issued a statutory order on March 24, 1976, in the midst of the Emergency, dividing the water 50:50 between the two states. Each state got 3.5 MAF and the remaining 0.2 MAF was allocated to Delhi. (One acre foot of water means one acre of land covered by one foot of standing water.)

Map by B.K. SHARMA



By reducing Punjab's share of the Ravi-Beas waters and doubling Haryana's, the Eradi report has only inflamed passions in Punjab.

The then chief minister of Punjab Giani Zail Singh, however, appealed to the Centre to revise the "unjust" award as it would upset the state's farm-based economy. With his letter Zail Singh appended a resolution passed by the leaders of all parties in the Vidhan Sabha saying that "some areas of Punjab already being irrigated for the last 15 years...will be denied irrigation in order to make up the quantity of water to be made available to Haryana". A year later, Zail Singh's successor Parkash Singh Badal took up the plea. He informed the Centre that Punjab had already developed irrigation facilities to use 5.94 MAF of the 7.2 MAF of Ravi-Beas waters that had been allocated to the composite Punjab. In July 1979, the Punjab government filed a suit in the Supreme Court asking that the 1976 notification of the Central Government dividing the Ravi-Beas waters be struck down. Haryana filed a counter-suit asking the court to direct the Centre to implement the 1976 award.

While these suits were pending, the Congress(I) returned to power in Punjab and chief minister Darbara Singh signed a tripartite agreement with his counterparts in Haryana (Bhajan Lal) and Rajasthan (Shiv Charan Mathur) in the presence of prime minister Indira Gandhi. The surplus Ravi-Beas waters, re-estimated at 17.17 MAF, were apportioned with Punjab getting 4.22 MAF, Haryana 3.50 MAF, Rajasthan 8.60 MAF, Jammu and Kashmir 0.65 MAF and Delhi 0.20 MAF. This agreement required both Haryana and Punjab to withdraw their Supreme Court suits. But then, in July 1985, came the Punjab accord with Clause 9 referring to the sharing of river waters. It said: "The farmers of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan will continue to get water not less than what they were using from the Ravi-Beas system as on July 1, 1985....The claim of Punjab and Haryana regarding their share in the remaining waters will be referred for adjudication to a tribunal to be presided over by a Supreme Court judge....The decision of this tribunal will be binding on both parties."

When the Akalis came to power in Punjab in October 1985, they got the Vidhan Sabha to pass a resolution declaring the 1981 agreement as redundant. When the tribunal headed by Justice V. Balakrishna Eradi of the Su-

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preme Court started its work, Punjab took the plea that on July 1, 1985, it had drawn 13,336 cusecs, Haryana 1,843 cusecs and Rajasthan 6,216 cusecs of Ravi-Beas waters. When multiplied by 365 to get the annual usage Punjab's usage came to 9.655 MAF of water, Haryana's to 1.334 MAF and Rajasthan's to 4.5 MAF. Since this usage had been protected by the accord, Punjab said the tribunal could adjudicate on the remaining 1.69 MAF of water.

Haryana protested. It argued that water usage should be gauged not by a single day's drawals but by the average water used over the previous year. Since there had been two breaches in the Bhakra main canal in that year the average of the last four years should be taken. The tribunal also held that Punjab's stand was not realistic. "The words used 'as on 1-7-1985' would clearly indicate that it is not the discharge at the canal heads on that particular day that is material. The expression 'as on' indicates the terminus date." As Justice Eradi explained: "We interpreted the wording 'as on July 1,1985' to mean a period ending on that day. It is the accepted judicial interpretation. So we took the figures from the Bhakra Beas Management Board of actual discharges of water at the canal heads and drew up a five-year average." The actual use of water over this period was: Punjab 5.406 MAF, Haryana 1.62 MAF and Rajasthan 6.09 MAF. In its final verdict the Eradi Tribunal awarded Punjab 5 MAF, Haryana 3.83 MAF and left Rajasthan's share untouched. "Haryana gained 2.21 MAF but it will start drawing the water only after the Sutlej Yamuna Link (SYL) canal is built," stated Eradi.

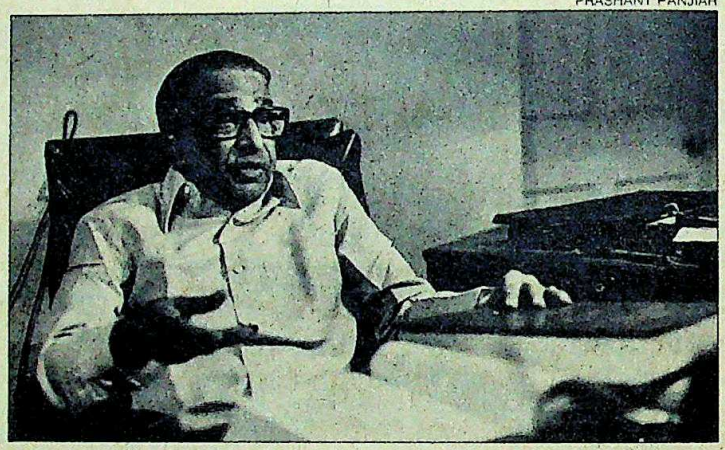
The tribunal rejected Punjab's contention that non-riparian Rajasthan had no right to any of the Ravi-Beas waters. "In a country like India the riparian theory is not accepted because there is no fixity of state boundaries. Under our Constitution state boundaries can be changed and a state can even be abolished. So no state can claim ownership of waters," Eradi said.

The response from the Akalis was understandably bitter. Said Khaira: "The award means that we will get less water than we were using. The calculations are deliberately misleading. This is an attempt to doctor the accord, and a complete negation of the terms of reference of the accord. The governor should not accept it."

But experts welcomed the verdict. "The award is the best the tribunal could do under the circumstances. It tried to arrive at a fair decision," said Dr Y.K. Murthy, former chairman of the Central Water Commission. The former chairman of the Narmada Control Authority M.N. Venkatesan said the tribunal had done a good job in making a fresh allocation. And B.B. Vohra, chairman of the Advisory Board on Energy sought to correct the mistaken belief that more water was synonymous with greater prosperity. "Irrigation has not been an unmixed blessing. It takes its toll in the form of salinisation and waterlogging. In Punjab half a million acres of land is waterlogged," Vohra said.

Eradi with the report: controversial

PRASHANT PANJIAR



> "Frequent disputes regarding river waters arise, introducing political tensions... making just solutions difficult...as in the present case."
> ERADI TRIBUNAL REPORT

Eradi and other experts agreed that the additional water allocated to Haryana cannot be utilised till the SYL canal is completed. And there is no saying when that will happen though, in political terms, the focus in both states will shift to the canal. There are signs that the Bharatiya Kisan Union and the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) may revive the agitation they had launched some time ago in Punjab against the digging of the canal. As it is, most Punjab farmers feel that their interests have been sold down the river by the Centre. And Haryana will increase pressure on the Centre to complete canal construction while Punjab is under President's rule. Without the canal, Haryana cannot use its full quota of water.

The Akali government in Punjab had probably expected an adverse verdict from Eradi and that may be why it did not raise too much of a row about its dismissal. "We knew that the report was going to go in favour of Haryana and we had already told the Centre that we would not be able to accept it. We are going to reject the report," admitted Balwant Singh. Apart from the Akalis, others also feel that the release of the report was so timed that the Centre could send a not-so-subtle message to the voters of Haryana. Eradi says he had nothing to do with the timing of the report's release. "We submitted the report on January 30. Why it was held up is something on which I cannot comment." But Eradi rued the fact that heading such a tribunal was a thankless task. "Unfortunately whatever one does nobody is satisfied."

Thankless or not, Eradi and the two fellow judges on the tribunal—justices A.M. Ahmadi and P.C. Balakrishna Menon—muddied the disputed waters some more by discovering additional water (amounting to 1.11 MAF) which neither state had been aware of. This, Eradi said, was the water flowing into the rivers through tributaries and streams downstream of the rim station where flow measurements are normally taken. It added this additional water, 1.11 MAF, to the Ravi-Beas pool which enabled it to raise Haryana's allocation. But as the Eradi report says: "Frequent disputes regarding the distribution of river waters arise, introducing political tensions resulting in further aggravating the dispute thereby making just solutions through negotiations difficult...as in the present case." It would, therefore, not be surprising that, despite its noble objective, the Eradi award may further inflame existing political passions in Punjab and Haryana.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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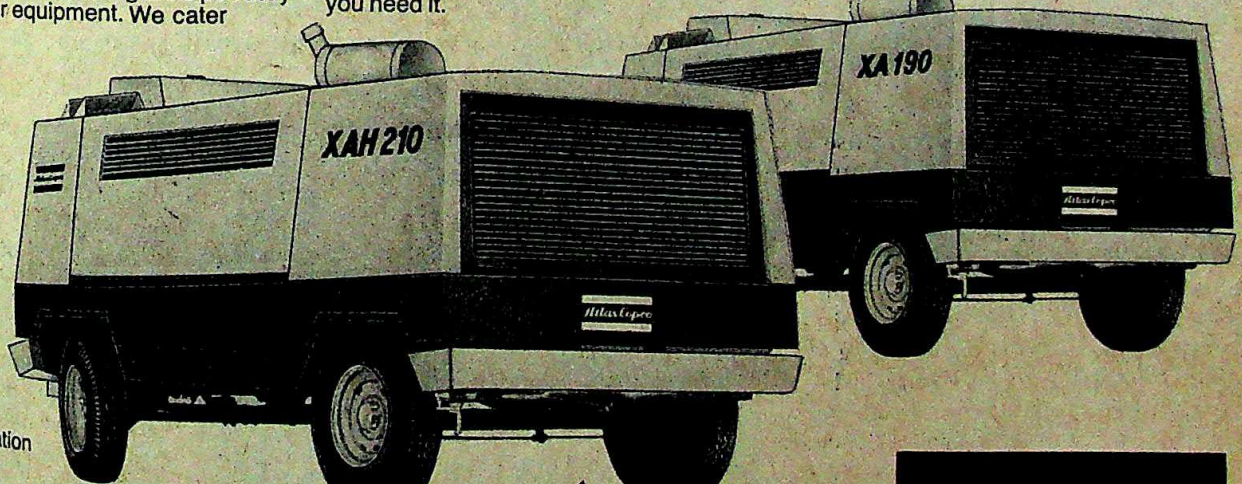

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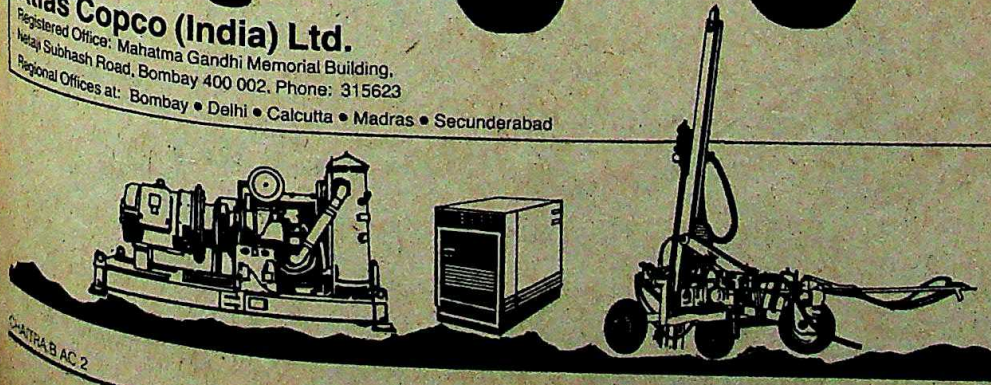

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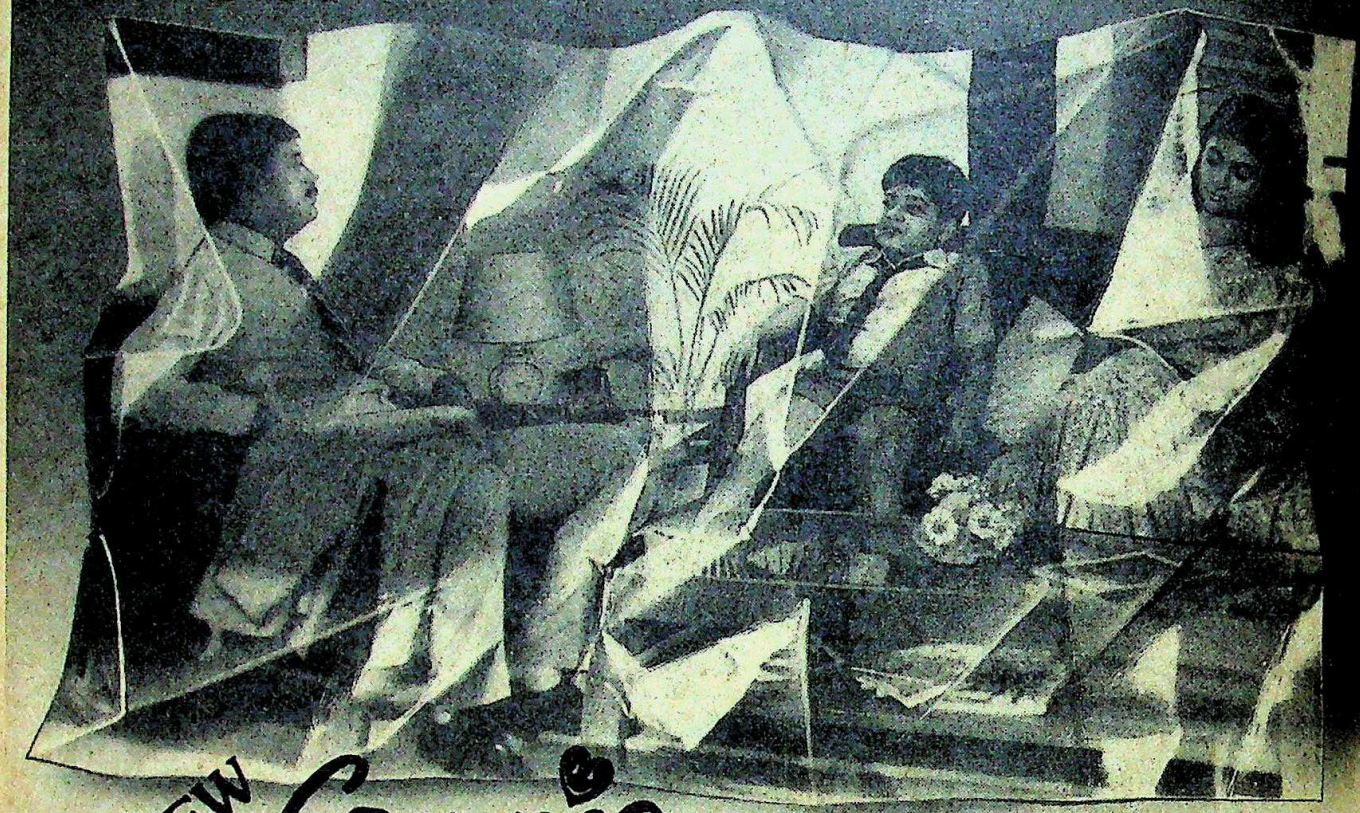

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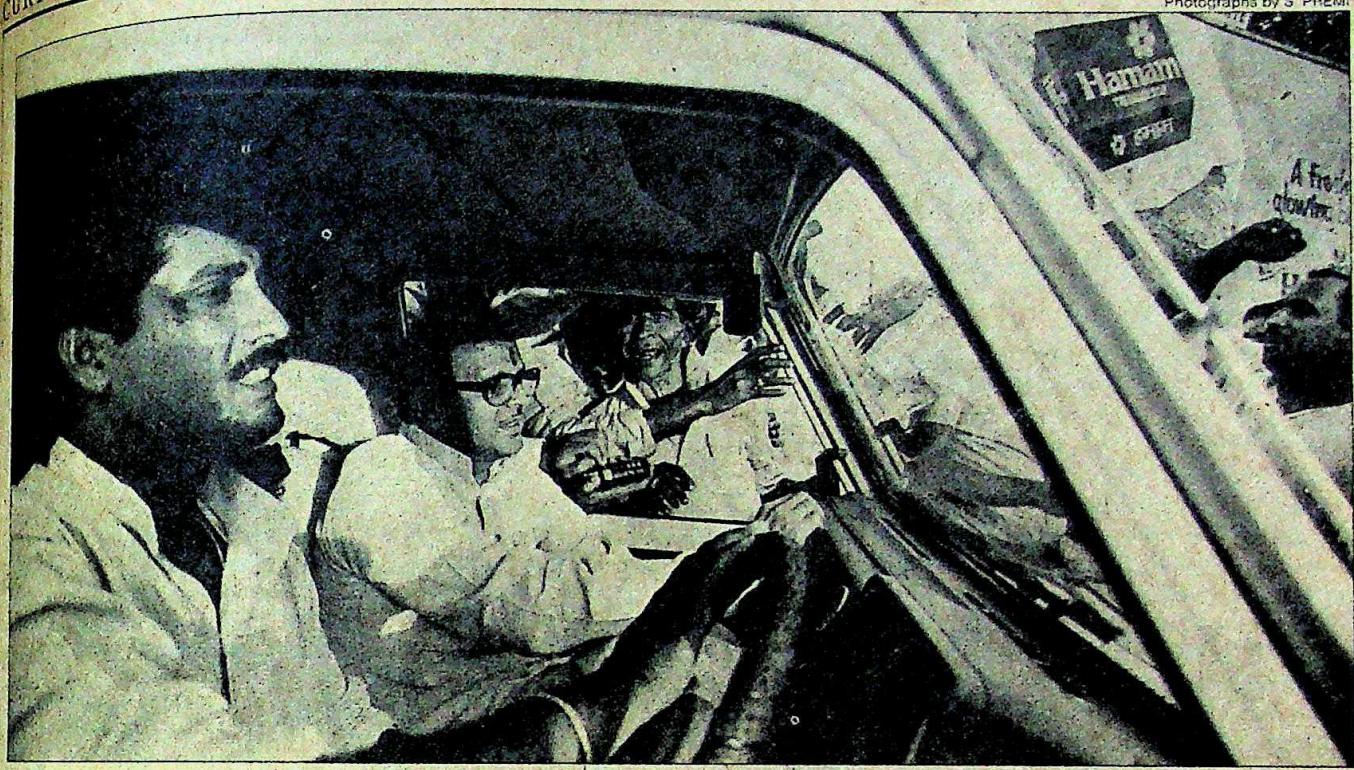


V.P. Singh at rally site: unruffled

UTTAR PRADESH

Desperate Measures

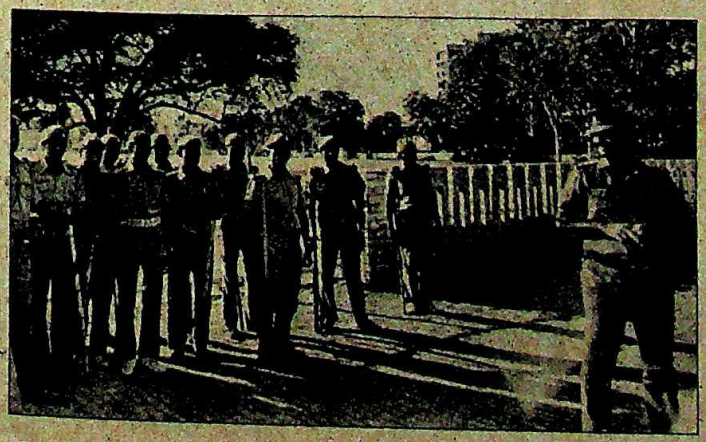
IN at least one way, communal violence has come as a blessing for the Uttar Pradesh chief minister. He tried to put these to good use to contain V.P. Singh, former Union defence minister by preventing him from addressing a state government employees rally in Lucknow on May 27.

On May 24, when the state administration relayed wireless messages to all communally sensitive districts, imposing a ban on public meetings and rallies, the district administration of Lucknow promptly issued a press release saying that the proposed employees' rally would be covered by the ban. This, despite the fact that Lucknow has no record of communal disturbances.

The administration got into the act soon after the rally was announced on May 14 and tried to split employee ranks. B.N. Singh, president of the State Employees and Teachers Coordination Committee, criticised V.P. Singh's coming, saying that there was "no need to involve politics and politicians in our struggle". However, soon afterwards, Mandhata Singh and Lallan Pandey, both members of the presidium of the State Employees and Teachers Confederation, justified the step, arguing that V.P. Singh had been called not because of political reasons but because he is "a good person and a man of principles".

It was an exhibition of raw state power. On rally day, heavily armed policemen not only cordoned off Lucknow's large Begum Hazrat Mahal Park, but made doubly sure that no one could enter the grounds by using state roadways and police vehicles to block all entry points. Their preparations resembled those required to face an armed mob. Lathi-wielding policemen shooed away the thousands who had turned up to attend the rally and arrested 30 people, apart from 10 employee leaders who were taken into custody, both before and after the rally attempt.

Policemen blockading Lucknow ground



An unruffled V.P. Singh drove around the park, viewing the elaborate arrangements, before returning to his Raj Bhawan Colony residence. While the state administration may have succeeded in achieving what it had set out to do, Congress(I) circles feel that the real gain has been the former minister's, whose stature has only risen because of the blatant state obstructionism.

Bir Bahadur Singh also tried to keep support for V.P. Singh, within the party, under control by reportedly proposing a cabinet reshuffle in which he suggested dropping several of the eight ministers—including Transport Minister Sanjay Singh and Energy Minister Sunil Shastri—who sympathised with V.P. Singh. The reshuffle, apparently postponed under New Delhi's instructions, was expected in the light of the warm welcome accorded to V.P. Singh by Congress(I) leaders and workers at Lucknow, Kanpur and Allahabad.

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During the fortnight, the battle also shifted to Allahabad, V.P. Singh's home town and Amitabh Bachchan's constituency. Last fortnight, newspaper readers across the country were surprised to find an item, datelined Allahabad, saying that the former defence minister had been expelled from the Congress(I) following the adoption of a resolution by the local party unit.

The man behind this attempt—which failed—was Ashok Bajpai, the son of Union Minister of State for Welfare Dr Rajendra Kumari Bajpai. Ashok's resentment springs from the fact that V.P. Singh, as state party chief, had denied him a ticket in the last assembly elections because of his alleged involvement in several scandals. Predictably, he is now an ardent Bachchan backer.

Ashok first tried to push a resolution for V.P. Singh's expulsion on May 19 at a meeting of city Congress(I) office-bearers. When that failed, another similar attempt was made at a meet of district party workers on May 24 in which the former minister as well as a local MLA, Satish Jaiswal, were expelled from the Congress(I)'s primary membership for six years. The meeting was neither authorised nor attended by any central observer. Only 2,000 of the 10,000 workers expected to participate showed up and, what is more, none of the nine local MLAs attended. This, and the fact that most of the district office-bearers stayed away, only went to demonstrate the power that V.P. Singh continues to enjoy in Allahabad despite the organised campaign within the party against him.

The move was apparently aimed at serving as a warning to V.P. Singh followers state-wide, that their continuing support to him would invite severe disciplinary action. Many Allahabad workers carried the impression that Ashok's plan had the backing of central party leaders. But the whole scheme backfired and showed up the organisers badly when the AICC(I) General Secretary Nawal Kishore Sharma issued a statement in New Delhi the same day saying that the district unit did not have the authority to expel any MP or MLA.

While the drama of trying to contain V.P. Singh in Uttar Pradesh is likely to continue in the coming weeks, the former minister can rest assured for now in the knowledge that nothing the state administration or Bir Bahadur Singh have done so far has succeeded in tarnishing his image in the slightest. On the other hand, it has usually had the opposite effect.

—DILIP AWASTHI

THAKKAR COMMISSION

Shrouded in Secrecy

NO sooner had the two-member Thakkar Commission begun its probe into the Fairfax affair than it landed itself smack into the lap of controversies that are threatening to heat up further. Former defence minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh, the inquiry's most obvious target, has already requested that the commission's work be conducted in full public view, while S. Gurumurthy of the *Indian Express* is insisting that he be allowed to be present during the hearings. Observers find it curious that Gurumurthy, who is at the heart of the controversy since he was accused of introducing Fairfax to the Finance Ministry, has not even been called as a witness.

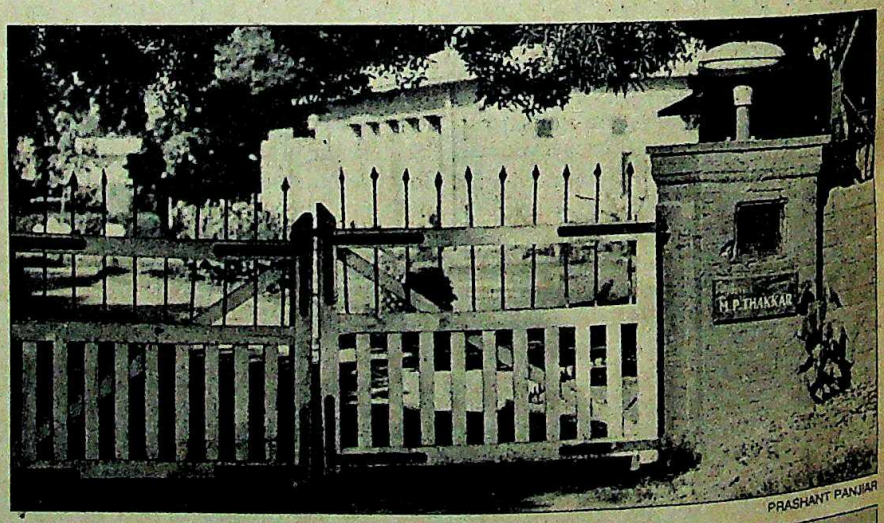
Noted lawyer Fali Nariman led the initial legal attack in a hard-hitting article in the *Indian Express* against the commission's procedure. He wrote: "Secrecy breeds suspicion and suspicion (however ill-founded) ultimately breeds contempt. The highest court in the land has the highest reputation to live up to—it simply cannot afford to expose itself to suspicion in whatever capacity its justices are called upon to function." Thakkar's first report—on Mrs Gandhi's assassination—is still a national secret. But its findings have already been used by a section of the media to cast aspersions on top government officials and dignitaries, including the President.

When Justice Thakkar, and his colleague, Justice Natrajan, were appointed to the (Fairfax) commission in April, the Government announced publicly that they would operate from the Supreme Court and submit a report within three months, which would be placed before Parliament. But the commission is neither functioning from the Supreme Court nor conducting an open inquiry. It is operating furtively from the well-guarded residence of Justice Thakkar. And early

Thakkar

Natrajan

Justice Thakkar's residence: in-house inquiry



PRASHANT PANJIAR

The fact that the Thakkar Commission is operating furtively from Justice Thakkar's residence, makes it clear the report will face a problem.

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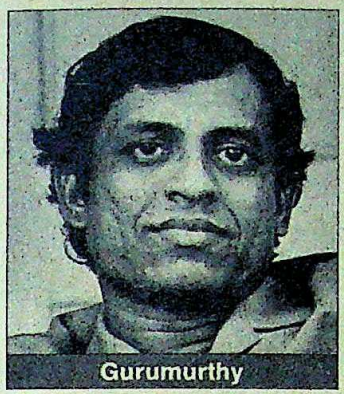
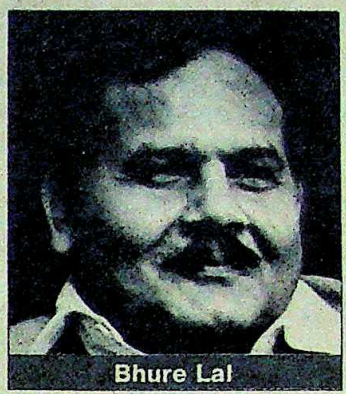
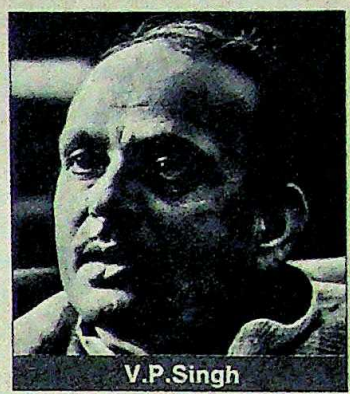
Wadia


Gurumurthy


Bhure Lal


V.P.Singh

last month, the press was barred entry.

The commission had also advertised for affidavits from anybody who possessed useful information. But even before the closing date for filing affidavits, it began summoning key officials for recording their statements. Predictably, the first one was Bhure Lal—the formidable former enforcement director. He was served a notice on the evening of May 4, while on sick leave, directing him to appear before the commission next morning. This left him with no time to consult counsel or to study relevant documents. And he was questioned first by Justice Thakkar, in the absence of Justice Natrajan. Later, they questioned him together for three hours.

The commission has now sent a detailed questionnaire to Nusli Wadia (Bombay Dyeing), V.P. Singh, the CBI and other Finance Ministry officials. In response, the finance secretary filed a voluminous affidavit that is likely to form the basis of the inquiry. And the CBI too submitted its documents—including the alleged forged letters to the commission.

The contents of the communications received from the commission are nearly identical. Some of the questions reportedly being asked by the commission are:

- Why did the Enforcement Directorate engage Fairfax?
- Who authorised its engagement?
- What was the role of Gurumurthy in hiring Fairfax?
- Was Nusli Wadia connected with Fairfax in any manner?
- Did V.P. Singh approve Bhure Lal's visit to the US or not?
- Why didn't V.P. Singh and former revenue secretary Vinod Pandey put their approval in writing for hiring Fairfax?
- Were the antecedents of Fairfax examined before hiring it?
- Was the Indian Embassy in the US involved in this or not?

The inquiry is zeroing in on the role of V.P. Singh, Bhure Lal and Vinod Pandey and the Government has made it obvious that it will play the role of an adversarial prosecutor.

Nariman is not the only one critical of the secrecy in which the commission has enshrouded itself. V.P. Singh, in a short reply to the commission, has also requested an open inquiry. Singh told INDIA TODAY: "Since the commission was born out of a public debate and is exercising the whole country, it would be better if its work was done in public. We will fully cooperate with the commission in conducting its proceedings."

Legal experts agree that only an open inquiry can reveal the credibility of the arguments being offered for and against the hiring of the foreign agency. Said an advocate connected with one witness: "Since none of the parties, including the Government, has to hide anything, let the media and the public watch the proceedings of a commission whose findings are going to affect the entire gamut of investigation against those who have taken Indian money abroad."

What irks legal sources is that the Thakkar Commission has begun to follow the Shah Commission's procedures. Justice T.P.S. Chawla had quashed the proceedings of the Shah Commission on the ground that no commission could assume the role of "an investigator, interrogator or inquisitor or conduct a fishing or a roving inquiry." According to the Commissions of Inquiry Act, the persons who are likely to be affected by the findings of a commission or whose conduct is being probed are entitled to be given a notice to be present during the proceedings and shown all the documents. And they have the right to cross-question witnesses and deponents. The recording of oral evidence can start only after the perusal of affidavits. But in this case the oral evidence began 12 days before the date of filing affidavits expired.

It has become quite apparent that the battle-lines are now drawn. As expected, the inquiry is zeroing in on the role of Singh, Bhure Lal and Vinod Pandey. And the troika has decided to fight back in unison. Senior advocates like Soli Sorabjee and Nariman have volunteered their services for defending the former defence minister and the officials who worked with him when he was finance minister. Recent moves made by the Government have made it obvious that it will play the role, not of a neutral party giving information, but that of an adversarial prosecutor of V.P. Singh and his former subordinates. That the Finance Ministry's affidavit was not shown to Bhure Lal or Vinod Pandey, who as government officials have the right to examine it under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, is proof of this development.

Still, last fortnight, the Finance Ministry agreed to request government counsel to "assist" Bhure Lal and Vinod Pandey. But what shape this vague promise will take is yet to be determined.

The other targets are Nusli Wadia, Gurumurthy and Fairfax Chairman Michael Hershman. Wadia was out of the country and had not replied to the commission's notice. And Gurumurthy wrote to the commission through his advocate that he would like be summoned. But whether this is likely to happen is still anybody's guess.

The real fire-works are likely to start when the commission begins its actual proceedings, after going through the scores of statements and affidavits filed before it. Since legal questions are already being raised about its procedures, the commission will have to tread very carefully to safeguard its credibility.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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ASSAM

Minority Moves

ASSAM'S tribal and minority leaders have taken their war against the ruling Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) to a new battlefield: New Delhi. The AGP too has not been far behind. Since the first week of May, representatives of the AGP have been camping in Delhi, trying to blunt their adversaries' campaign and swing Central opinion in their favour.

The AGP, whose support base has been dwindling since late last year, was particularly desperate to prove its credentials and dispel the charge of discrimination and chauvinism that has been levelled against it by the state's tribal and minority groups. And the indications are that it has won the first round.

"The Centre has assured us that it will not encourage the separatists," says Chief Minister Prafulla Mahanta. However, the AGP's demand for the amendment of the Illegal Migrants Determination (By Tribunals) Act to facilitate the detection and deportation of foreigners has not won Central support. Instead, the Union Home Ministry has suggested

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

"The Centre has assured us that it will not encourage the separatists (the tribal and minority groups)."

PRAFULLA MAHANTA
Assam chief minister

BIHAR

Disc Drive

THE Bihar Government is poised to hurl itself into the 21st century. Well, almost. Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey, taking a byte out of his leader's apple, has launched an ambitious disc drive—to computerise one of the most backward states in the country. Most of the state's 40 departments and 49 public sector undertakings are to be computerised at a cost of Rs 10 crore. The aim: wipe off the stigma of being one of the worst-run states, speed up development and spruce up the Government's image.

The plan, which will take a few months to be implemented, will include the setting up of local area and wide area networks. The Finance Department will be linked to all the 40 treasuries in the state (cost: Rs 1 crore) and the Police Department geared to fight crime with data fed into a central system. Other departments and state undertakings will have smaller systems (cost: Rs 10 lakh-Rs 15 lakh each) and divisional commissioners, heads of department and collectors will be encouraged to use personal computers.

The computerisation plan has been in the works for the last two years but Dubey decided to press the fast forward button last month. To speed up the processing, the Government also plans to set up a new directorate of computers and introduce computer courses at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels in engineering colleges and polytechnics. Says R.K. Singh, deputy director (computer planning) of the Department of Science and Technology: "The whole exercise is aimed at creating a computer culture in the state."

Critics of the scheme, however, recall Bihar's initial encounter with computer culture. The Irrigation Department, which was the first to acquire a computer in 1979 to monitor the progress of irrigation projects, had made little use of it. The computer had become more of a showpiece. Finally, in the absence of a maintenance contract with the dealer, it fell into disuse.

Then, in 1980 the Government decided to computerise the Police Department. A computer cell was set up and a blueprint drawn to define its functioning. A post of inspector general modernisation-cum-director, computers, was created. Surprisingly, the lone computer that was bought became operational only recently. However, the officials who continued to be posted to the cell were mostly policemen who were out of favour.

The fate of the bilingual computer system in the chief secretary's office was no different. Its idleness made one incumbent, K.K. Srivastava, use it as a Hindi word processor. Later, it was returned to the dealer.

Doubts were naturally voiced about the new plan's utility. Said Shivaji Sinha, a former inspector general of police: "This is like adding insult to injury. When people can't get safe drinking water, villages and towns have neither roads nor electricity, and when the Government cannot protect the people from such diseases as jaundice, how can it talk of computers?" And, in the light of past experience, the Bihar Government may have taken a bigger byte than it can swallow. —FARZAND AHMAD

Government office: computer culture

K.M. KISHAN

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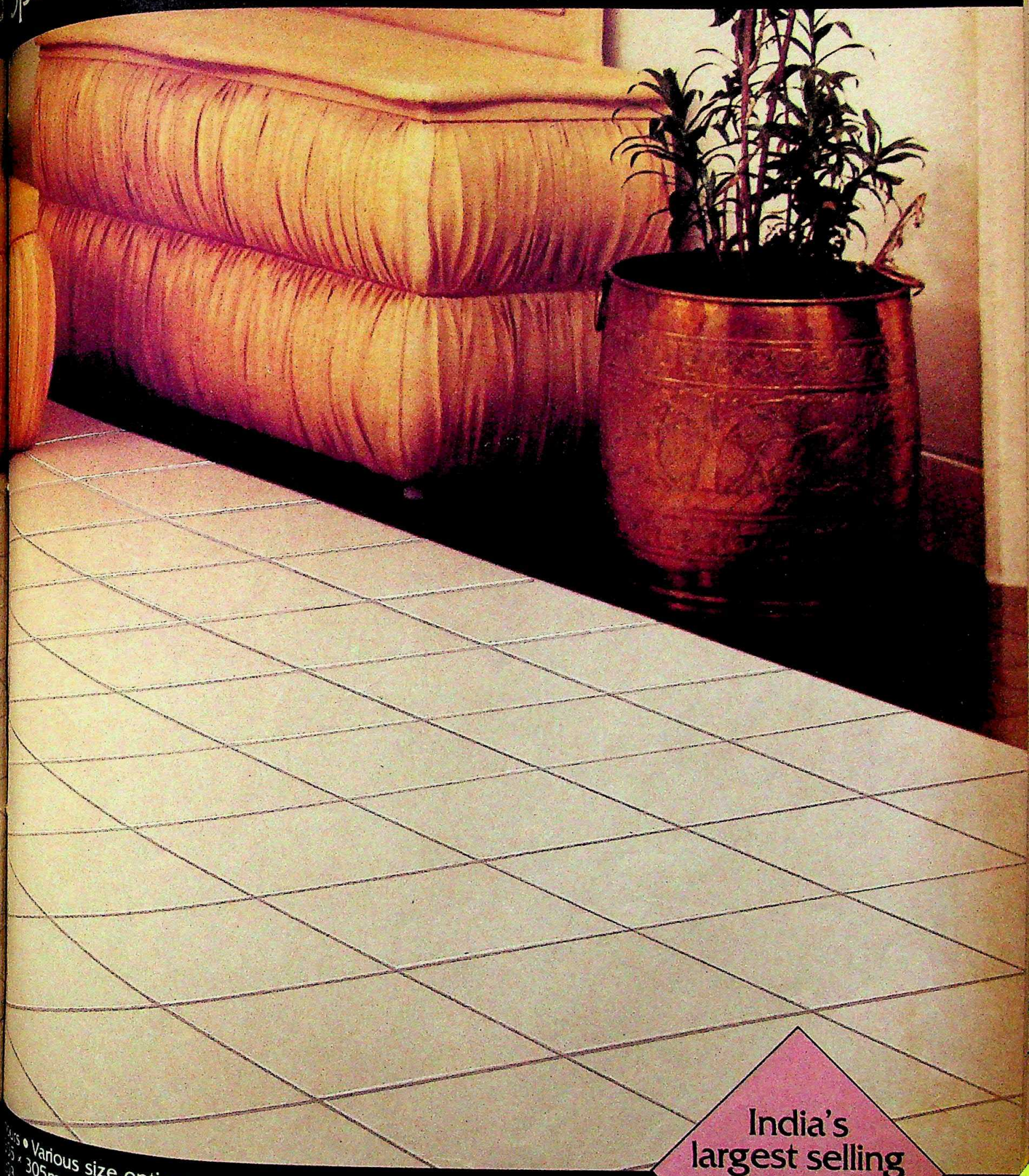

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an alternative and simpler method of registering complaints against foreigners. The state Government has been asked to issue special forms free of cost to any resident of Assam wishing to complain against a suspected foreigner. These forms will be submitted to the local superintendent of police who will investigate the complaint and then forward it to the nearest of the 20 "foreigners" tribunals in Assam.

However, the United Minorities Front (UMF) has tried to take the wind out of the AGP's foreigners-issue sails. Its delegation, which met the prime minister in Delhi, charged that the foreigners issue was a mere AGP bogey raised for the sole purpose of harassing the minorities. To drive home its point, it stated that of the 2,45,167 cases of suspected foreigners investigated by the police between December 1985 (when the AGP assumed power) and January 1987, only 7,771 were forwarded to the tribunals, and of these, only 528 persons were declared foreigners. "So where are the lakhs of foreigners the AGP has been shouting about?" the UMF President Golam Osmani queried.

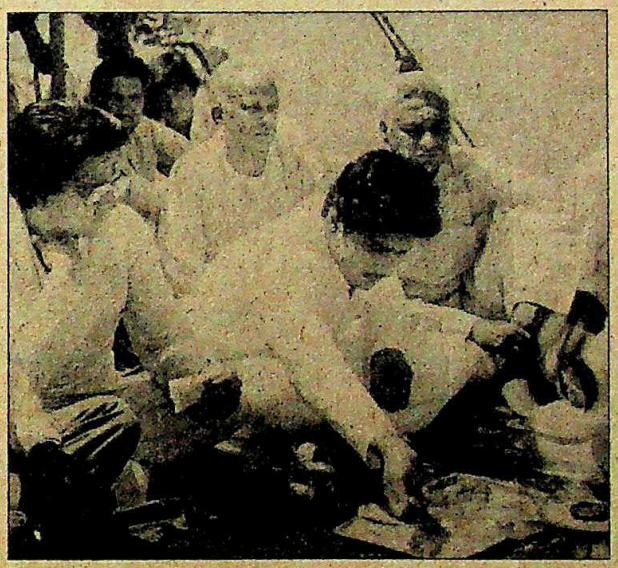
At the same time, another delegation, comprising the United Nationalist Tribals Liberation Front (UNTLF), the Autonomous State Demand Committee of Assam, the Zomi National Congress of Manipur and the United People's Party of Mizoram met the prime minister and acquainted him of the AGP Government's "evil intentions" against the state's tribals and minorities. They warned the prime minister that a paralysing agitation crippling the entire North-east would be launched in late June this year if their demand for immediate Central rule in Assam's tribal areas was not fulfilled. "We also tried to explain the AGP's dangerous policy of evicting thousands of tribals from their forest homelands without providing any alternative," says UNTLF Chairman Benai-Khungur Basumatari.

But though they may have failed to convince Delhi, the tribal leaders have not lost hope. At home, the AGP Government's support remains far from complete, and one indication of what the future might hold was provided last fortnight at the Kacharigaon reserve forest. When government officials with armed police and elephants went to evict tribal encroachers on forest land, they suddenly found themselves surrounded by a silent hostile army of almost 10,000 tribals. Clearly, the battle will continue on home ground.—INDRANIL BANERJIE

MADHYA PRADESH

One More Son

YET another son is rising on the political horizon of Madhya Pradesh. He is Arun Vora, the 25-year-old offspring of Chief Minister Motilal Vora. Propped by his powerful father, Arun has already become a VIP in his home town of Durg: he lays foundation stones of government buildings, presides over public functions and generally gets things done in the "public interest".



Arun performing puja at an official function: new power base

He has also come to hold several important offices, many of which came his way after his father became the chief minister two years ago. Besides being the district chief of Youth Congress(I) in Durg, he is a shareholder in the family daily, *Amrit Sandesh*, as also its correspondent, and director of a transport company, Durg Travels. He is also 'chief patron', 'patron' and 'chairman' of a host of local organisations. "Everyone is out to rope him in so that they can collect funds in the name of the chief minister's son," says CPI Durg District Secretary Rajkumar Gupta.

But his favourite activity remains laying foundation stones. The entire Durg-Bhilai belt is littered with them, each bearing the inscription "laid by Durg District Youth Congress President Shri Arun Vora". He is estimated to have laid foundation stones of at least 50 buildings in the area, most of them being government or government-sponsored constructions.

Earlier this year, Arun laid in a day, 10 foundation stones for community centres to be constructed by the Durg-Bhilai Special Area Development Authority (SADA) in the rural areas of Durg. Recalls an eyewitness: "He travelled in a caravan of about a dozen government-owned vehicles. There was a pilot jeep in front and another following him." At about the same time, he also presided over an official loan distribution camp organised by the Rural Development Agency. The function was attended, among others, by the town's mayor and the district collector.

Because Arun with his Youth Congress(I) post has no locus standi at such official functions, he has become the target of opposition attacks. Says District Janata Party chief Pradeep Choube: "What is objectionable is that he has been made chief guest even at government functions, with important district officials and public figures waiting on him."

And though Arun concedes that government organisations had started inviting him after his father became the chief minister, he adds hastily: "Basically, I am invited to functions because of my personal rapport with the people."

However, there is no denying the fact that Arun's extra-constitutional role often creates embarrassing moments for the authorities. Once, addressing a public gathering in a Durg village, a Congress(I) leader announced a grant of Rs 10,000 from the chief minister's fund on behalf of Arun. "He did not ask me before making the announcement and I did not know what to do," says Arun. What happened eventually? "The villagers got the money," he replies.

Eight months ago, it had been the statement of Bhajan Singh Nirankari, the chief minister's confidant and chairman of SADA, that had caused an uproar. The statement—"Since Voraji is not present, you should consider Arun Vora as the chief minister"—reportedly made at a public meeting sparked off a demonstration by the Janata Party and the CPI in front of the collector's office. "We also sent a tape of the speech with a letter of protest to Vora but there was no

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reply," says CPI's Gupta.

Arun was involved in yet another controversy last year when he applied for accreditation with the state Government as the *Amrit Sandesh* correspondent and his uncle, who edits the daily, recommended him though he didn't qualify. Under the rules, only working journalists are given accreditation and Arun is a shareholder in the paper he works for. The application was ultimately rejected, but not before it had caused much consternation in the fourth estate.

In fact, his efforts to ride two horses—politics and journalism—at the same time, lead to several ludicrous situations. During press tours, avoiding the company of fellow journalists, he travels in an official car, much to the amusement of others. Above all, he avoids attending opposition press conferences possibly due to the attacks on his father. Arun concedes he was over sensitive earlier. "But now I've reconciled myself to the situation," he says.

Now he has also started going to nearby towns like Rajnandgaon, Dongargarh, Dalli-Rajhara and Balod to address social gatherings at government colleges and to inaugurate community markets. People in Durg believe that Arun is being projected at the behest of his father who wants his younger son to succeed him in public life. This is not really surprising since most of the chief ministers in the past appear to have done the same thing. Blood is obviously thicker than water.

—N.K. SINGH in Durg

KERALA

Laboured Issue

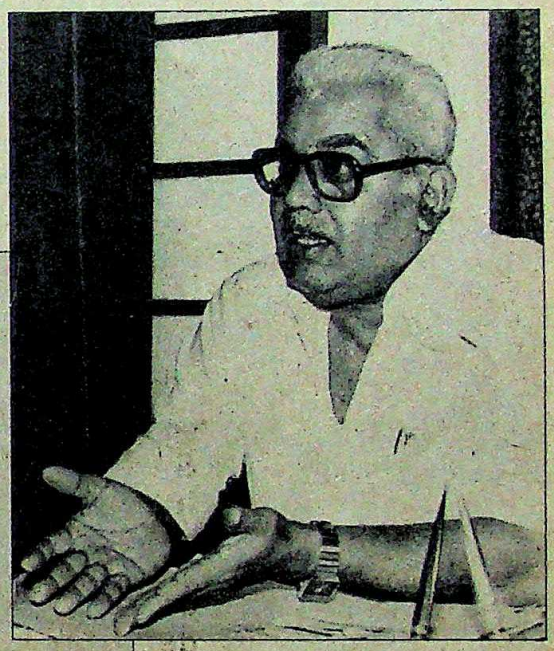
TWO months is generally enough of a political barometer to get the measure of a new state Government. By that yardstick, the E.K. Nayanar Ministry in Kerala seems to have made a flawless take-off. After many years, a coalition government has settled in without any major controversies or infighting—the bane of earlier state governments.

That success is all the more creditable considering that the Congress(I)-led Opposition has been desperately searching for an available handle to tarnish the image of the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) Ministry. And more so since elections to the Kottayam and Vamanapuram assembly seats are scheduled for June 2, which is considered a key test for the new ministry. Admitted former home minister Vayalar Ravi: "We have to win in at least one of the places to keep the LDF on a tight leash. If we lose both seats, it will be a great setback."

The state Opposition—the Congress(I) and the United Democratic Front (UDF)—is depending on the traditional Achilles heel of the LDF—the powerful Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU). Union bosses and workers have an unholy reputation in Kerala, with innumerable instances of them using violence to terrorise the population. They have, over the years, been labelled the thugs of the Marxist party. Whenever the LDF has been in power, the CITU has been a source of embarrassment.

But this time, the Marxist Government is taking no chances. It has sent out circulars to all CITU units in the state warning them that the Government's image depends on their dealings with the public. Says Trivandrum district Secretary of the CPI(M), K. Sreedharan: "We will not allow CITU members to indulge in anti-social activities by using their relationship with the CPI(M) as a cover." The party is obviously serious about keeping the union on a tight leash. Last month, it suspended Thomas Abraham, a lawyer in charge of the Vanchiyoor unit of the CITU in Trivandrum, for his failure to take disciplinary action against two erring union members who beat up a doctor on the main road in Trivandrum. Union notice boards in markets and major transport stations now carry names of members who have been suspended for misbehaving with the public. As M.M. Lawrence, LDF convenor and an all-India secretary of CITU, said: "Today, CITU workers are politically conscious and would do nothing to tarnish the Government's image. The CITU has always been the favourite whipping boy of right-wing papers and the Opposition."

> **"Karunakaran can't talk of insecurity (due to the CITU). In Meerut, people are being butchered. What is the Congress(I) doing?"**
> E.K. NAYANAR
> *chief minister, Kerala*



That statement is not without meaning. Already, the Opposition has launched an anti-CITU campaign following a minor incident, in the state secretariat, involving a dispute over the unloading of some desks and chairs. CITU head load workers had declared their right to unload the articles and demanded Rs 10 per piece as 'attimari' charges. 'Attimari' is the so-called right of CITU workers to load or unload articles on or from trucks or buses in markets—whether one wants their services or not. Brushing aside the incident, Nayanar commented it was only a dispute between the workers and the contractors who had brought the furniture. Other minor incidents involving similar disputes have taken place.

The Marxist leadership, however, believes that right-wing newspapers and the Opposition, led by former chief minister Karunakaran, are blowing up the issue on the eve of the two assembly elections. "Karunakaran has no right to talk about people feeling insecure in the state. In Delhi and Meerut, under the nose of his boss Rajiv Gandhi, hundreds of people are being butchered in communal riots. What the hell is the Congress(I) doing about it?" said Nayanar. But the Opposition's CITU-targeted pre-election campaign clearly shows that they have little else to criticise the LDF with. That alone is enough to give Nayanar and his new Ministry plenty of encouragement.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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IPCA

Lotus Blossoms

LOTUSES are blossoming everywhere. By some curious coincidence, the major share in Ajitabh Bachchan's pharmaceuticals company in Bombay, IPCA, is owned by an investment company called Lotus Investments Private Limited, in which Ajitabh, 39, is a director. Coincidentally, Lotus also happens to be the code-name for the Swiss bank account that Swedish Radio has alleged huge pay-offs were made into for the Bofors deal with the Indian Government. And with Ajitabh having shifted to Switzerland, the list of coincidences does seem a bit startling.

If this served to focus attention on the company that Ajitabh has left behind in India, there also appear to be some major discrepancies in Amitabh Bachchan's claim in recent press interviews that his brother had left behind a Rs 40-crore company. Ajitabh would have to possess the miraculous powers his brother displays on the screen to have increased IPCA's turnover to this level from the Rs 15 crore it recorded in 1985. In fact, the 37th annual report of the company, which was presented at the annual general meeting last fortnight, clearly shows that IPCA's turnover in 1986 was slightly over Rs 17 crore and that its profits have dropped sharply.

Both Madhukar Chandurkar and Prem Chand Godha, the two managing directors of the company, find it difficult to explain Bachchan's statement. But they also steadfastly refuse to speak on any aspect of IPCA's functioning. Chandurkar and Godha, through two investment companies, together control 48.7 per cent of IPCA's shares, with the other major chunk of 49.5 per cent being controlled by Lotus Investments.

In fact, after the pharmaceuticals company was granted permission in March last year to capitalise Rs 30 lakh from its general reserve of Rs 52.5 lakh, the break-up of equity shares in the company ran thus: Amitabh Bachchan (1,000): Jaya Bachchan (1,000): Ajitabh Bachchan (1,000): M.R. Chandurkar (1,000): P.C. Godha (1,000): Lotus Investments Pvt Ltd (2,97,000): Chandurkar Investments Pvt Ltd (1,49,000) and Kaygee Investments Pvt Ltd—controlled by Godha—(1,49,000).

However, this was not the pattern of the shareholding when the company was acquired from its earlier owner, Balubhai Chuilal Shah, a Burma-returned businessman. A board meeting in October 1975 had appointed Amitabh, Ajitabh, Jaya, Chandurkar and Godha as directors. At the time of acquisition, the major equity was held in Amitabh's name (54,000 shares), and Ajitabh and Jaya with 19,000 and 20,500 shares respectively, were the other two big shareholders, while Godha and Chandurkar had 500 shares each. The 1,000 preference shares were split between Amitabh (566) and Ajitabh (434).

It was after the Bachchans took over the floundering small-scale pharmaceuticals company, which was set up by an Englishman in Bombay in 1949, that IPCA shifted its registered office to 48, Government Industrial Estate, Kandivili West, a distant Bombay suburb where it has its main manufacturing unit. But under the Bachchans, IPCA has expanded considerably thanks to a steady injection of loans from Canara Bank (the company's present debt stands at Rs 3.5 crore). IPCA has now set up a second unit at Ratlam. Besides, the Bachchans have set up Mexin Medicaments at Silvasa (in Daman), the products of which are also sold through IPCA. The company also has an active export division, having sold formulations worth nearly Rs 1 crore last year, and winning the Chemexcil award for small-scale companies.

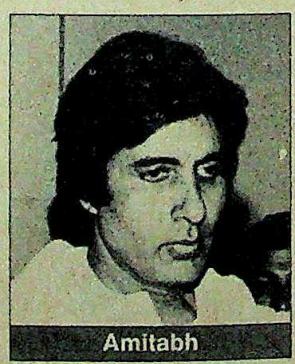
A company official says that it was after 1978 that IPCA started doing well. "Progress has largely been due to our

IPCA Laboratories: suspicious success

By some curious coincidences, the major shares in IPCA are held by Lotus Investments, in which Ajitabh is a director.

NAMAS BHOJAN

Ajitabh


Amitabh

Jaya

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success in finding a niche in the highly competitive pharmaceuticals market, and with 250 medical representatives throughout the country, we have been able to get doctors to accept the new medicines we introduced in India," says the official.

IPCA's biggest success has been with the antacid 'Perinorm', which is now widely used for heartburn conditions. Besides this, the company makes medicines for chest infections and vitamin syrups for both adults and children. All these formulations, company officials claim, are a product of its own R & D Department.

THE popularity of IPCA's medicines has certainly been reflected in its balance sheet, with the company maintaining steady profits for the last six years. But curiously, IPCA's profits suddenly shot up in 1985, a phenomenon for which company officials give no explanation, especially considering that in 1986 profits are back again to earlier levels.

After a modest Rs 5.33 lakh profit in 1981, IPCA turned in a much better performance in 1982 recording a Rs15.27-lakh profit, followed by Rs 12.19 lakh in 1983 and Rs 10.51 lakh in 1984. But in 1985, company profits spiralled to Rs85.85 lakh, even though the turnover recorded only a 30 per cent increase from Rs11.86 crore in 1984 to Rs 15.43 crore in 1985.

The pharmaceuticals firm's performance in 1985 was particularly remarkable, considering that labour trouble in the Kandivili unit in September led to an extended lock-out which lasted well into the next year. Even so, profits went up by 800 per cent and income by 30 per cent, of which Rs 37 lakh also came from assisting another small pharmaceuticals company in exporting its products, a service which IPCA, with its owner's high-level connections, is likely to extend further in the coming years.

Though both Chandurkar and Godha are doing all they can to ensure that the company keeps a low profile, IPCA first gained notice for its celebrity ownership when Amitabh Bachchan fell grievously ill and was hospitalised. Now once again, for different reasons, the company's link with the superstar MP has become a matter of public scrutiny. And with the company chairman comfortably ensconced in Switzerland, the spotlight may continue to remain on the pharmaceuticals company.

—M. RAHMAN

LAST WORD/RAJINDER PURI

Choosing a President

PEOPLE are sick of the PM-President controversy, so the Congress(I) is taking extra care in choosing the next President. People don't know it, but right now Rajiv Gandhi's trusted men are interviewing scores of applicants for the President's job. I was invited to join the interview board. The applicant walked in and took his chair.

"Can you tell us why you want to become President?" was the first question.

"I'm having trouble with my landlord," the applicant replied promptly, "I would like to live in Rashtrapati Bhavan."

A murmur of satisfaction went around the members of the board. One senior member leaned forward and asked: "We would like the new President to be aware of the world situation. Can you tell us the main threat to the country today?"

"Of course," the applicant said. "The main threat to India today is from Jaichand and Mir Jafar!"

The board members nodded approvingly. "Can you tell us what are your reading habits?" another member asked.

"I only read speeches written for me," the applicant said.

"Have you ever read the Constitution of India?" the member persisted suspiciously.

"Never!" the applicant said loudly.

"Good," the chairman said approvingly. "What about writing? Do you ever write letters?"

"Never," the applicant said emphatically, "I only write my signature, that's all."

"Ah," said a young member, "but how well can you do that?"

"I am very proficient at that," the applicant said. "Try me, I can sign blindfolded."

"What is your view of the Postal Bill?" the chairman asked.

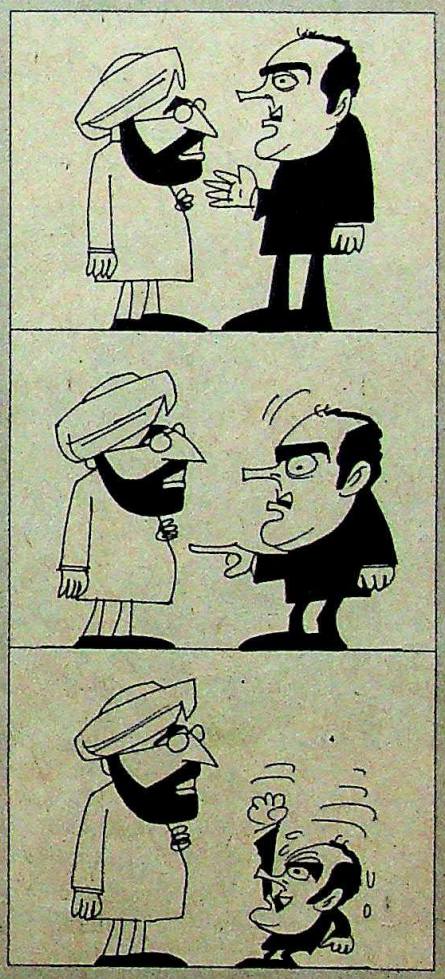
The applicant hesitated. "Normally I don't bother about such questions," he said, "but frankly I am not quite satisfied with it."

"Why not?" several members asked indignantly.

"I would have liked the scope of the bill to be enlarged to include phone tapping and permitting the Government to bug anyone's residence."

The board members looked surprised. "That's a very good suggestion," the chairman acknowledged. "Tell us," he said, casually, "which is your favourite foreign city?"

"I would like to visit Paris, I guess," the applicant said wistfully.



"Aha!" the chairman said, triumphantly. "So you love to travel, is it? For a moment you almost had us fooled, we thought you were just right for the post."

The applicant sighed and said, "I slipped badly there, didn't I?" and walked towards the door. He turned around and said in a puzzled voice, "Can I ask you one question? Why do you need a President?"

"Isn't that obvious," the chairman snapped. "Because we respect the Constitution of India, that's why!"

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PUNJAB

Discouraging Start

EXACTLY one week after Punjab came under President's rule, three people were killed in the Tarn Taran area. The manner in which they were killed is the best example of how little difference Julio Ribeiro's 'free hand' has so far made to the law and order situation.

The first to die was a journalist in Tarn Taran. He was shot dead around 9 a.m. in full view of a CRPF picket. His killers walked away, taunting eyewitnesses to catch them. When people tried to get the CRPF men to move, they refused, saying this was not their job. Later the same day, CPI(M) leader Deepak Kumar Dhawan was waylaid riding on his scooter near Sanghe village. His killers, mounted on a black horse, asked him to try and run but shot him as he attempted to. Finally, a doctor was also shot in broad daylight, in Badala village, after which his killers calmly strolled off across the fields. There were eyewitnesses to all three killings but nobody was prepared to talk.

This, according to Ribeiro, is the crux of their problems. "We are simply not getting enough information about these people and we cannot do anything without information," he said.

In the countryside, those who still have the courage to talk to strangers say that the reason they do not give information is that the security forces have yet to prove they are stronger than the terrorists. The terrorist information network still seems far superior to that of the police and informants are wiped out with a brutality that silences anyone else. So in the villages, the present deployment of 30,000 paramilitary troops statewide has changed nothing.

But the police is determined to believe otherwise. Said a senior police officer in Chandigarh: "The number of killings have come down (compared to April) by nearly 50 per cent and we have also succeeded in killing many more terrorists." But this claim is not substantiated by facts. Whereas 29 people were killed before the Akali government was dismissed on May 11, in the fortnight since President's rule was imposed, 27 people have been killed.

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR

Ray inspecting grain: in charge

Ribeiro, who had earlier stated that if he were given a 'free hand' it would dramatically improve things, now speaks in slightly different tones. Asked what special measures he was now taking, he said that they had already been doing everything they possibly could do. He has spent the past few weeks touring rural areas in the hope that mass contact will help build the people's confidence in the police.

Almost the only new measure Ribeiro has taken since President's rule, has been to arrest two former Akali Dal ministers and over 900 youth. This has led to allegations from the Akalis that he has unleashed a wave of repression. Said former chief minister S.S. Barnala: "Many people have come to us with complaints that they are being threatened by the authorities. They are also arresting our party workers. Instead of fighting the terrorists, they are fighting those who are fighting the terrorists."

The arrest and alleged torture of former minister for cooperation Prem Singh Chandumajra is being cited as yet another example of the new repression. According to former finance minister Balwant Singh, who met him before he was produced in court in Patiala, Chandumajra complained of having been hung upside down and beaten. The police is tight-lipped about the torture charge but Ribeiro sticks to his claim of Chandumajra's links with terrorists.

If Ribeiro is discovering the problems of finally being where the buck stops, Governor Ray is also finding out what it is like to be in Punjab's hot seat. When Ray moved into Barnala's office in the Chandigarh secretariat, he found that the state's wheat crop had been severely damaged and in the terrorist-infested districts of Amritsar and Gurdaspur the damage was over 80 per cent. Ray spent several days with senior officials to assess crop damage before setting out for Amritsar to view the situation and announce a relief package.

The Central Government compounded the problems of Punjab's new ruler by choosing precisely this moment to announce the Eradi Commission report which, on the face of it, appeared to favour Haryana. The Akalis seized the opportunity to arouse hysteria over it. Said Balwant Singh: "Forty per cent of Punjab's irrigated land will become unirrigated due to this award.

The Akalis plan to hold a series of meetings at the village and district level to make people aware of 'the injustice to Punjab'. But so far, they appear to be more concerned with the 'repression'. The question of repression has united the various factions of Sikh opinion. Even Akal Takht Jathedar Darshan Singh Ragi, who had earlier refused to condemn President's rule, now says that he is very upset by the arrests of Sikh youth and by the continuing 'fake encounters'. Condemnation of the arrests and encounters has also come from the 'unified' Akali Dal and from the two factions of the AISSF. So ironically, one of the immediate effects of President's rule has been to unite moderate and extremist Sikh opinion for the first time since Operation Bluestar.

—TAVLEEN SINGH

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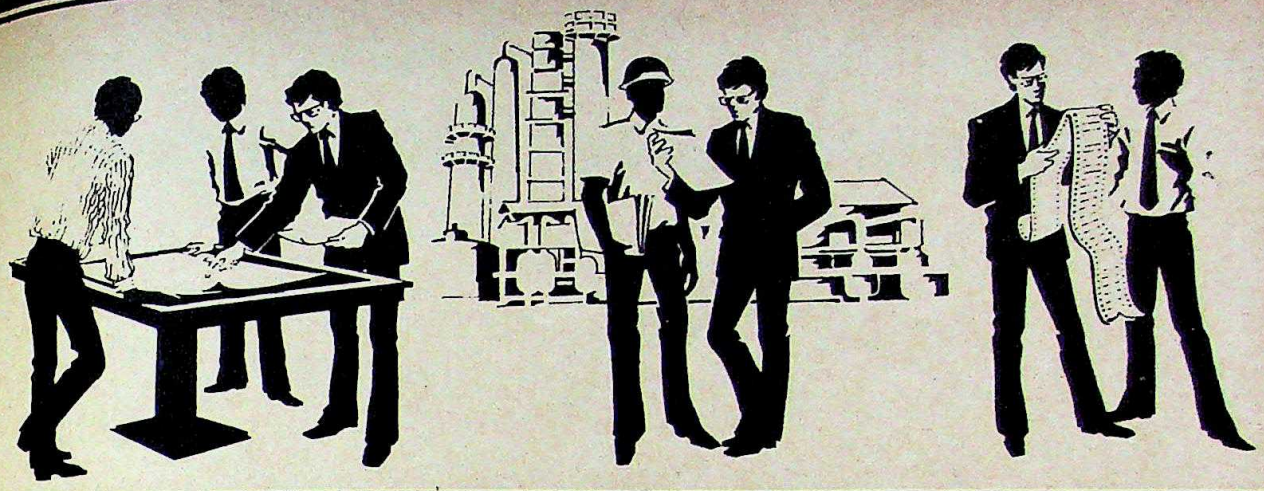

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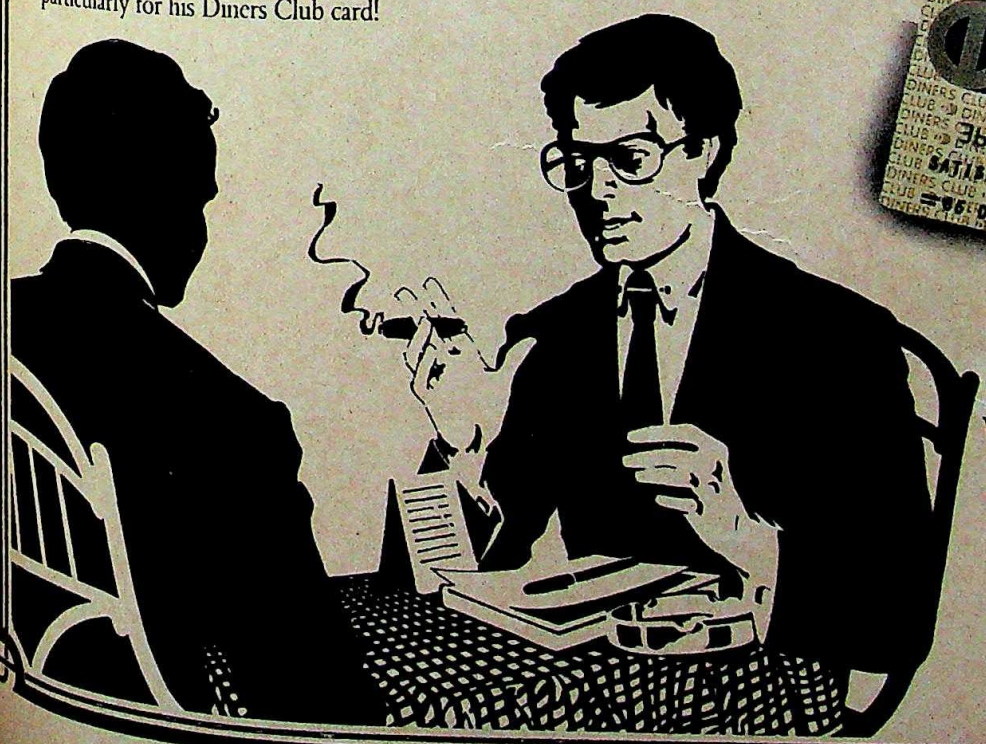

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TAMIL NADU

Censor Scrape

THE script would never get past the censors. A former matinee idol becomes chief minister and promptly gives himself powers to censor all films and film publicity material even remotely critical of legislators or the state Assembly. Or, for that matter, anything that suggests legislators are anything less than humble servants of the people. Moreover, the chief minister is cast as the hero of the film and not the villain.

The censors, as it turned out last fortnight, didn't even come into the picture. The M.G. Ramachandran Government in Tamil Nadu requisitioned that role for itself by pushing through in the state Assembly in almost indecent haste, two bills on the last day of the budget session that could only belong to a C grade film plot. Said K. Manoharan, leader of the DMK in the Assembly: "The MGR Government was so keen on rushing through the legislation that cyclostyled copies of the proposed bills were circulated to MLAs on the eve of adjournment of the session and the bills were bulldozed through."

By virtue of the first bill—the Tamil Nadu Cinemas (Regulation) second amendment bill—the state Government armed itself with the power to ban films derogatory to legislators, which commit contempt of the Assembly, and which are likely to incite the public against legislators. The Government also empowered itself to ban those films that had been certified by the Central Board of Film Certification, commonly called the Censor Board. Producers and exhibitors of such films, in the state Government's view, could be punished with three years imprisonment and a Rs 5,000 fine.

The second bill provided for compulsory pre-censorship of all publicity material, not just of films. It envisaged the constitution of two censor boards in the state, one for clearing film publicity material, and the other for non-film publicity material.

Even by MGR's quixotic standards, the bills stretched the limits of legislative freedom. Said Soli J. Sorabjee, an eminent lawyer and former attorney general: "It's difficult to recollect in independent India, in normal times, a greater onslaught on one of the most precious freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution: freedom of speech and expression."

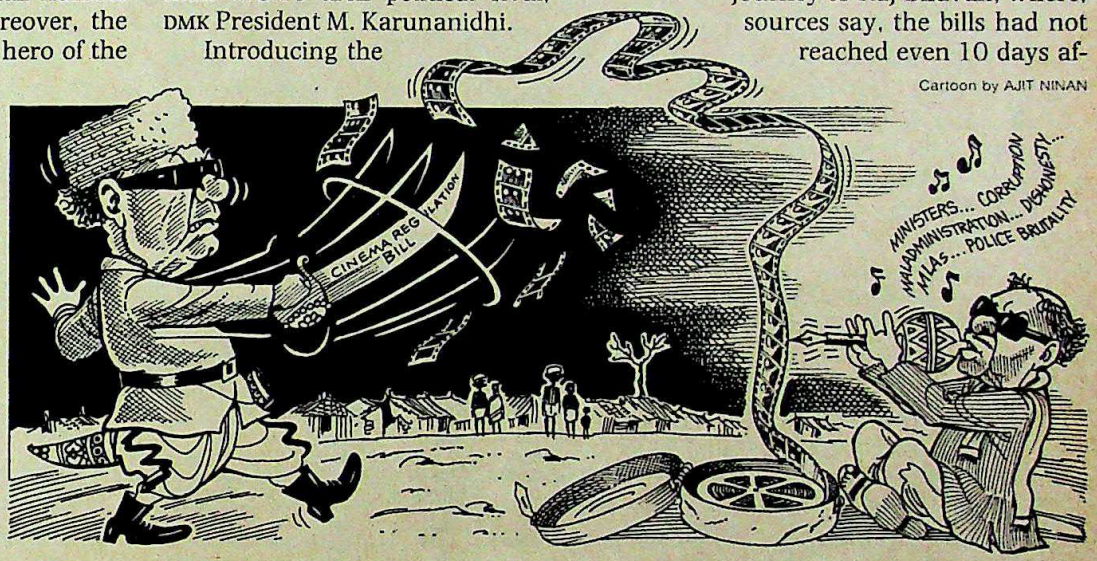
The apparent provocation for the introduction—and speedy passage—of the bills was the fact that two satirical Tamil films on the conduct of ministers and policemen were enjoying a phenomenal run. The other reason was the fact that the script for one of the films, *Neethikku Thandanai* is by none other than MGR's arch political rival, DMK President M. Karunanidhi.

Introducing the bills, the Assembly's controversial Speaker P.H. Pandian was, even by his past record, unusually vitriolic in dubbing film makers as "petty and irresponsible persons bent on making money by ridiculing legislators".

But with the passage of the two bills, it was more than just cinema houses that the legislature was being ridiculed in. Not surprisingly, the legislative legality of the bills was also questioned in court. Two separate writ petitions have been filed in the Madras High Court challenging them. S.S. Neelakantan, managing partner of Lalithanjali Fine Arts, producers of *Neethikku Thandanai*, and G. Venkateswaran, managing director of Sujatha films, distributors of *Makkal En Pakkam*, have argued in their petitions that the Assembly does not have the power to enact the new legislation. The sanctioning of cinematograph films for exhibition was classified under entry 60 of the Union List in the Constitution. Hence, only the Central Government can frame laws in that regard. There also exists a Cinematograph Act of 1952 under which was constituted the Central Board of Film Certification. Said a leading state lawyer: "There was no need for this legislation as even otherwise the state Assembly has the power to haul up a producer for breach of privilege. The legislation delegates this power to the state Government, which is another unwarranted action."

But Justice S. Sivasubramaniam held the petitions premature as the bills had not yet got the governor's assent to become law. The petitions would be kept on file and taken up once the bills entered the statute book. Curiously, the unseemly speed in piloting the bill through the Assembly was not kept up in its journey to Raj Bhavan, where, sources say, the bills had not reached even 10 days after adjournment of the budget session.

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



The governor has the option to either withhold assent, retain the bill for consideration or to refer it to the President. But whatever he ultimately does, the MGR Government's anti-media reputation is now securely established. Two years ago, the Government enacted a law to take over all hoardings in the state, whether they were cinema hoardings or being used for political or commercial purposes. That legislation had been stayed by the courts. Recently, a government resolution sentencing Tamil weekly *Ananda Vikatan* Editor S. Balasubramanian to three months' rigorous imprisonment created such a storm that he was soon released.

Meanwhile, the two films that triggered off MGR's latest legislative quirk are running to packed houses all over the state, leading an AIADMK minister to quip: "MGR should get royalty from these film producers for boosting their business." The same way, he could have added, the business of the other packed house, the state Assembly, was coming under increasing public scrutiny.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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HARYANA ELECTION ANALYSIS

A Delicate Balance

NO election is like any other. And the voter can always behave in an unpredictable way. But past voting patterns do show up the predilections of the electorate. Further analysis of these patterns indicates what it will take for one or the other contending party to win at the hustings.

To understand the Haryana voter and the conditions that will be required for a Congress(I) or Lok Dal victory in the coming Assembly elections in this crucial north Indian state, INDIA TODAY *commissioned psephologist* PRANNOY ROY *to analyse election results in Haryana over the past 10 years, and to pick out the most important factors that will determine the outcome. His report (using research assistance from* LOLITA GHOSE *and* RAJIV THAPAR*):*

If the Congress(I) had to demonstrate its electoral strength somewhere in the Hindi belt, Haryana is the last place it would choose to do so. Quite simply, the voter here has shown in the past that he is much less enamoured of the ruling party than his counterparts elsewhere in the Hindi heartland.

In every election over the last decade, the Congress(I) vote in Haryana has, on an average, been a substantial 10 per cent lower than its vote in other northern states. There was only one exception: the unusual 1984 elections, when the party secured 55 per cent of the vote here. Nevertheless, it was still 1 per cent below the other states' average (*see graph*).

It is too early in the game to forecast the outcome of the coming elections. However, going by the Congress(I)'s record in Haryana and the indefatigable campaign by the Lok Dal(B)'s star campaigner Devi Lal, the Congress(I)'s task certainly seems to be an uphill one. Yet, oddly enough—because this is not generally known—the ruling party also has some advantages in the inherent arithmetic of the state's electoral scene.

Compared to the 1982 Assembly elections, the Congress(I) needs only a small swing of 1.5 per cent in its favour to win more than half the seats in the Assembly elections and form the government. The Lok Dal(B)-BJP alliance, on the other hand, requires a substantially larger change in the voting pattern: it will need a 6 per cent swing to gain a majority.

On this count, at least, Bansi Lal has an easier task ahead of him than Devi Lal—who, as a result, will have to look for electoral strategies that will make up for this clear disadvantage. And one strategy could be to aim at increasing opposition unity, which will convert the same percentage of opposition votes into a larger number of seats.

The sensitivity of seats to changes in the level of opposition unity is extremely high. A relatively small improvement in opposition unity (*see chart for description of the Index of Opposition Unity*—IOU), of only 10 points above its 1982 level gets the Lok Dal-BJP alliance close to an absolute majority.

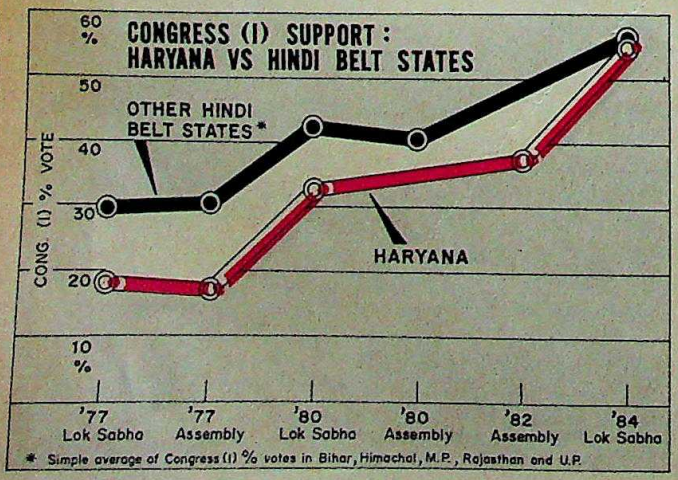
This magnitude of increase in the IOU is, in other states, not difficult to achieve. In Haryana, however, the Opposition has always been fairly fragmented. Even in 1977, when the non-Congress parties

Maps & Tables by B.K. SHARMA

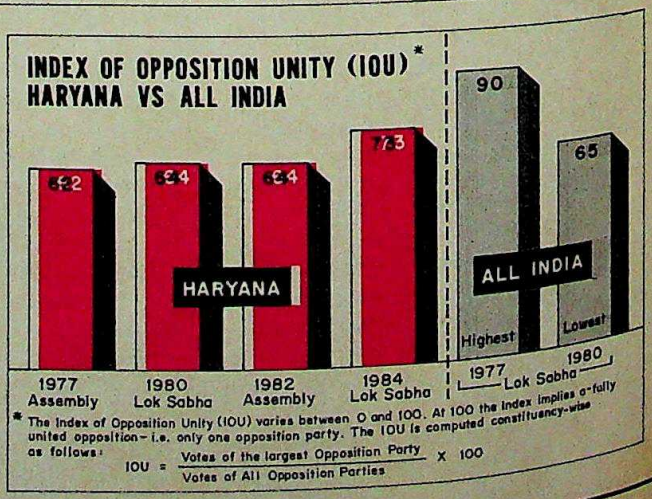
HARYANA'S ELECTORAL RECORD

ELECTIONS ►	ASSEMBLY SEATS / SEGMENTS WON: 1977 Assembly Seats Won	1980 Lok Sabha Assembly Segments Won	1982 Assembly Seats Won	1984 Lok Sabha Assembly Segments Won	% VOTES: 1977 Assembly	1980 Lok Sabha	1982 Assembly	1984 Lok Sabha
					% VOTES			
CONGRESS (I)	3	34	36	77	17.2	32.6	37.6	55.0
LOK DAL	*	39	31	10	*	33.5	23.9	19.1
BJP	*	**	6	0	*	**	7.7	7.5
JANATA PARTY	75	17	1	0	46.7	28.1	3.2	1.4
CPI	0	-	0	0	0.8		0.8	0.9
CPI (M)	0	-	0	-	0.6		0.4	-
CONGRESS (J)	-	-	-	3				10.5
VISHAL HARYANA PARTY	5	-	-	-	6.0			
INDEPENDENTS	7	-	16	-	28.7	5.4	26.5	5.6
TOTAL	90	90	90	90	100	100	100	100

Alliances: * 1977: Lok Dal, BJP & Janata Party contested under Janata symbol. ** 1980: Lok Dal & BJP contested together under Janata (S) symbol.
1982: Lok Dal & BJP – seat adjustment contested under separate symbols; Janata, CPI & CPI(M) – seat adjustment contested under separate symbols



* Simple average of Congress (I) % votes in Bihar, Himachal, M.P., Rajasthan and U.P.



* The Index of Opposition Unity (IOU) varies between 0 and 100. At 100 the index implies a fully united opposition – i.e. only one opposition party. The IOU is computed constituency-wise as follows:

$$IOU = \frac{\text{Votes of the largest Opposition Party}}{\text{Votes of All Opposition Parties}} \times 100$$

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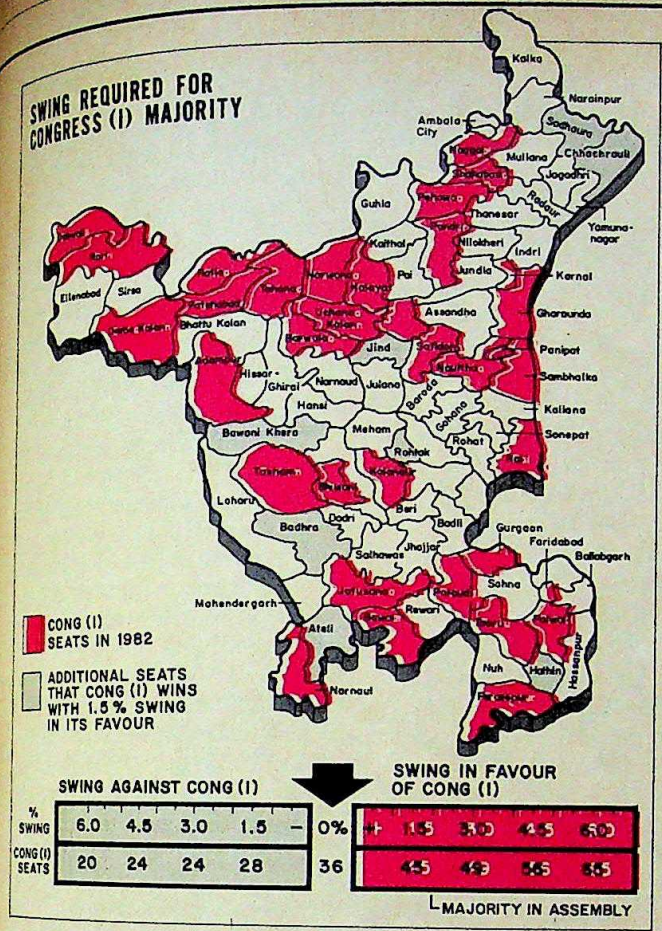

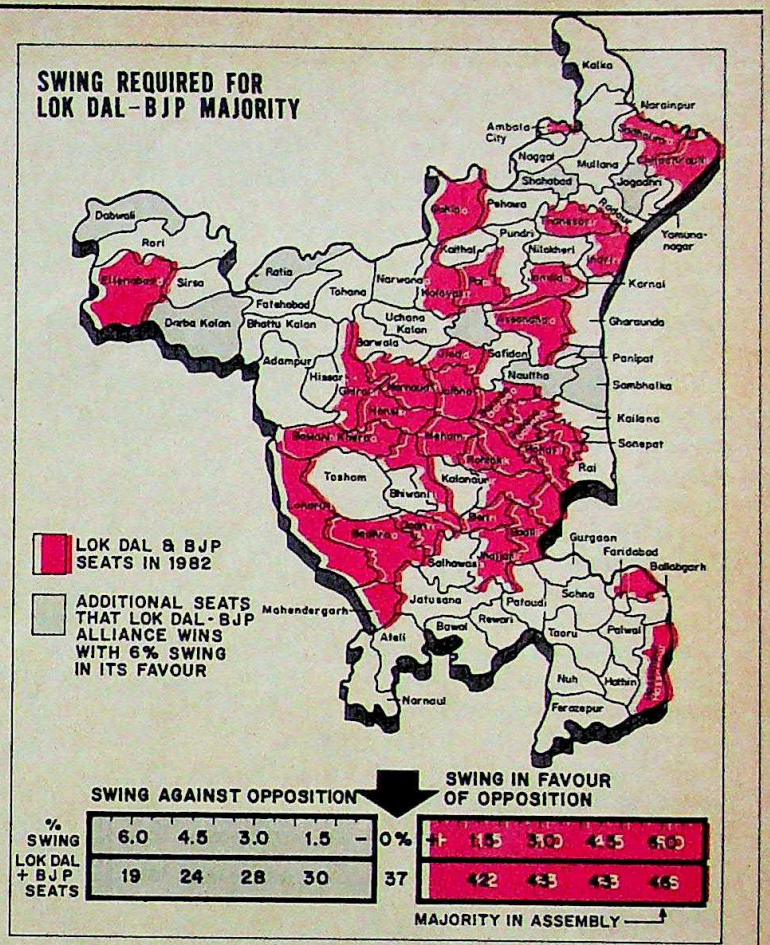

were at their most united at the national level, with a national average IOU of 90, the index reading in Haryana was only 62 (*see chart*). But although the level of opposition unity has historically been low in Haryana, there are indications that with the emergence of the Haryana Sangharsh Samiti in 1985, things may have changed.

The Lok Dal initially grew as the representative of the farm lobby in western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, as a direct corollary of the spread of the green revolution. Commercialism in agriculture brought rural-urban economic conflicts into sharp focus, as in the share of electricity given for rural irrigation. The Lok Dal sided unabashedly with the farmer against urban interests, and consequently had no electoral base in towns and cities. The Opposition electoral base was further divided as the Lok Dal developed into an essentially caste-based, Jat-farmer party. The low Index of Opposition Unity is a reflection of these divisions in the rural areas as well as of the overall rural-urban divide.

The Punjab accord in 1985 and the conflict of interests between Haryana and Punjab over territorial rights and the sharing of irrigation water provided an ideal opportunity for the Lok Dal to widen its base. Particularly in the rural areas, the Haryana Sangharsh Samiti could use the conflict with Punjab to mobilise non-Jat farmers on a wide range of issues. Although the Lok Dal has still not been able to shed its anti-urban image—which is why it has given predominantly urban seats to the BJP in seat adjustments—it is likely that the level of opposition unity will be considerably higher this time round. This is perhaps the major factor by which it will gain seats in the coming elections.

While a higher IOU may thus be more important than the swing in votes, the two seldom operate separately. The sensi-

SENSITIVITY OF SEATS
TO SWINGS AND CHANGES IN OPPOSITION UNITY
SEATS WON BY CONGRESS (I)

Swing in Votes ▲ SWING ▲ Congress (I) in favour / against	Index of Opposition Unity: LESS UNITED (10 points down)	1982 Level	MORE UNITED (10 points up)
+ 1.5 %	52	45	26
0 % 1982 Vote %	53	36	24
– 1.5 %	48	28	21

SENSITIVITY OF SEATS
TO SWINGS AND CHANGES IN OPPOSITION UNITY
SEATS WON BY LOK DAL-BJP ALLIANCE

Swing in Votes ▲ SWING ▲ in favour of / against Opposition	Index of Opposition Unity: LESS UNITED (10 points down)	1982 Level	MORE UNITED (10 points up)
+ 1.5 %	29	42	45
0 % 1982 Vote %	27	37	45
– 1.5 %	22	30	42

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tivity tables show how both the swing and the IOU can combine to generate major shifts in electoral fortunes (*see tables*).

A swing of 1.5 per cent away from the Congress(I) would be more than compensated for by a small 10-point drop in opposition unity. Under such circumstances, the Congress(I) would actually gain 12 seats and win a comfortable majority. On the other hand, a similar improvement in opposition unity would more than counteract a 1.5 per cent swing in favour of the Congress(I) and reduce its strength in the Assembly to only 26 seats. Indeed, the Congress(I) can gain 17 seats—making a total of 53 seats out of 90 in the House—purely on the basis of a 10-point greater disunity in the opposition ranks. In this unusual context, therefore, it would perhaps be more fruitful for the Congress(I) to campaign for the Lok Dal (Ajit Singh)-Janata alliance than for its own candidates!

The reverse is, of course, true for the Lok Dal-BJP alliance and the other opposition parties. Rather than concentrate their efforts on attacking the Congress(I), simple electoral arithmetic suggests they would gain far more by achieving greater cohesion amongst themselves and, thereafter, attack the Lok Dal(A) front. For the Lok Dal-BJP alliance, a 10-point improvement in its level of unity provides greater returns than even a 1.5 per cent swing in its favour. The smoothest path to victory for the alliance is, of course, a 1.5 per cent swing in its favour coupled with a small improvement in the unity level. This would be enough to yield 45 seats and enable the alliance to form the next government.

The peculiar logic of the Haryana scene suggests that the fortunes of both the Congress(I) and the Lok Dal-BJP alliance rest on the significance that Ajit Singh's front attains at the hustings.

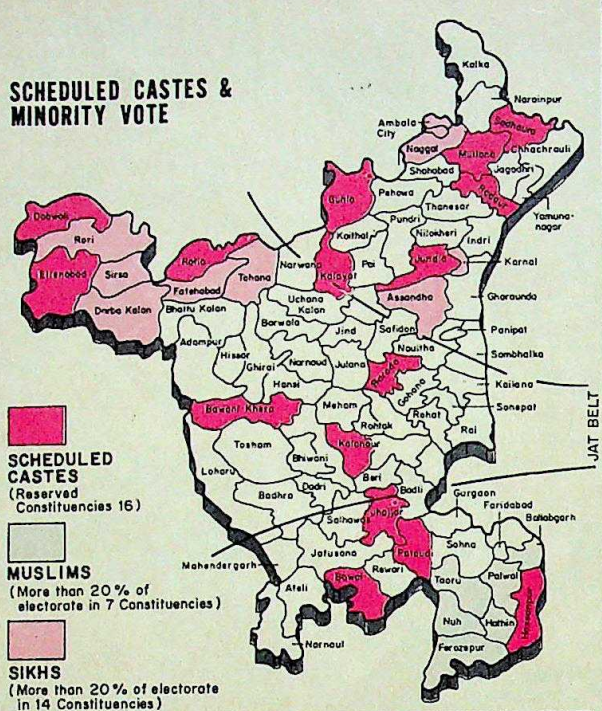
In the same way that the opposition parties are undermined by a lack of cohesion, the Congress(I) votes may be eroded by a currently unknown force in Haryana: the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). There are two factors, however, that suggest this may not happen in these elections. First, contrary to popular belief, the Congress(I) has not been as dependent on the Scheduled Caste vote in Haryana as it is in some other states. The average vote of the ruling party in the reserved Scheduled Caste constituencies—37.5 per cent—is no better than its average vote in all the constituencies in the state (*see table*). Second, the BSP has hitherto concentrated its efforts primarily in Uttar Pradesh and is only beginning to make inroads in Haryana. With the election only a few weeks away, the BSP may not have the time to consolidate its vote and create an impact of the kind that many predict.

Perhaps a more worrying factor for the Congress(I) is the fairly significant Sikh vote in Haryana. In at least 14 constituencies, Sikh votes play an important part in the result as they account for over 20 per cent of the electorate (*see map*). Traditionally, the Congress(I) has done well in these constituencies, with an average vote that has been six percentage points above the state average (*see table*). If the Sikhs do not vote for the ruling party this time, the impact could be decisive. The Sikh voter, however, faces a dilemma since Devi Lal is advocating a tougher line on Punjab than the Congress(I).

The important Muslim-dominated constituencies in the southern part of the state have been historically weak Congress(I) areas: the party vote here has tended to be about 5 per cent below the state average (*see table*). From this weak base, the Congress(I) can only hope to do better, since any swing away cannot significantly affect the previously poor record.

When the Congress(I) confronts its traditional rival—the BJP—in urban areas, it will be in the knowledge that so far, the ruling party has done much better in the towns than in the villages (*see table*). However, there is far greater uncertainty in urban constituencies, which have recorded a high average swing of over 17 per cent in the elections since 1977. On the other hand, the rural seats, where the Lok Dal is traditionally stronger, are less prone to change and are therefore more predictable.

The state of Haryana as a whole, however, is unusually volatile. Although, margins of victory may not be as narrow as they are in some of the other states—take Kerala, for instance—the large swings from one election to the next make seats with even reasonably large margins unsafe (*see map*). After taking both the size of the margin and the volatile nature of voters for each seat into account, an overwhelming majority of constituencies in Haryana can only be classified as "marginal". Of the 28 "safe" seats, the Congress(I) has the larger share—17 seats—while the Lok Dal-BJP alliance has only 11 seats that can be assessed as reasonably safe.



CONGRESS (I) VOTE %: SCHEDULED CASTES & MINORITIES
AVERAGE % VOTE IN 1977, 1980, 1982 & 1984 ELECTIONS)

AVERAGE % VOTE	SCHEDULED CASTE (Reserved)	SIKH*	MUSLIM**
CONGRESS (I)	35.7%	41.6%	31.9%
STATE AVERAGE	35.6%	35.6%	35.6%

* 14 constituencies: in which Sikh votes are higher than 20%
** 7 constituencies: in which Muslim votes are higher than 20%

URBAN-RURAL DIFFERENCES IN VOTING PATTERN
(Average figures for 1977, 1980, 1982 & 1984 elections)

CONSTITUENCIES	CONGRESS (I) % VOTE	VOLATILITY-AVERAGE SWING
RURAL	36.4	11.8
URBAN	40.8	17.2

Rural: electorate less than 5% urban (28 seats); Urban: electorate greater than 30% urban (16 seats), according to Election Commission, 1972

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HARYANA

Carving the Cake

AFTER several marathon sessions of mediation, conciliation, reconciliation and head-counting, the Congress(I) high command finally issued a list of 90 candidates who will contest the Haryana Assembly poll against the formidable alliance of Devi Lal's Lok Dal(B) and the BJP. After an internecine battle, the Congress(I) dropped 22 of its sitting MLAs including three ministers—Finance Minister Kartar Singh, Development Minister Colonel Ram Singh, and Minister of State for Cooperation Piara Singh.

Congress(I) high command officials were calling it a consensus list but there was little cause for rejoicing in the camp of Bhajan Lal, former chief minister and now a Union minister, who was recalled to the Centre and his archrival in the party, Bansi Lal, made chief minister. Most of the MLAs who were dropped were Bhajan Lal supporters, many of them defectors who had joined the Congress(I) in 1982 to help Bhajan Lal form a ministry. Many of them are expected to run as independents or even support opposition candidates in a determined effort to try and prevent Bansi Lal from forming a new government.

According to party insiders, no more than 15 to 20 Bhajan Lal loyalists have been given tickets. When the first list of about 70 candidates had been finalised, Bhajan Lal and his supporters found that they had been virtually excluded. It was only after he lodged a strong protest that several of his men, foremost among them O.P. Mahajan from Hissar, were included. In fact, the final session of the nominating board which lasted 12 hours non-stop—into the early hours of the morning—devoted most of its time trying to assuage Bhajan Lal's hurt feelings.

But Bhajan Lal was able to score some minor victories. His wife, Jashma Devi, was nominated from his old constituency in Adampur in Hissar district—a clear indication that Bhajan Lal is keeping the option open for a possible move-back to the state. And he was also able to get the board to reverse its earlier decisions on the seats from the two important constituencies of Nelokheri and Naraingarh.

Naraingarh was a particularly sweet victory. The original nominee for the seat was Lachchman Singh, who had the backing of both Bansi Lal as well as state Congress(I) President Harpal Singh. But for Bhajan Lal, this was like waving a red flag before a bull. Lachchman Singh had been fired from the Bhajan Lal ministry for trying to engineer a revolt against the chief minister when he was away in the US for medical treatment two years ago. Bhajan Lal managed to strike his name off the list of nominees and replace it with that of his own loyalist, Lal Singh.

That the party was in a real quandary about mediating between local bosses was evident in that it violated its own AICC(I) resolution barring the immediate relatives of party officials and legislators from holding party positions in the same state. Bhajan Lal's wife was not the only person thus accommodated: Inderjit Singh, son of Ahir leader and former chief minister Rao Birendra Singh and Paramvir Singh, Harpal Singh's son, have also been selected as Congress(I) nominees. Among the important party leaders chosen to contest are chief minister Bansi Lal from Tosham, Irrigation Minister S.S. Surjewala from Narwana in Jind and Home Minister Tayyab Hussein from Taoru in Gurgaon.

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

The final selection was perhaps the most arduous political task faced by the party high command. It involved choosing candidates with a proven ability to capture votes and strategies to placate the factions. The original work done by a committee composed of H.K.L. Bhagat, Nawal Kishore Sharma, P.V. Narasimha Rao and Uma Shanker Dixit, who held four secret meetings at Dixit's house that were attended separately by Bhajan Lal and Bansi Lal as well as by Rao Birendra Singh. The District Congress(I) Committees were virtually excluded and applications for candidates were submitted directly by either the Pradesh Congress Committee or Youth Congress. Some 1,500 applications were finally winnowed down to a short-list of 150.

This short-list was provided to Rajiv, who then spent about three hours with Haryana leaders trying to sort out differences. He ultimately decided that the main criterion for selection ought to be loyalty and that Bansi Lal's nominees should be given the lion's share of the seats. The 90 names were then finalised by a Congress(I) Parliamentary Board subcommittee—consisting of General Secretary G.K. Moopanar, Communications Minister Arjun Singh, and Darbara Singh.

High command officials, aware that the Bhajan Lal-Bansi Lal dispute could prove to be a major irritant, say that the current arrangements are the best they could arrive at. But the Congress(I) is hoping this subterranean split within its ranks will be compensated by the split in the Lok Dal and the failure of the Opposition to unite. Devi Lal has refused to reach any accommodation with the Ajit Singh faction on the plea that it is a Trojan Horse for the Congress(I). The Ajit Singh faction is now considering an alliance with the Janata Party and fielding some 65 candidates. What is worrying the Lok Dal and the Sangharsh Samiti is that ailing Jat leader Charan Singh's wife Gayatri Devi is filing her nomination for the Rohtak Parliamentary by-elections. The Congress(I) hopes her entry will split the Jat votes.

The early political winds are still blowing in favour of Devi Lal and his Lok Dal. If the Congress(I) does better than generally now expected, it will be for one reason alone—the Opposition's infighting and inability to unite. —INDERJIT BADHWAR

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MAIN BATTLE TANK

Chinks in the Armour

IT is named after one of the greatest heroes in Indian mythology, a decision that, in hindsight, is not without its irony. For Arjuna, as India's Main Battle Tank (MBT) has been called, is becoming something of a mythical figure itself.

For the last 13 years, successive defence ministers and the annual report of the Defence Ministry have held up the MBT project as a shining symbol of India's brave new thrust in defence research, projecting it as among the best tanks in the world (when it makes its operational debut). Speaking on the subject during the defence debate at the tail-end of the budget session of Parliament, Minister of State for Defence Research and Development Arun Singh assured the army that it would be getting a "first-rate product, as it wanted". But what the army wants and what it is likely to get, and more importantly, when, are questions that are acquiring serious overtones.

Investigations into the progress of the project reveal that instead of the formidable frontline tank that was envisaged, the MBT project is fast becoming the most expensive white elephant in the history of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). Since the project first started in 1974, scientists and engineers working on the MBT have periodically claimed "major breakthroughs" while developing the six prototypes built so far. But the reality is somewhat different. The army—the prospective users of the tank—refused to approve the latest prototype, after inspection. The latest trial report of the MBT, prepared by the General Staff Branch of Army Headquarters early this year says: "Examinations reveal that there are a number of design and functional areas where the tank does not meet with user's acceptance," adding that "it requires emphasising that these are 'make or break' issues which singly, or in combination, may nullify the effectiveness of the tank as a whole". Even more devastating was the finding that "safety, reliability and maintainability have still not been built into the design".

The expert committee which examined the prototype noted major variations from the General Staff Qualitative Requirement (GSQR) as well as serious design faults. These include:

► The turret and the hull design are not suitable for smooth and safe operation. Said the committee: "The turret overhang hits the driver when in the open up position. Entry and egress of the driver when turret is in frontal position is either not possible, or when possible, very difficult."

► The fire control system is neither integrated nor fitted.

► The present loading rate is unacceptably low and "may necessitate design changes, affecting hull and turret". In its present design, it takes about 15 seconds for loading the "most ready" round and may take even longer in loading subsequent rounds. The report noted that existing tanks like Vijayanta or T-55 have a much higher rate, "making a duel between the Arjuna and either the T-55 or the Vijayanta more than an even chance of success for the latter".

► To achieve a reasonable loading rate, the committee recommended major changes, including reduction of the inboard length of the gun and relocating the ammunition for easy loading. It also found that the present system of "the gun having to come back to a fixed loading elevation to load each round is unacceptable".

► The air defence gun is wrongly positioned: it will have to be operated by the loader which means that in case of an air attack, the main gun will be inoperative for the duration.

► Presently, there are only three ready rounds in the turret area, as against the 12 specified in the GSQR.

► The shape of the turret is "a veritable shell trap".

► The tank's weight has grown from 45 tonnes to over 60 tonnes, seriously affecting mobility.

► The width of the tank has increased way beyond the army's specifications, further reducing its mobility since it will not be able to be transported on normal trains or traverse bridges where it is likely to be in operation.

Arjuna Tank: mythical weapon

► The machine-man interface is still not suited to optimal efficiency. Seats are uncomfortable, do not have an adequate adjustment range and are without proper accessibility to functional controls.

After recording its findings, the report concluded: "We feel that no deviations from the standards laid down in the GSQR are acceptable." It also noted that "the design approach has changed from indigenous manufacture to licensed manufacture of imported sub-systems". More important, it stated that "nothing has been done about systems integration.... Resultantly, the tank cannot be evaluated for mission effectiveness".

That devastating assessment—so much at variance with every single public pronouncement on the subject—is just

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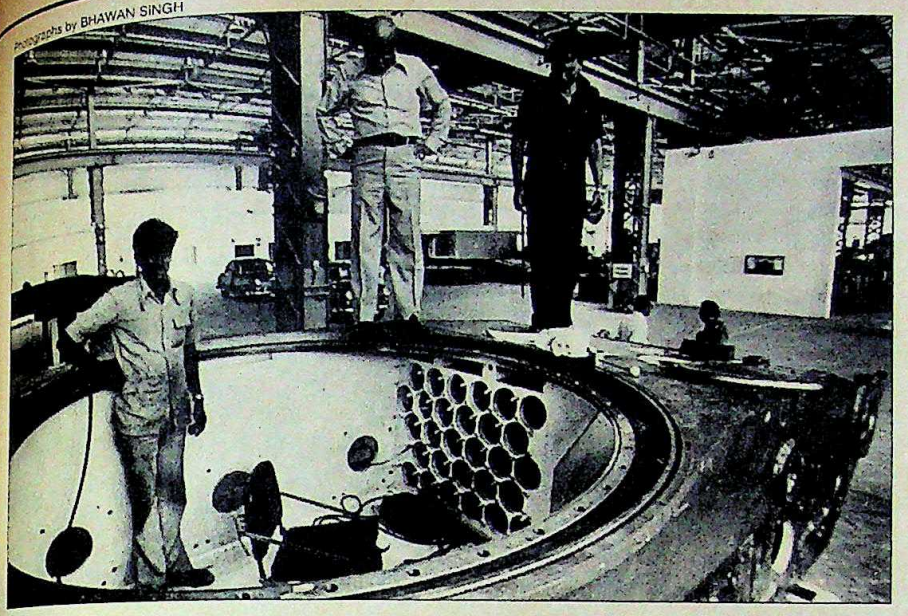

The MBT's chamber: room for defects

Despite Arun Singh's optimistic statement in Parliament, the army's latest evaluation has pointed out serious design faults in the MBT project.

one of the latest indications that the MBT project still has serious chinks in its armour. 13 years after its conception and despite the largest financial outlay for any single defence research project. The project was sanctioned in March 1974, with an allocation of Rs 15.5 crore. It was to be completed by 1980 by the Combat Vehicle Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE)—a wing of the DRDO—in Avadi, near Madras. By 1979, the Cabinet Committee on Public Affairs was asked for additional funds, which hiked the project cost to Rs 56.55 crore. In 1981, the Government was again approached for additional funds, raising the cost to over Rs 90 crore. Then, in July last year, the DRDO submitted yet another revised estimate, of Rs 292 crore—a 19-fold increase of the original estimate.

Also, not only has the project undergone major technical changes, but it has systematically gone in for more and more imported components, raising the foreign exchange expenditure from Rs 3.7 crore to Rs 89.36 crore. Out of the present financial sanction, the CVRDE has already spent Rs 68.82 crore—including Rs 32.86 crore in foreign exchange—by March last year. The DRDO, in its report to the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs asking for additional finances for the project, specified the increased number of prototypes and tanks for troops trials, import of engines for them, certain changes brought in by the Army and global escalation in the cost of equipment, as the major factors for pushing up the project cost.

But despite the liberal flow of funds, the prospect of the Army getting the MBT operational by the scheduled year—1990—seems remote indeed. Apart from the factors mentioned by the Army Headquarters' evaluation committee, the key problem is still the engine for the tank. Arun Singh stated in Parliament last month: "We have not been very successful on the engine." He even admitted that if by the end of the decade, the requisite 1,500 hp engine was not developed indigenously, the Government would not hesitate to import the entire engine.

But Arun Singh's statement on the unsuccessful engine development is an understatement. So far, the six MBT prototypes have been fitted with MTU engines imported from West Germany. Admitted a senior official at Avadi: "An indigenously developed engine is just a mirage we are chasing."

It is the elusive search for an indigenous engine that has caused the major delay in the development of the tank. The GSQR had specified a 1,400 hp engine for the MBT. The DRDO undertook the ambitious task of developing a 12-cylinder, 1,500 hp, air-cooled, Variable Compression Ratio diesel engine. But after five years, they were unable to even achieve the basic initial requirement of 500 hp. In 1982, the Defence Ministry was forced to place orders for 42 engines, worth Rs 22 crore to MTU for fitting on the prototypes, and for use in the field trials. But even the MTU engines proved incompatible with the Arjuna prototype. Admiral S.M. Nanda, former naval chief and head of Globe Tech, MTU's Indian representative, says that the reason for the failure was that the Indian order did not specify certain requirements necessary for successful operation in Indian climatic conditions.

The MBT, which was to be commissioned in the army by 1980, has already been delayed by over seven years and even the most optimistic calculations rule out any possibility of its induction in the army before the mid-'90s. That is a dangerous vulnerability. The number of T-72 tanks that suffered engine seizures during Operation Brasstacks is already causing worry in Army Headquarters. The DRDO has been advocating freezing of the MBT design, so as to go ahead with the production schedule. But Army Headquarters has so far managed to insist on the specifications given in their original GSQR. Senior DRDO officials also refused to comment on the tank's design faults on the plea that the project is in the secret category.

Already, with the T-55s on the verge of being phased out, the army has upgraded its plans for the purchase and licensed manufacture of T-72s and T-72 spares. Another ambitious plan for retrofitting the existing Vijayantas, called Project Bison, is also currently underway. These moves suggest that even the army is becoming increasingly sceptical of the operational viability of the MBT in the context of its overall strategic planning. The DRDO may have achieved some success in the 120 mm rifled gun and the Kanchan armour for the MBT, but it is still a far cry from being an integrated frontline system for the use of the army till the turn of the century. In fact, right now, judging by the army's own assessment, the MBT is about as effective as Arjuna's original chariot.

—DILIP BOBB with SHEKHAR JHA in Dehra Dun and PRABHU CHAWLA in Avadi

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Surprise Showing

APPEARANCES are deceptive. When the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran agreed to unveil the bust of S.V. Aditanar, the late founder of the largest circulated Tamil newspaper *Daily Thanthi* in central Madras last fortnight, MGR-watchers expected him to pull his now familiar stunt: agreeing to be the master of ceremonies and then not showing up at the last minute. In any event, MGR is not exactly a lover of the press.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

MGR: special favour

But this time, the chief minister pulled a surprise. Dutifully, even happily, he presented himself for the *Daily Thanthi* function, which turned out to be a glittering, high-profile affair. And MGR even announced that an important road in central Madras would be renamed after S.P. Aditanar.

The chief minister's critics were aghast. Had he suddenly developed a soft corner for the press? Only at first look. The second look gave a different idea. The *Daily Thanthi* was one of the very few newspapers which had refused to participate in the one-day boycott of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly organised by the press to protest against the sentencing of *Ananda Vikatan* Editor S. Balasubramanian by the Assembly for publishing a cartoon that had lampooned ministers and legislators. And generally the paper, with its circulation of 3.25 lakh, has been pro-government. This was simply MGR's way of saying thanks.

Copying Caper

AS if repeated postponement of examinations, delayed results, irregular courses and student strikes were not enough, the Bangalore University has now been struck by a new menace: mass copying. More and more students are resorting to cheating and any effort of the invigilators to check them is being met with ugly opposition. The principal of Kolar Government Boys College was recently attacked when he caught a student copying. And, in another incident, the chief of the vigilance squad was assaulted. Finally, to maintain the college's credibility, the principal was forced to cancel the examinations.

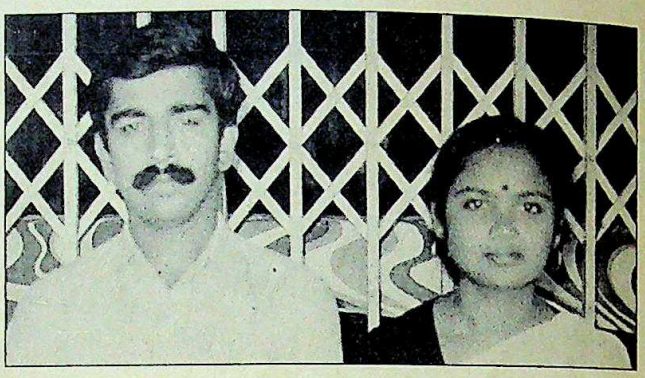
BHAWAN SINGH

Alva: worried

So severe is the copying menace that even the Government has been forced to sit up and take notice. A worried Minister for Higher Education Jeevaraj Alva has now declared that the state Government may promulgate an ordinance making copying a cognisable offence and declaring university campuses and examination centres as prohibited areas. The threat is a potent one and should bring the student community to its senses. As it is, the sincere students are confronted with the spectre of finding more and more appointment advertisements carrying the dreaded notice that Bangalore University students need not apply. Already this notice has made its appearance in a few advertisements and does not bode well for Bangalore University students.

A Troubled Couple

RELIGIOUS orthodoxy has no soft spot for matters of the heart as a newly-wed couple has learnt to its dismay in Tenali, Andhra Pradesh. Ever since Dr Mary Michael, 28, a Roman Catholic, got married to A.S. Venkatachalam, 30, an orthodox Brahmin, at the civil registry in Vijayawada last June they have been under religious pressure. Last fortnight the Education Department ordered a probe into the charges of harassment levelled by Mary against the college where she worked as a Hindi lecturer—Jesus Mary Joseph College. In the name of religious belief the college virtually made them go through fire. Mary was summoned several times to the college principal's room and advised that she should ask Venkatachalam to embrace Christianity and get properly married in a church. She was also reminded that she had got the job because she was a Roman Catholic. Afraid that Mary may lose her job, the couple sought the help of local activists and also wrote to eminent publicmen. The campaign worked and a probe was ordered.



Venkatachalam and Mary: distressed

Political Coup

BIHAR Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey may not be a keen administrator but he certainly knows how to ingratiate himself with the Centre. Dubey's latest political coup has been his success in persuading a group of 17 independent MLAs in the Assembly to join Congress(I). This has immense symbolic importance at a time when the Congress(I)'s image is at an all-time low and, if anything, the talk is of an impending split in the party with Congressmen standing ready to bolt their organisation.

KRISHNA MURARI KISHAN

Dubey: shrewd move

The shrewd leader he is, Dubey even arranged for 10 of the 17 MLAs to meet Rajiv Gandhi in person in New Delhi where they gave him a written pledge that "under the present situation only the Congress(I) can lead the country". The legal spadework is now being done to find a way for a formal merger without violating the anti-defection law. Among the advice the MLAs have been given is to form a new party and seek recognition from the Election Commission before being allotted seats on the treasury benches. Ironically though, the solution to the anti-defection law in this case could well wind up giving ideas to Congressmen who are potential defectors.

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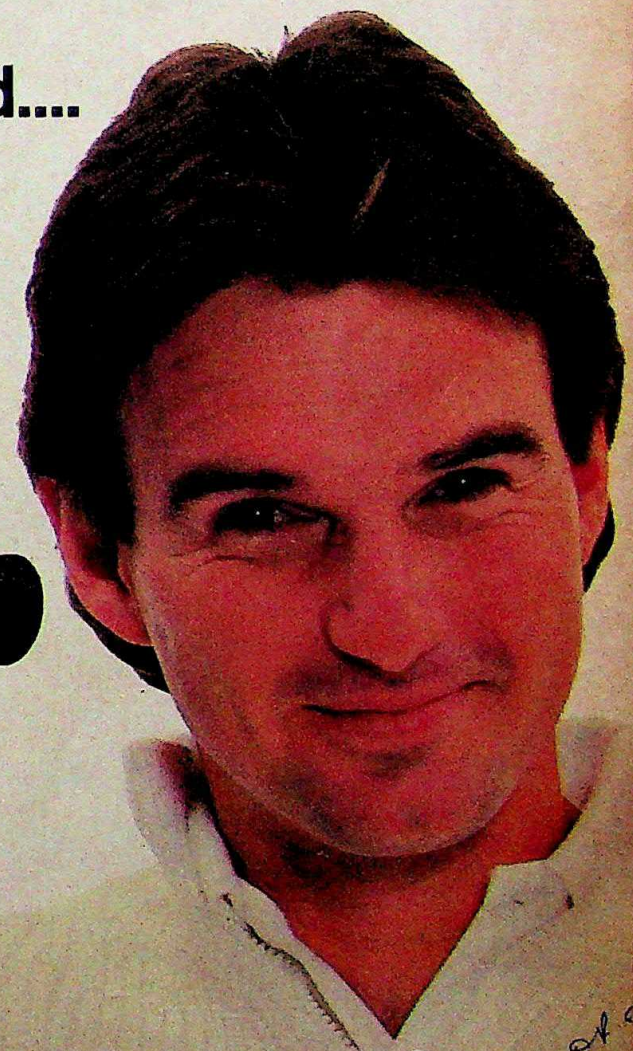

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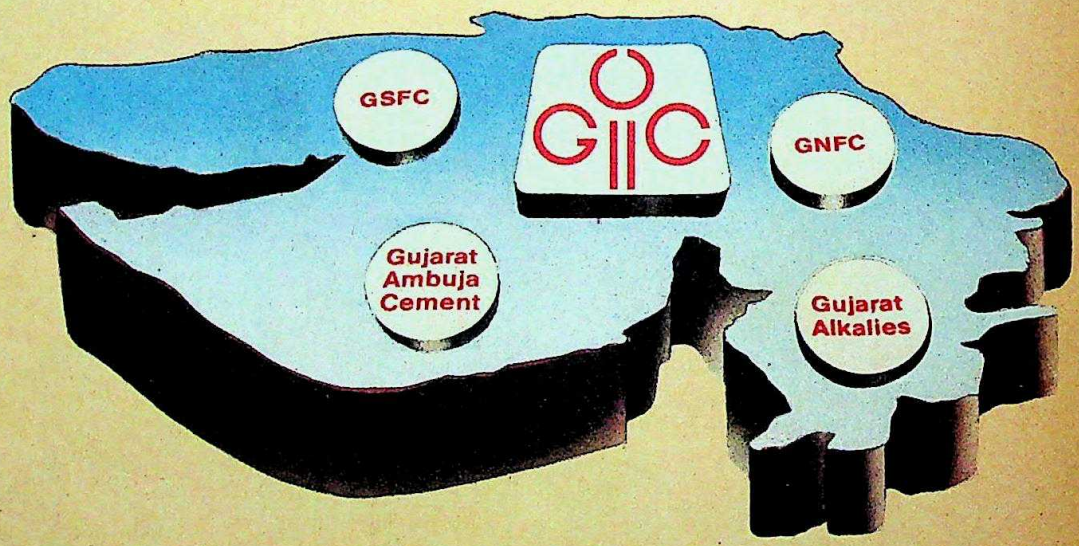
Gujarat, the land of giants like GSFC and GNFC...



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a Rs. 245 crore project co-promoted by GIIC.

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- State-of-the-art proprietory 'dry-liming' technology from world renowned AKZO ZOUT CHEMIE of Netherlands.
- Critical equipment from KLOCKNER INDUSTRIE ANLAGEN, West Germany—world leaders in chemical plants.
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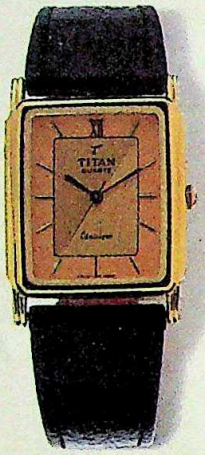
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You're eighteen, not exactly Ryan O'Neal, but what the hell.
There's college. Bikes. Hamburgers. Movies. Blue jeans. And pocket-money.
She's seventeen. Pony-tailed. Pretty. Brown-eyed. Cute as a button.

It was the Philosophy Society's Christmas party.
Streamers. The Beatles. Confetti. Pizza. Madness. Sandwiches. And her.
You straightened your tie, cleared your throat, took a deep breath, and said, "Would you like to dance?"
Her answer made you believe in Santa Claus.

From McDowell
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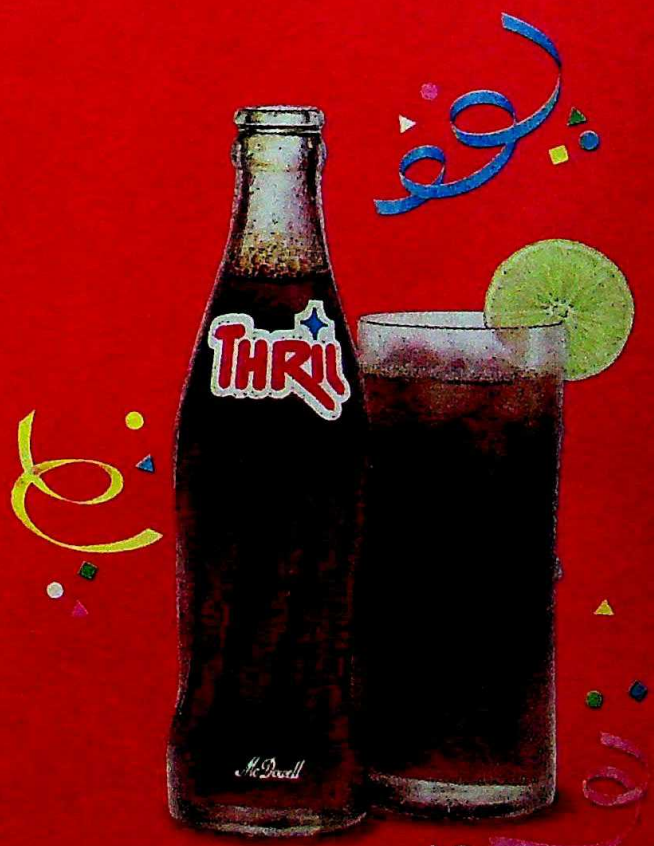

"I think I'll have a Thril," you said.

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Politics of Compromise

THE Eradi panel's award on the division of the Beas-Ravi waters between Punjab and Haryana is, on the whole, just. Punjab will now be entitled to at least 1.7 million acre feet (MAF) *more* water every year than it has actually been using in the period 1980-85. 'At least' because the Eradi panel has left 0.7 MAF of water unallocated, and Punjab should get at least 0.4 MAF out of this too.

Thus Punjab could end up with a total of 7.7 MAF, against its actual usage of 5.604 MAF. Even with the existing amount of water, its agricultural output has been growing rapidly. The lack of water has not therefore been a constraint on growth. In these circumstances, the availability of another 1.7 to 2.1 MAF provides a sufficient cushion to meet any conceivable future need.

But despite this, Barnala felt constrained to reject the award. He did so because he could not sell its virtues to the people. And he could not do this because neither the Sikhs nor the Hindus in the state trust him and his party any longer.

That is why, however repugnant the dismissal of his government may be, it had become a political necessity. Barnala's government had become an anomaly. It was backed by a stable majority in the Vidhan Sabha, but no longer commanded appreciable support among the people. It had thus become a roadblock to political change.

I do not wish to suggest that this is why the Centre declared President's rule in Punjab. On the contrary, over 800 arrests and Union Home Minister Buta Singh's comments suggest that the main purpose was to bring the law and order situation under control. The Haryana elections and the fact that Haryana is the main beneficiary from the Eradi panel's award may have also had something to do with it. But President's rule can be used to push ahead with the search for a political solution in Punjab.

This suggestion is anathema to a large section of the public, which stoutly believes that the only way to deal with the Punjab problem is through the unbridled use of force. But a number of responsible political observers have also questioned the wisdom of any such attempt, on the grounds that to deal with militants who condone or inspire the killing of innocents is to appease and indirectly encourage them.

This view is simplistic. Had the Government refused to deal with those who have taken to violence, it could never have brought peace to Mizoram and Nagaland. The essence of the search for a political solution is to judge the right moment for offering concessions in exchange for an end to violence. Such a judgement is always a bit of a gamble. For instance, while Jayaprakash Narayan guessed correctly when he led a peace mission to Nagaland in 1964, and Mrs Gandhi (and later Rajiv Gandhi) also judged correctly in offering an amnesty to the Mizo National Front, Nripen Chakraborty's move to win the support of the Tripura tribals, by limiting the role of the security forces and giving greater autonomy to the tribal districts, was premature and failed.

> "The essence of the search for a political solution is to judge the right moment for offering concessions in exchange for an end to violence. Such a judgement is always a gamble. But any responsible government must explore this alternative before relying on force."

But the alternative, of first crushing terrorism and only then offering a political settlement, is fraught with even greater risks. In Punjab, the one-track approach of the last 12 months, in which the Government has relied solely on police methods to crush terrorism, has only bred more terrorism. Against 78 terrorist killings in 1985, there were 545 in 1986. In April 1987, there were nearly a hundred killings.

Reliable reports indicate that against the average of 10 to 20 Sikhs who were taking *amrit* every day at Chowk Mehta gurudwara, the seat of the militant Damdami Taksal and a principal recruitment point for terrorists, as many as 200 have been doing so every day in the last few months.

Reliance on force therefore compels you to use more, and still more, force. In the end you get pacification programmes *a la* Vietnam, Malaysia or Libya. People are herded into guarded villages while army patrols sweep the empty country-side, killing anything that moves. This road does not always lead to disaster. It did for the Americans in Vietnam but not for the British in Malaysia and, at least for some time, for the Italians in Libya, but the cost is frightfully high and its price: genocide or secession. Thus, any responsible government has the duty to explore the alternatives of compromise first.

In Punjab, on the eve of President's rule, there were a number of signs that the militants were ready for such a compromise. The new Unified Akali Dal had succeeded in getting both Baba Joginder Singh's UAD and the Manjit faction of the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) to subscribe to a platform that emphasised the unity of India and the need for a federal polity. The new jathedar of the Akal Takht, Ragi Darshan Singh, had made a number of statements in Amritsar and at various gurudwaras condemning the killing of innocents. Terrorist leaders like Avtar Singh Brahma had hinted at the possibility of a cease-fire. Sunil Dutt had received a warm reception in the Golden Temple. And, most significant of all, when it became clear that Sushil Muni had New Delhi's support, his talks with Darshan Singh were attended by Baba Thakur Singh, head of the Damdami Taksal, the four other high priests, who are all products of this Taksal, and even Avtar Singh Brahma. Nothing could have highlighted better the catalytic role that Darshan Singh can play.

The Government's decision to release 900 detained AISSF militants on good conduct guarantees suggests that President's rule does not signify the end of the search for a political settlement. We must hope that Rajiv Gandhi has the courage to continue with it.

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SATISH SHARMA

Flying Through Turbulence

AS Rajiv Gandhi and his government have come under controversial scrutiny, so too have a handful of his closest friends. Among them is Captain Satish Sharma, 41, an airline pilot who abandoned his flying career in 1983 to become one of Rajiv's trusted aides. Sharma has preferred to play it low-key, until recent allegations about his land deals surfaced and forced him into the limelight. A report on Sharma the man, his role in the prime minister's camp and the controversies swirling around him, from Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR *and Senior Editor* PRABHU CHAWLA.

FROM what appeared to be an obscure nook, within the recesses of the prime minister's labyrinthine edifice of political aides, a former Indian Airlines pilot, Captain Satish Sharma, has exploded into controversial prominence, following newspaper reports that his lifestyle has suddenly become luxurious and opulent. Several MPs, including some from the ruling party, have begun to insist that Sharma be asked for explanations, lest the charges become yet another embarrassment for the prime minister. The controversy revolves around three major issues:

► Sharma's acquisition of 10 acres of land on the Delhi-Haryana border last year for Rs 4.50 lakh. According to real estate dealers, the price of farm land in the area was then over Rs 1.25 lakh an acre. So the total price should have been over Rs 12.5 lakh. Sharma is now building a farmhouse with a swimming pool.

► Allegations that he and Rajiv bought prime land together, adjoining Rajiv's family farm near Chhatarpur village, on the Delhi-Gurgaon road, in anticipation that the newly-acquired land would be declared a *lal dora* (a strip of land around villages where no zoning is allowed and where factories and workshops can be constructed without permits).

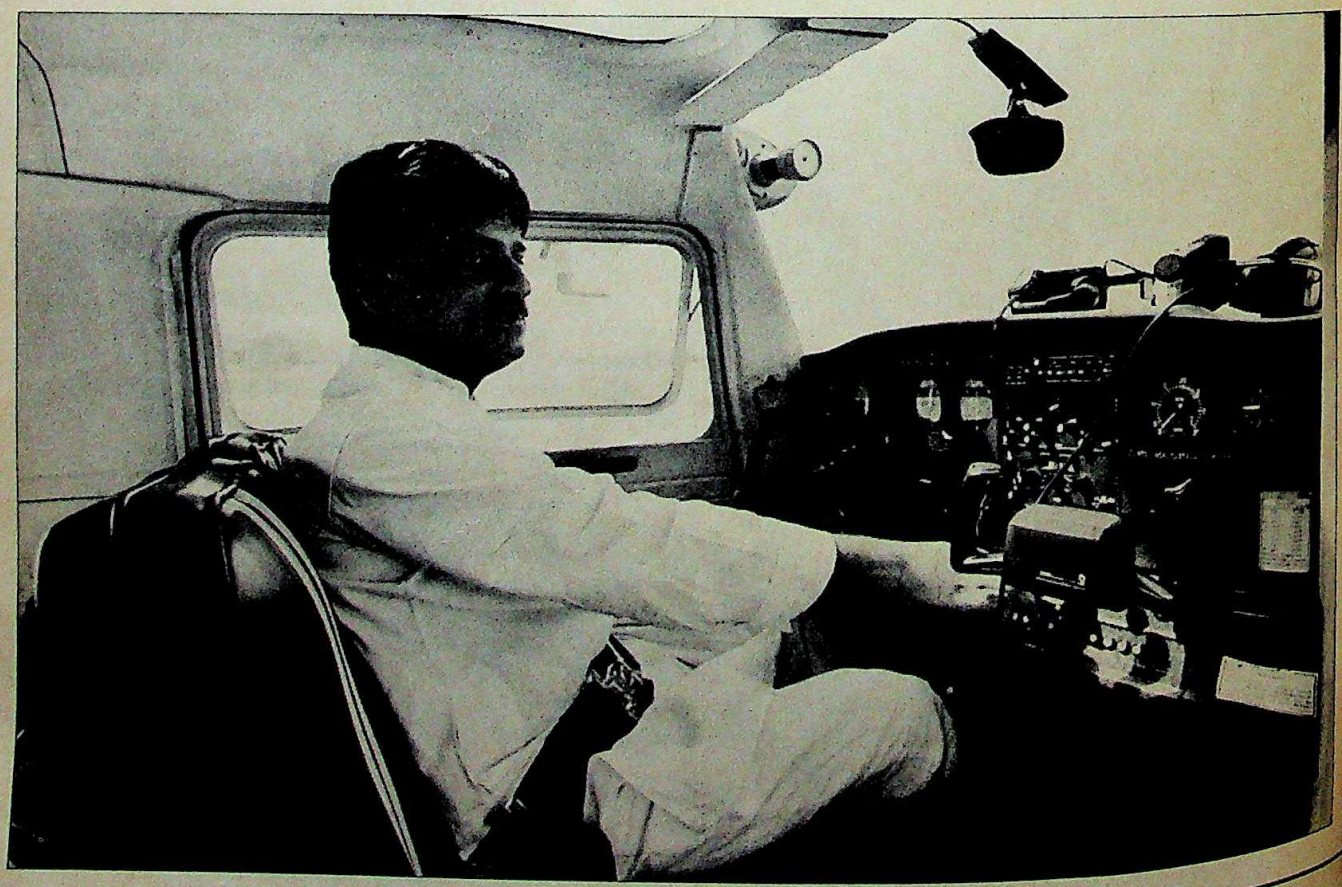
► Sharma's import of 3,000 kg of Italian marble tiles for the swimming pool now under construction at his farm.

Sharma insists that every transaction has been "completely above board", and that the charges against him are part of a recent pattern "of attacks on anybody close to Rajiv. These are aimed in the hope that they will weaken him. But this won't happen."

Sharma says that he paid for his farm land by cheque, and that he has bought real estate close to the Delhi-Haryana border, some distance from the swank farmhouses closer to town (one of them being Rajiv's). It is a semi-arid patch, and half the land has an uneven, hilly terrain. All this, Sharma argues, contributed to the low price. Also, this is about the only

Satish Sharma has become a target of those in the party who would like to see Rajiv distance himself from his friends.

Sharma in the cockpit: troubled take-off



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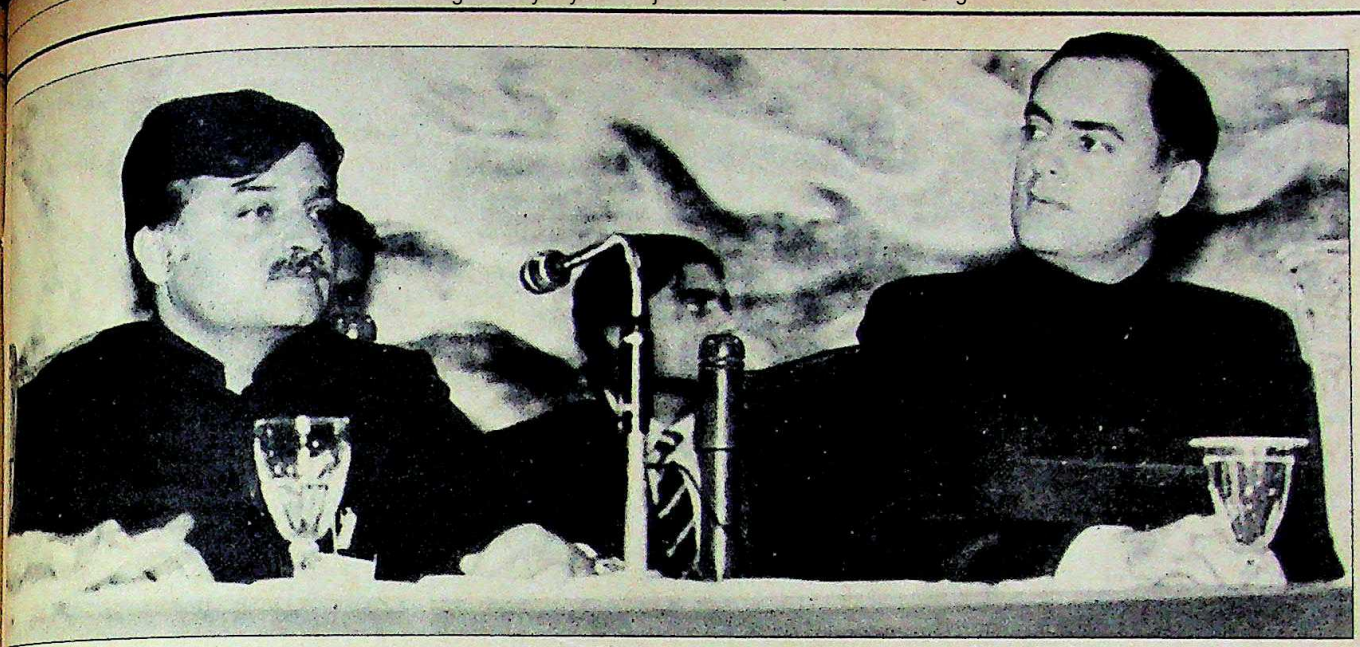

Sharma with Rajiv: intimate ties

property he has, besides his ancestral home in Secunderabad.

As for the *lal dora* land, Sharma says this is no more than 2,000 sq yds, and was bought in 1979—when the Janata Party was in power. Some eucalyptus grows on it now. Sharma says he bought the land and advised Rajiv to buy too—some 1,000 sq yds) because he felt the price would appreciate.

In the case of the swimming pool tiles, Sharma says these were gifted to him by his father-in-law in New York, and that he came close to returning them when he was presented with the customs duty bill of Rs 1.9 lakh. "The tiles are ceramic, not marble. And I could have bought them in India for Rs 60,000," he says.

OTHER questions being asked relate to the business run by Sharma's Dutch-born wife, Stera (Capi to friends), and her acquisition of real estate in prime South Delhi locations. But Sharma has answers to these too *(see interview)*.

No matter what Sharma's story is, the reality is that Sharma has become a target not only of Rajiv's opponents but also of people within the party, particularly those who would like to see the prime minister rely more on members of the old guard. As one senior party MP put it: "I think the time for advisers like Sharma is over. What qualifications does he enjoy for wielding the power that he does?"

Unfortunately for him, Sharma is becoming increasingly isolated. His power and influence—stretching out well before the point when he became a nominated member of the Rajya Sabha last July—have been enormous. But while being one of Rajiv's most trusted men, Sharma has functioned more or less as a loner, cut off from Rajiv's Doon School crowd, his advisers in the Prime Minister's Secretariat, as well as from old guard Congress politicos like Commerce Minister P. Shiv Shanker and M.L. Fotedar, who are now his detractors.

> **The two pilots are in the midst of heavy weather that they have not experienced before: political turbulence.**

And yet Sharma was—and continues to be—an independent power centre, deriving his strength from the trust that Rajiv reposes in him. He has an office at 7, Race Course Road, from where he handles the affairs of Rajiv's Lok Sabha constituency, Amethi. He is, moreover, one of the four people immediately around the prime minister (the others being Fotedar, Rajiv's Private Secretary V. George and V.M. Panikar, a Malayalee MP from Orissa), who help with all manner of odd jobs through the day.

The Amethi work involves speeding up development, keeping the local party unit in gear and dealing with complaints. But Sharma is more than just Rajiv's man-in-Amethi. He is a troubleshooter, a follow-up man, a sounding board, and as an associate remarked, "one of the very few people who mince no words before the prime minister, and call a spade a spade".

"George, get me Satish," that crisp command from Rajiv is repeated a dozen times every day. Sharma then helps out, whether it is to deal with angry MLAs in Amitabh Bachchan's constituency, or to mediate between dissidents and the chief ministers of Bihar and Orissa. Insiders say that Sharma was also asked to monitor the Punjab situation, and that it was he who had advised Rajiv to call off party attacks on V.P. Singh. His is also the controversial job of distributing party funds and liaising with ministries.

Sharma has always been an independent pipeline of information to Rajiv. It is through him that MPs, MLAs and even newsmen express their views, privately or in writing to Rajiv. Many of these missives are complaints against senior partymen, or even against the doings of officials in the Prime Minister's Secretariat.

Still, associates say, Sharma is not a profound political thinker or strategist. Says one: "He is the prime minister's two-way street. He does not allow information to get distorted within political prisms before it reaches his friend." In fact, Sharma is more a confidant and a leg-man than a political adviser.

Essentially, Sharma is a garrulous, happy-go-lucky flier, who likes to drive around in his Maruti van and Contessa, and socialise in the evenings with close friends. His friendship with Rajiv goes back to 1963. Sharma, then 17, was cycling down to the Delhi Flying Club, when a black Hindustan 14 car pulled up beside him. "Hop in," the driver said. Sharma looked incredulous. The car's occupant was Rajiv Gandhi—grandson of the then prime minister—who opened the car boot, shoved Sharma's cycle in,

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INTERVIEW

"I didn't use influence"

FOR the first time since published allegations about Satish Sharma and his land deals and opulent life-style began appearing, he agreed to an interview to tell his side of the story. Sharma spoke to Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR *and Senior Editor* PRABHU CHAWLA *in the office of the Aeroclub of India, of which he is president.*

Q. *Why do you think you have been under attack recently?*

A. During the last few months, they seem to be attacking everybody close to Rajiv, not just me, in the hope they'll weaken him in the process. This won't happen. It will just strengthen his resolve.

Q. *But as a public figure, don't you think you ought to be answerable?*

A. By all means put me under a microscope, but not under a distorted vision as has been happening. I'm ready to be accountable but I have no reason to go on the defensive.

Q. *With your recent land purchases and the building of a swimming pool using imported marble at your farmhouse, your life-style has suddenly become luxurious.*

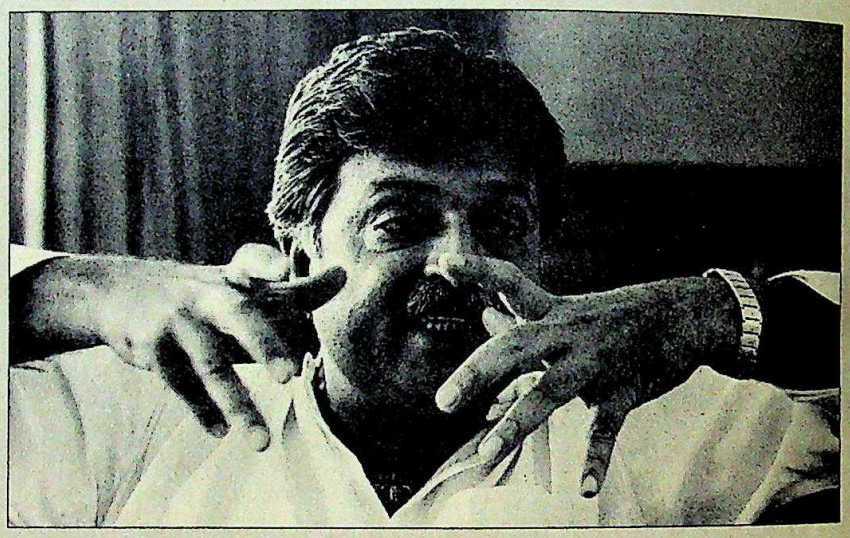
A. For one thing, I was never exactly poor. My grandfather, who reared me, was a millionaire in the 1950s and we still have family wealth. My wife is a designer of children's clothes and runs two successful boutiques.

Q. *The acquisition of the second boutique in South Extension also raised questions because the* pugree *usually charged on showrooms there is about Rs 40 lakh. Did you have that kind of money?*

A. In my position I was acutely conscious that such questions would be raised. The plain fact is that our space is small—a third of a shop owned by the Royal Safe Company. We got a loan from a bank and paid by cheque the deposit as well as agency fees.

Q. *What about your farmland? According to the records, you paid Rs 40,000 an acre for 10 acres of land a year ago, while land prices there were averaging between Rs 2 lakh and Rs 3 lakh an acre six months ago. How did you get it so cheap? Or did you actually pay more and it was not shown?*

A. We paid about Rs 5 lakh. And we paid by cheque. The land was cheaper because it is way out. The village Dera Mandi is the last one on the Haryana border (with Delhi). If I had stashes of money, why would I have gone so far out? My former colleagues have bought property in Delhi. But it made sense for me to go out because I knew what I could afford.



Q. *But you still paid less than the prevailing rate.*

A. Look, the area around is semi-desert. And I was able to buy cheaply because the land is uneven, with five acres level and five acres elevated. And I've seen land registries immediately before and after I bought, and they reflect a similar price to what I paid. Of course, prices have gone up now. That is because a telephone line has come to the area, and prices always go up when people see someone who is well-known buy land.

Q. *Are you constructing a luxurious farmhouse?*

A. You can see it for yourself. Under the law I can't build more than 1,000 sq ft (on a two-and-half-acre plot). How can anyone build a palace there? So I'm starting gradually by building the basement first, and we'll add as we go along.

Q. *What about the controversial swimming pool?*

A. Yes, we are building a family-size pool. And why not? Aside from my family property in Hyderabad, this is the only home we will own. This is my only piece of rock.

Q. *But reports say it is a luxurious pool for which you imported 3,000 kg of Italian marble.*

A. The material is ceramic tile. It was sent as a gift to me from my in-laws, who knew we are building a house. It came through regular customs and I couldn't quite return it without hurting their feelings. I paid Rs 1.90 lakh as duty and penalty on the gift. If I had used Indian tiles for the purpose, they would have cost me only about Rs 60,000. It is obvious that I didn't use my influence in any way.

Q. *What about the plot you and Rajiv bought adjacent to his farm in anticipation that it would be declared a* lal dora*—an area for which there is no zoning and where people can set up factories without permits? Didn't that require you to use your influence?*

A. This is yet another example of irresponsible reporting. First, the plot is five or six miles away from Rajiv's farm. Secondly, it was already a *lal dora* when we purchased it in 1979, when we were pilots and neither Rajiv nor his mother were in power. It is a small 5,000 sq yd rural plot that Rajiv and I bought as an investment at about Rs 23 per sq yd.

Q. *Most of what you are saying will be held to minute public scrutiny because of your position.*

A. Let it be so. I have confidence. Every penny I've spent is from within my known sources of income and savings, and all the transactions have been done openly and by cheque, including all the construction that is now going on at my farmland and which will continue to proceed.

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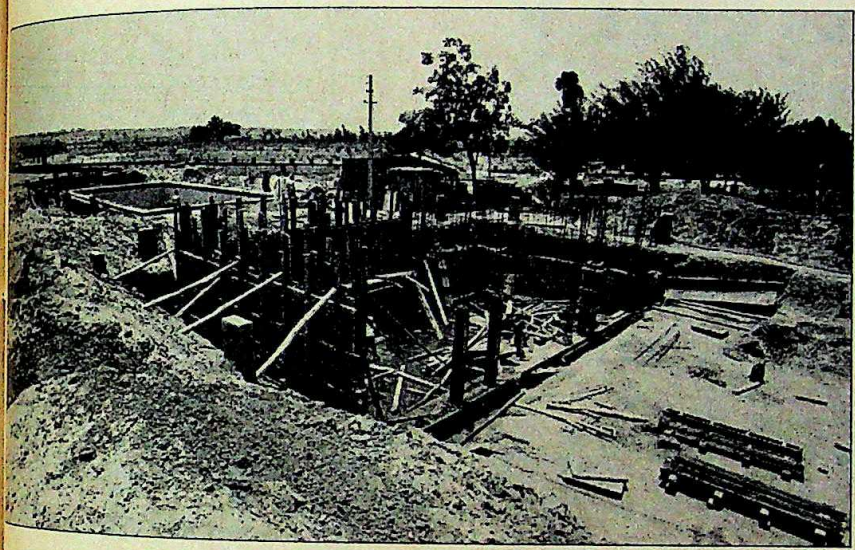
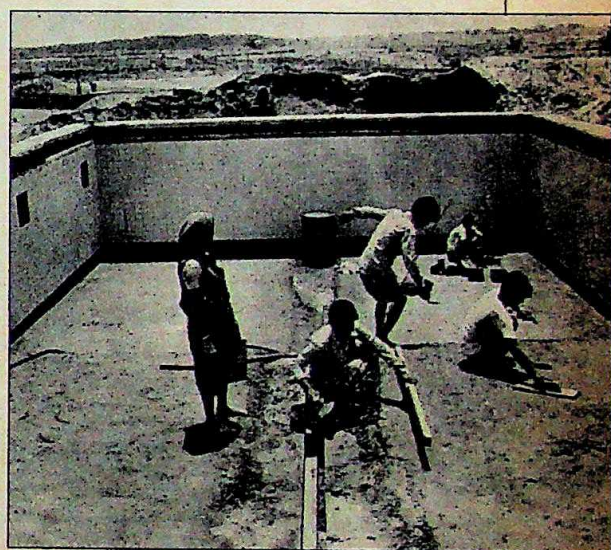
hoisted the cyclist into the passenger seat and drove off to the club.

They did not meet again for four years. Sharma had returned to his hometown, Hyderabad, to take up flying as a career. Rajiv had returned from England and was accompanying his mother, Indira Gandhi, on a visit to Hyderabad. Sharma called him at Raj Bhavan. "I wondered if he would remember me," he recalls. Rajiv's response on the phone was: "Are you the guy with the crew cut (then Sharma's hairstyle)?" After that, the two never lost touch.

His acquisition of land and commercial space has, inevitably, fuelled speculation about the source of his money.





Sharma's farmhouse (top left); swimming pool; and wife Stera in boutique: vulnerable

Sharma joined Indian Airlines shortly before Rajiv, flying Dakotas initially, and then the two often flew together. "When you've seen someone in the cockpit for those many years, you really get to know the guy," Sharma says. "I've seen him tackle the worst of weather, going through thunderstorms and lightning bolts, and I always marvelled at his coolness."

He began helping Rajiv with administrative chores in 1981, after Rajiv quit his airlines job. Sharma himself resigned in 1983, to become a full-time political aide. Says he: "What did I know of politics? My only concern was helping a friend whom I respected and loved dearly."

Economically, Sharma says, joining politics was not attractive. His financial situation was eased, he says, partly because of help from his mother's family, and by the income from his wife Stera, who worked as a fashion designer for a Dutch company. The daughter of John Scherar, *Time* magazine's former bureau chief in Brussels—and now the International Monetary Fund's permanent representative to the United Nations—Stera opened up a children's boutique in New Delhi's Archana Arcade. Within a year, the Sharmas say, the shop did so well that they were able to start tailoring factories and open a second store—Balloons—in the capital's plush South Extension.

His acquisition of land and commercial space has, inevitably, fuelled speculation about the source of his money. But Sharma refuses to divulge his wealth, and claims his wife's success is a strong factor in his ability to maintain his life-style and make investments. He also says that his relatives, including his in-laws, have been generous with their help.

To start with, he says, he was not exactly poor. He was raised by his maternal grandfather, Amarchand Sharma, who left Punjab for Hyderabad at 14 to get a civil engineering degree and became later, one of the biggest contractors in the area. Sharma proudly points to his grandfather as the builder of India's first siphon spillway dam, Sarla Sagar in Andhra Pradesh. "As early as the '50s, we had a new car, and my grandfather was a millionaire."

Asked about the qualifications he has to be an adviser to the prime minister, Sharma shrugs and says: "He is a friend and a fellow-flier. Whenever he needs my help, I'm there." As proof of his capability as an organiser and "go getter", he points to what he believes will be his legacy: India's flying clubs and their achievements since he became president of the Aeroclub of India. Rajiv had assigned Sharma the task of resuscitating the flying clubs in the country. And it is Sharma's blueprint, which included the purchase of 28 new Cessna Aerobat planes for 25 clubs, that is being implemented today.

But whatever their achievements as lovers of flying, the two pilots are in the midst of heavy weather—political turbulence for which the flight manuals have no answers and for which they have not been trained.

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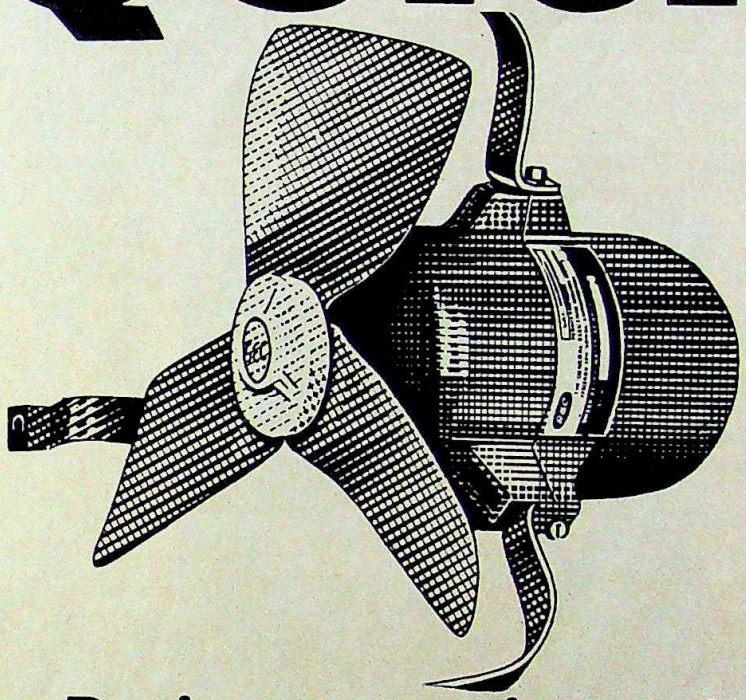

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Three minutes flat!

That's all it takes for the new GEC Ventilair Fan to clear stuffy air in your kitchen or bathroom.

What's more, Ventilair does its super fast job ever so quietly. Thanks to the computer aided design of impellers which ensures minimum air-cutting noise, and increases air delivery.

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Clears your kitchen or bathroom of stuffy air in 3 minutes flat. Available in two sizes: 230 mm and 305 mm.

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UK GENERAL ELECTIONS

Campaign Craft

WITH the polling day just 11 days away, independent observers and commentators in Britain seem unanimous in their view that the first major public gaffe in the current, frenzied general election campaign was committed by Margaret Thatcher herself. Pondering over the future, she felt she could not only win this election but the following one too. And she added: "I could go on and on and on." Even the Tory faithful cringed at this statement as her political opponents recoiled at her "amazing arrogance" and roasted her for her "authoritarian instincts". Liberal Party leader David Steel arraigned her for trying to make herself "leader for life". It also earned her yet another nickname: "mama doc". After eight years of untrammelled Thatcherism, many quailed at the millennial prospects she offered. The fierce criticism of Mrs Thatcher's overconfidence notwithstanding, the fact remains that she is well on course to spearhead the Tories to a record third successive term.

When the June 11 election date was announced a fortnight ago, opinion polls gave the Conservative Party a handsome 14-point lead and predicted an easy win. But two weeks into the campaign, the Tories now suddenly have more of a fight on their hands. The Labour Party's election machine has put up an exceptionally sophisticated show to edge to within four points of the Tories. Labour, Britian's main opposition party, has moved light years away from the professional shambles of Michael Foot's campaign in 1983, whose manifesto was acidly described as the "longest suicide note in history".

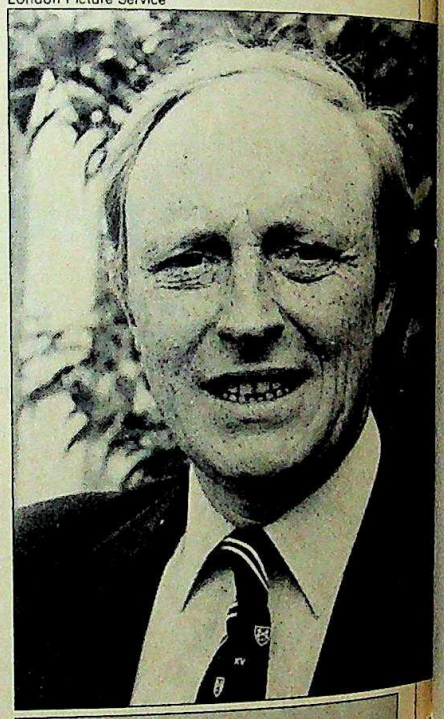
This time, the Alliance—comprising the Social Democratic Party and the Liberal Party—came fastest off the blocks. Since 1983, the Alliance has established itself as a permanent presence in British politics. But despite a slow start and a startlingly hostile press, Labour has edged closer to the Tories, making them understandably nervous.

The Labour Party's change in fortunes has been essentially pegged to a superbly-packaged TV campaign and has come at the expense of the Alliance led by those two messengers of moderation, Dr David Owen and David Steel. The Alliance is thus facing a tougher and more dispiriting struggle than many of its members had expected. To many British commentators, Neil Kinnock in 1987 has reminded them of Mrs Thatcher in 1979: ruthlessly geared to TV, going for pictures at well-attended meetings, hecklers conspicuously absent, with friendly voters and kissing friendlier babies with panache.

London Picture Service

MARGARET THATCHER
Conservative Party

London Picture Service



NEIL KINNOCK
Labour Party

Labour has produced the most capable, efficient and glossy campaign so far in its long history. Little wonder then, that the press here has described its campaign as owing more to Madison Avenue than to the memory of Keir Hardie. In fact, this is the first election run along American lines, with stylishly-packaged TV ads in the form of party election broadcasts and glossy literature flooding voters' houses. From the early-morning *Good Morning Britain*, to the late-night current *Newsnight*, there are analyses, interviews, computer forecasts and talk shows. Election broadcasts usually send viewers fleeing to their kitchens. This time, they have aroused exceptional interest. The Tory broadcast pressed hard on the pedals of patriotism and freedom. The spirit of enterprise, it claimed, won for Britain the last war, raised profitability, cut taxes, reduced the power of the state, and produced bonny babies.

Conceived by Saatchi and Saatchi, it showed shots of the Battle of Britain, and attempted to espouse the Tory ideals—thrift, hard work, self-reliance and a firm belief in Victorian values. But it simply did not work. It just showed a ceaseless capacity to annex British history and patriotism. Said one viewer: "The unabashed jingoism simply went over the top." It wasn't just the Union Jack or the implied claim to have won the Second World War single-handed, but the issues were not clearly stated.

In contrast, the Labour Party's TV campaign has been described as "brilliant" and "outstanding". It simply concentrated on one single personality: Neil Kinnock. Presidential in tenor, and devised by two Oscar-winning talents—Colin Welland and Hugh Hudson (of *Chariots of Fire*)—its masterly appeal broke new ground. It showed Kinnock, the man and leader, his origins and political rise, his message, his family, his passion and his feeling for the poor. It also had a series of endorsements from

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You can enjoy the same cooker that's the favourite in America's top department store

The Hawkins Futura has been exported to leading department stores in the United States of America. This success is based on unique consumer benefits and product design that has been awarded patents in the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

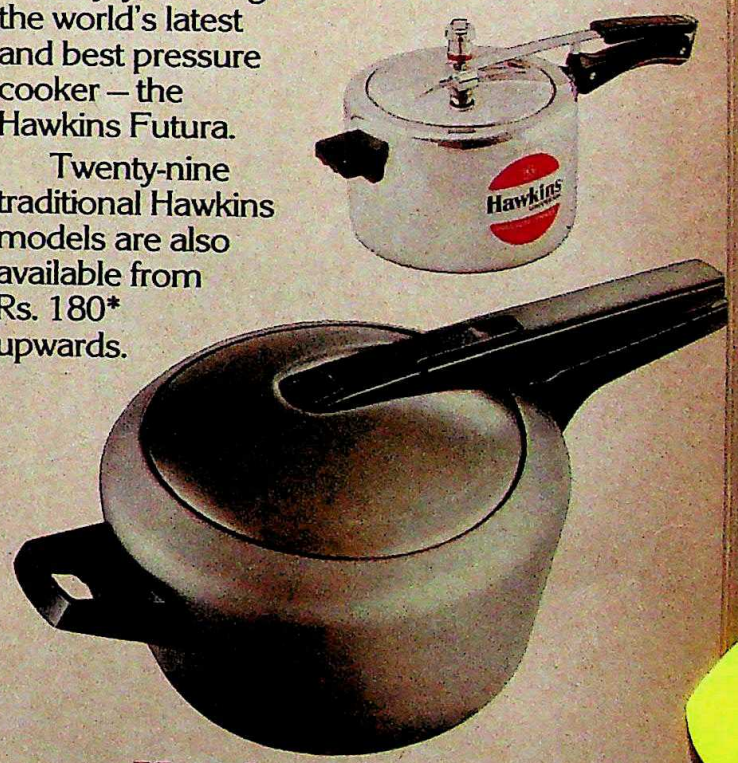
In actual cooking trials the Hawkins Futura on average proved 46% faster than microwave cooking.

The Hawkins Futura's beautiful, jewel-grey Satilon finish combines the advantages of quick-heating aluminium with the non-tarnish quality of stainless steel.

The fingertip control provides safe, automatic, direction-controlled steam release.

Enjoy cooking in the world's latest and best pressure cooker – the Hawkins Futura.

Twenty-nine traditional Hawkins models are also available from Rs. 180* upwards.



Hawkins Futura pressure cookers on display in a Bloomingdale's store in New York. Bloomingdale's is America's leading department store chain for high-quality products.

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FUJI CHIFFON SAREES

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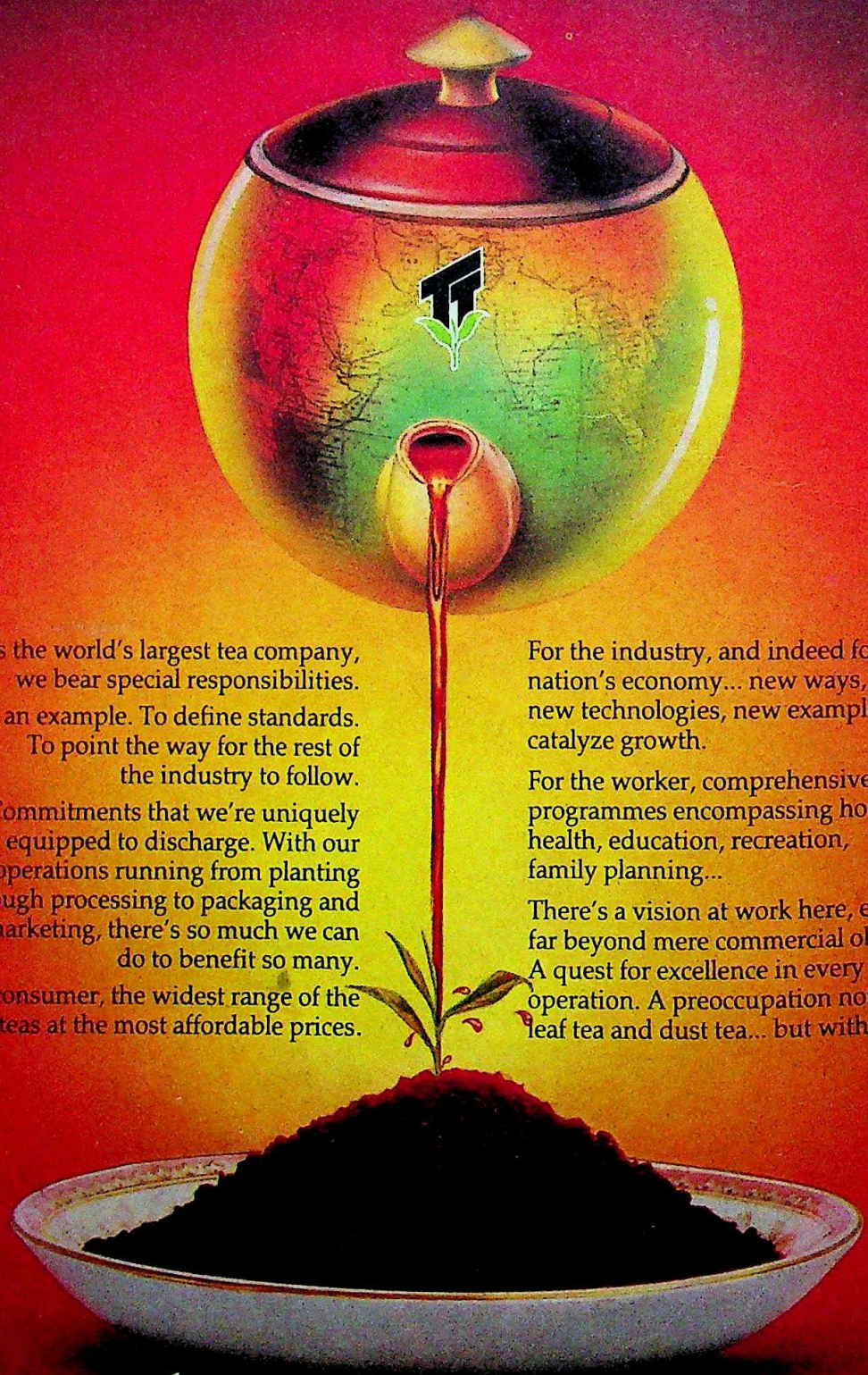
Product value flows from corporate values at Tata Tea.



As the world's largest tea company, we bear special responsibilities.

To set an example. To define standards. To point the way for the rest of the industry to follow.

Commitments that we're uniquely equipped to discharge. With our operations running from planting through processing to packaging and marketing, there's so much we can do to benefit so many.

For the consumer, the widest range of the finest teas at the most affordable prices.

For the industry, and indeed for the nation's economy... new ways, new technologies, new examples to help catalyze growth.

For the worker, comprehensive programmes encompassing housing, health, education, recreation, family planning...

There's a vision at work here, extending far beyond mere commercial obsessions. A quest for excellence in every area of operation. A preoccupation not just with leaf tea and dust tea... but with humanity

TATA TEA LIMITED

Making a difference.... differently

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personalities like Barbara Castle and James Callaghan (including one from Dennis Healey saying: "Like Gorbachev, he has a nice smile but steel teeth").

Kinnock's rallies have also been stage-managed to the last rose petal. The Labour leader, who has a reputation for verbosity, has sternly kept quiet in front of the print media but in some rallies, his speeches have displayed the evangelical fervour that makes him an outstanding orator. Says a Welsh academic: "Kinnock is only 45 but he has a strongly romantic view of history." He has set himself formidable tasks for this election: to transform the national mood from one of greed and individualism to solidarity between the well-off and those living in the misery of old age, poverty and the dole queues.

THE Alliance campaign has been strangely sterile. It had Rosie Barnes, no doubt an attractive candidate who recently won a stunning victory against the Tories in Greenwich, waffling on TV for 10 minutes. This, despite being crafted by a man accepted in British advertising circles as the successor to David Ogilvy—David Abbot.

Many observers have remarked on a serious strategic miscalculation of the Alliance—of not paying enough attention to Labour and concentrating its flak on Mrs Thatcher and the Tories. Despite possessing Dr Owen, an impressive parliamentary performer, the Alliance's support has been steadily dwindling. In its opening press conference, the Alliance dismissed the Labour Party as not even worth discussing and outlining "tactical voting", that is, you cast your vote for the candidate most likely to defeat the Conservative. Now it finds itself facing the prospects of being squeezed out by the two front-runners.

A remarkable facet of these elections is the lack of debate on an intellectual level. The endless arguments about socialism have not thrown up any new insights. Instead personal attacks and "ugly smears" dominate the show.

If issues are to be analysed, education is unmistakably the dominant one. It is one of the three subjects—with jobs and the health service—which will influence the British voters' choice of party. Every dimension of it has an electoral resonance. The schools system is at the heart of the debate. Whoever wins will need an agenda for reform. Teachers have already threatened to make June a time of discontent.

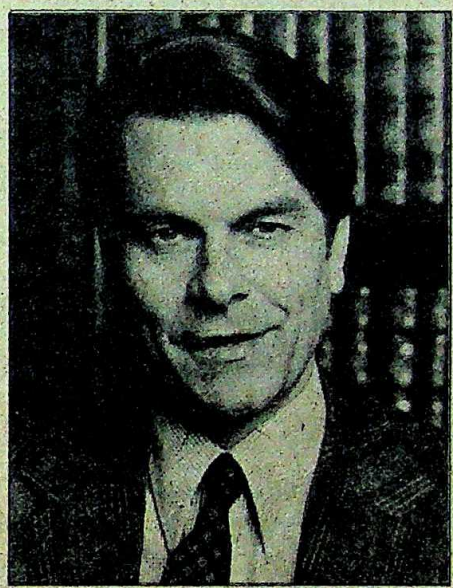
Mrs Thatcher's mission has been to "kill socialism" from Britain while the Labour Party wishes to eradicate Thatcherism. She dismissed the Labour manifesto as the "iceberg manifesto—one-tenth of its socialism visible, nine-tenths beneath the surface". Her tactics have been to stand by her record—especially on the economic front. The Tories speak glowingly about privatisation and the record 8.5 million individual shareholders in Britain. Their dictum has been that the conquest of inflation would clear the path to economic recovery and this, by contrast, required strict monetary control and cuts in borrowing.

However, as the *The New Statesman* pointed out editorially in a recent issue that also featured a cover report on "100 reasons not to vote Tory", any incoming government must prepare Britain for the 1990s, when the oil revenues begin to decline and it must also decide on fundamental foreign policy choices—to be more European or Atlanticist. It argued that it was wrong to blame Mrs Thatcher for all that had happened to the country. After all, she did not arrange for Argentina to invade the Falklands. But she has indeed presided over the rise in unemployment—estimated between three million and four million. It has also divided Britain along class lines, encouraging private greed whilst remaining indifferent to public squalor.

Still, Labour's manifesto has been a disappointment. Few proposals are concrete, fewer still are costed. Where it has a fluent line is in whingeing recitation of the evil Mrs Thatcher has done to Britain. The campaign has injected fresh vigour and vitality into the party ranks. But, as leading commentator Brain Walden pointed out, perhaps with some exaggeration: "Labour's progress in the opinion polls has not been advanced by any new fangled yuppie-oriented froth about greenery or the Third World or the challenge of the 21st century. Good old collective bribery, class hatred and the envy of the rich has done the trick."

If a Conservative victory, albeit with a reduced majority looks likely, what is more certain is that the face of the next British Parliament would be drastically altered. The next House of Commons could have several black faces—the first time since three Indian Parsis, Naoroji, Bhownagree and Saklatvala—graced the chambers. The probables are Russel Profit, the controversial Bernie Grant, Paul Boateng, and Diane Abbott. Amongst the Indian-origin candidates, Keith Vaz, contesting from Leicester east, has a reasonable chance. Others like Zerbanoo Gifford and Praful Patel, despite their high-profile, have a tough fight on their hands.

As the high-pressure electioneering draws to its last stages, the Tories and the Alliance have been taking a closer look at the Labour campaign, and perhaps even adapt some of its positive aspects. In its film on Kinnock, it shows the Labour leader remarking about his wife Glenys: "I am married to a woman of high intelligence, and immense warmth and independence." Somehow, it does not seem likely that Mrs Thatcher could make similar remarks about her husband Denis. —RAMESH CHANDRAN



DAVID OWEN
Social Democratic Party

DAVID STEEL
Liberal Party

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FIJI

A Communal Coup

TIME: 10 a.m. Date: May 14, 1987. Place: Parliament House, Suva, the capital of Fiji. The scene: opposition MP Taniela Veitata has the floor. "Peace and harmony is the governing principle on which the Fijians have been running their lives since the advent of Christianity. This is in contrast to what Mao Tse Tung believed: that political power comes out of the barrel of a gun."

Enter Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, no. 3 in the Royal Fijian military, gun in hand, with 10 soldiers, all similarly armed. "This is a military take-over. Lie down and remain calm," he shouts.

In the next 10 days, Fiji's political system is shattered. After long and tortuous negotiations, the colonel's basic aims are given respectability and the allegedly "Indian" Bavadra government is overthrown and replaced by a new political system to ensure ethnic Fijian control, seemingly for all time to come.

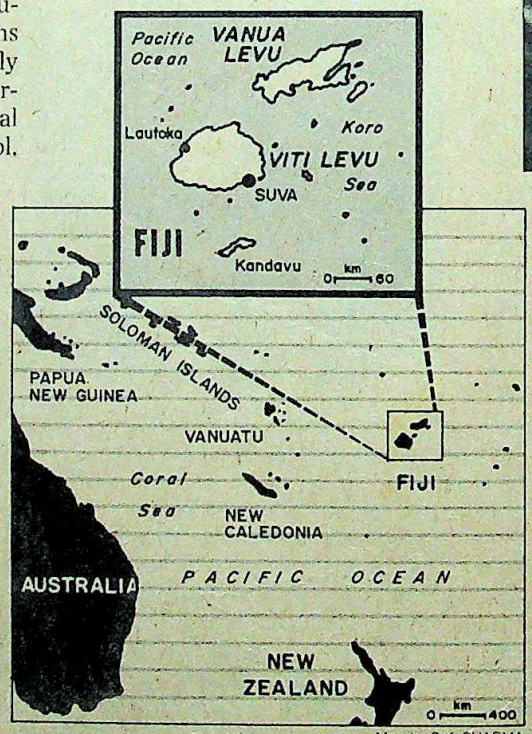
Until new elections are held, Fiji will be run by an Advisory Council split into an administrative committee and another to revise the constitution. Both these committees are chaired by Brigadier Rabuka (the colonel has promoted himself). The constitution committee is to ensure that two-thirds of the lower house seats as well as the jobs of the prime minister and the governor-general should be compulsorily reserved for ethnic Fijians.

Last fortnight's coup thus simply confirmed what most Indians have known during their 108 years in Fiji—they are second-class citizens and will remain so. Since the arrival of the first Indians to the islands as indentured labourers, they have been ruled by the British for 96 years and the Fijian-majority alliance party government for 12 years. The only Indian-majority government, the Labour Party and National Federation Party coalition, was ended by the coup only six days after being officially sworn in by the governor-general.

While protesting over the seizure of power, the Indians will probably sullenly accept their fate and return to a life that is pretty much the same as it was before 10 a.m. on May 14. On the surface, it seems Fiji's Indians have a Hobson's choice. Either remain under the control of ethnic Fijians or leave the country.

Many Indians are contemplating the latter course. "Fiji is ruined and I want to leave," was a common catch-cry among Indians in Suva over the past fortnight. Many of those with family ties in other countries—the US, Australia, Canada and New Zealand—were making desperate attempts to expedite applications to migrate or obtain visitors' permits.

The Fijian Government Passport Office says there has been a "drastic" rise in passport applications since the riots in the capital, when ethnic Fijians attacked Indians and looted their shops. Suva's biggest photographic shop, Caines Photofast, developed passport photographs for more than 250 people last Friday: about 230 were for Indians. "Its been absolutely incredible," a staff member said. "There are whole families planning to leave Fiji."



Map by B.K. SHARMA

However, most Indians neither have family ties nor money to even dream of a new life in another country. And despite the coup, many will not leave Fiji because they have been extremely successful in business here. One businessman with substantial retail interests in Suva, Abdul Jalar, said: "I would be foolish to leave all this."

Most of Fiji's successful Indians, like Jalar, have had to carve their success from business rather than the land. It is enshrined in the Constitution that ownership of land will remain mostly with the ethnic Fijians. So, though there are now more Indians than Fijians—347,455 against 330,441—83 per cent of the land is under Fijian ownership. This has meant that most Indians have to rely on shopkeeping, working in the sugar-cane industry, general business and farming land obtained on long leases from Fijians. They have also had to concentrate on becoming better educated.

With the election of an Indian-majority government, Fijians increasingly have feared the next step will be losing ownership of their lands. A former alliance cabinet minister, Apisai Tora, who had been detained by the deposed Bavadra government on charges of inciting racial hatred before the coup, voiced the feeling of many ethnic Fijians. "Since our generosity has been rejected (by not being re-elected), we would like to have these leases back. And let us state quite clearly that when these leases come up for renewal, in the '90s, they will not be renewed. Our population is increasing and we will need these blocks of our most fertile land to improve ourselves, and those who do not want our chiefs should vacate our land."

It was sentiments like these which enabled Colonel Rabuka and the Fijian-

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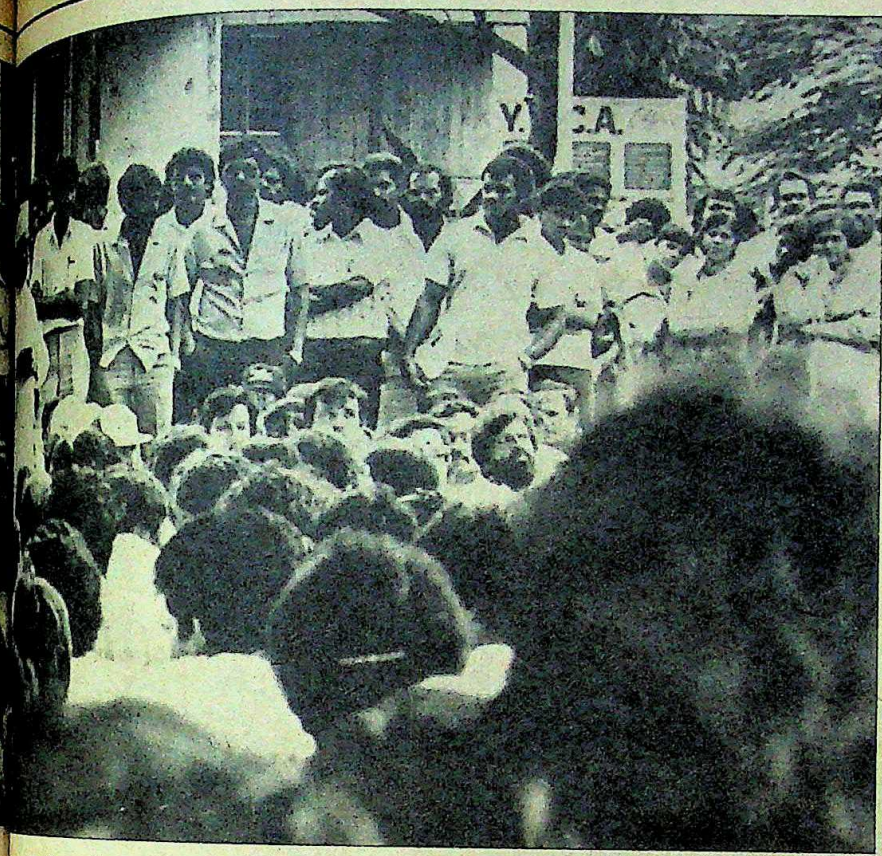

RICK STEVENS Sydney Morning Herald

Indian prayer meeting in Suva:

dominated army to succeed in taking over the country. Now the announcement about new elections and the ruling council bring anger and resentment from the man who will carry on the fight on behalf of the Indians and those Fijians who believe in true democracy.

Dr Bavadra says the council is "stacked heavily" in favour of the alliance party which was defeated at the elections. There are only three Indians on the council—deposed deputy prime minister Harish Sharma, Chairman of the Fiji Trade and Investment Board Mumtaz Ali and President of the Fiji Employers' Consultative Association Colonel Paul Manueli.

Sharma and Dr Bavadra are the only representatives of the new government, yet there are 14 members of the former alliance government, including the long-time prime minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. Rabuka also is a council member.

When Dr Bavadra questions the fairness of decisions that would come from such a group, he may have well been considering the track record of one ethnic Fijian member, Alipate Qetaki. It seems that Fiji's Indians would have good cause to feel uneasy about the appointment of Qetaki, a Suva lawyer. In the Fijian magistrate's court in Suva, Qetaki put forward an amazing argument in the defence of seven youths charged with attacking Indians and looting their shops in the riots. He claimed that the court had no jurisdiction to hear the charges because of the military coup. Instead, his clients should be tried by a military tribunal. He said the coup had removed the Constitution and all its powers. Both the magistrate hearing the charges, James Sabharwal, and the Chief Magistrate, Howard Morrisson, strongly rejected Qetaki's argument. Sabharwal said the governor-general was still the head of state as the Queen's representative and the court sat with all the authority vested in the magistrates by the Queen.

With the governor-general giving in to coup leader Colonel Rabuka and the great chiefs, it seems fairly certain that the short-lived Indian summer in the South sea island of Fiji will never be seen again.

Thousands of Indians have been angered by Qetaki's approach. After the riots, they had been looking to the courts to show that law and order still applied to the streets of Fiji. Yet, the next day, Qetaki was appointed to the council to advise the governor-general.

The mood of the Indians seems to have gone through four stages during the coup. In the days immediately following the seizure of power, there was disbelief, but also a calmness which astonished visiting journalists. As worshippers were pushed out of the street leading to the house where the Bavadra government was held, they were softly singing Fiji's national anthem and many were smiling. A group of Indians told an Australian journalist: "We are peaceful in Fiji. We would never take to violence."

By early last week, the Indians began to be decisive. They boarded up virtually all the Indian shops and stayed in their homes in silent protest, when not holding public prayer meetings. One Indian leader, Abdul Ali, said: "We have lived together for more than 100 years in harmony and can continue to do so. But if they take away our voting rights, we take away our commerce." The Indian cane cutters refused to harvest the sugar-cane crop—Fiji's most important crop.

The next emotion was fright as the riots erupted in Suva. Indians were beaten up and their cars and property damaged and stolen. Because of the closure of the newspapers and censorship of the radio stations, this fear spread quickly up and down the coast with Indians not knowing whether to believe stories about what was happening in Suva. Even after the release of the Bavadra cabinet, many Indians outside Suva believed they were still imprisoned and being tortured.

Now, the initial anger and fright have been replaced with a simmering frustration that will continue for years, no matter what happens. The Queen herself has been unable to do little, except perhaps prevent Fiji from turning the opinion of the great council of chiefs away from a proposal to make Fiji a republic.

Although the governor-general, as the Crown's respected and loved representative, has managed to provide the most powerful opposition to the military regime, he has conceded to Colonel Rabuka being on his advisory council. Any changes to the Constitution will guarantee permanent Fijian supremacy. The six days of Indian-majority rule will never be seen again.

—MICHAEL LAURENCE and GIRISH KUMAR in Suva

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SRI LANKA

Final Battle

WHEN the Sri Lankan armed forces, under instructions from Minister for National Security Lalith Athulathmudali, and armed with a carte blanche from President J.R. Jayewardene, launched a final all-out military offensive to recapture Jaffna from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) last fortnight, there was an air of inevitability about it. For nearly two years the whole of Jaffna peninsula was under the complete control of the LTTE. So it was only natural that after the failure of the protracted efforts to find a negotiated solution to the ethnic problem, the Sri Lankan Government should have decided to push through the military option in the north. Said a top National Security Ministry official in Colombo: "Our army is now making a spirited attempt to ensure that the Sri Lankan Government's writ again runs in the northern peninsula."

For nearly a month, Colombo made massive preparations for this final military onslaught on the north. If the Sri Lankan Army succeeds in recapturing Jaffna, the backbone of the Tamil militant movement will be broken. According to informed sources in Colombo, over 20,000 troops were gradually massed for the military offensive. This was four times the estimated military cadre strength of the LTTE.

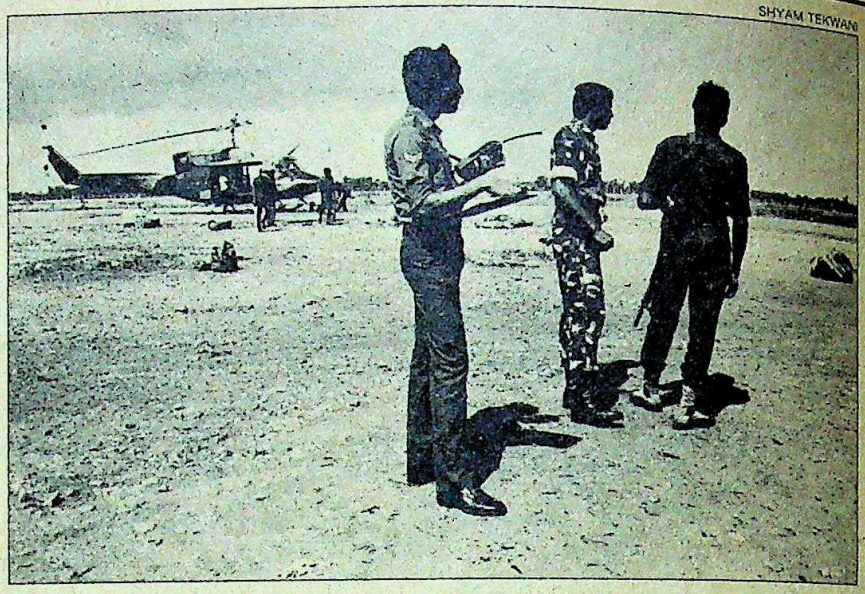
Last fortnight, Colombo took the final plunge and began the strike in the north. In a well-planned action after organising its troops, Sri Lankan Air Force planes and helicopters whirred over Jaffna, dropping thousands of printed leaflets announcing the immediate imposition of a 48-hour curfew. Within two hours of that warning, in a concerted action, troops moved out in columns from all the nine military camps in the peninsula, where, by and large, they had remained confined for the last couple of years. The advancing soldiers opened mortar and artillery fire on LTTE positions, while air force planes and helicopter gunships, providing air cover to the marching troops, pounded Jaffna town and its suburbs. And all along the Jaffna coast, naval gunboats shelled intermittently.

According to A.S. Balasingham, the spokesman of the LTTE in Madras, over 100 innocent Tamil civilians were killed on the first day of the assault. "Nine gunboats have been continuously shelling the north-eastern coastal belt. We are of course putting up a stiff fight but innocent civilians are getting killed in large numbers. Indiscriminate aerial bombardment is also taking a heavy toll," said Balasingham.

However, Sri Lankan armed forces seemed to be selective in their attack this time, hitting only at identifiable terrorist targets and bases. The first objective that the forces concentrated on was cutting off Vadamarachi town—a notorious militant hideout—from the rest of the Jaffna peninsula. Vadamarachi is the native place of several key militant leaders like Velupillai Pirabakharan, Kittu, and Mahttaya of the LTTE, and V. Balakumar of the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS).

The leaflets warned civilians to move into temples, schools, and theatres temporarily, and stay far away from militant bunkers and camps. According to sources in Colombo, even in Jayewardene's message to Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi sent through Sri Lanka's High Commissioner in Delhi, Bernard Tilakaratne, the President had taken pains to assure India that his army would hit only terrorist targets.

SHYAM TEKWANI



Sinhalese soldiers in Jaffna: strong strike

> **The assault seemed to indicate that it was only a question of time before the Tamil's last bastion in Sri Lanka fell to the army.**

The assault seemed to indicate that it was only a question of time before the Tamil's last bastion on the island fell to the army. As a result of the infighting among the militants—in particular the LTTE's war against the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF)—the Sri Lankan Army and home guards virtually control the east.

Tamil militants and Delhi can only blame themselves for the present state of affairs. The fratricidal war among the militants has ensured the Tigers' isolation. "The Tigers are responsible for 10,000 Tamil militants not being able to wield the gun and fight in northern Sri Lanka because they have banned other militant groups, except for the EROS, from functioning in Jaffna," said A. Selvam, the leader of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation, which was practically wiped out in Jaffna by the LTTE in April 1986. Comments L.K. Theeswaran of the EPRLF: "The fratricidal attacks launched by the LTTE on others were a prominent factor in weakening the Tamil militant movement as a whole."

Having caught the Tiger by the tail, Jayewardene is unlikely to let go. But the greater danger is that New Delhi may decide to intervene if the killing of innocent Tamils continues. The cabinet and the service chiefs have already discussed the option. But in the larger diplomatic context, any form of armed intervention will be a bigger disaster than anything the present government has done so far.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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ARRESTED AUCTION

THE Bangalore-based Chamundi Mopeds may not be up for auction after all. The Mehtas, who promoted the Rs 22-crore project, are having second thoughts about hawking the cash-strapped company (total losses: Rs 8 crore). They have now invited their technical collaborator, Peugeot of France, to invest in Chamundi. Another option being considered is to rope in a partner who would bring in funds, and a London-based non-resident Indian is mentioned in this connection.

Six months ago, the financial institutions and banks which lent Chamundi Rs 15 crore recommended the two-wheeler outfit be sold. Bajaj Auto and Mahindra executives even toured the plant over a month back. But the Mehtas now feel they can make a go of it as the Karnataka Government recently granted Chamundi major sales tax concessions, permitting the vehicle's price to be reduced.

FACE-LIFT

THE country's Rs 50-crore lifts market is heading for a face-lift. At least one new company is entering the business, and established manufacturers sensing competition are busy updating their technologies. In the north, the Usha Telehoist stable of firms has entered into a collaboration with West Germany's Thyssen to promote a joint venture. The new company is expected to produce up to 500 lifts and escalators a year after production is kicked off in October 1988. In Gujarat, Bharat Bijlee, which already turns out lifts, has signed an agreement for technical collaboration with a Swiss outfit who will share its established expertise in the business. And in Madras, Best & Crompton has got together recently with a Finnish company. With all this imminent competition, market leader Otis is also investing more capital in updating know-how. The burst of activity in the industry is partly attributed to growth prospects. It is expected that the market will more than double in the next couple of years.

CHILD'S PLAY

UNIT Trust of India (UTI) certainly believes in catching them really young. In a drive to promote its Children's Gift Growth Fund, the state-owned financial institution is flooding hundreds of maternity homes and clinics across the country with brochures publicising the scheme. And once the mums are out of the maternity homes, they too can climb onto the UTI bandwagon. After a media blitz invited housewives to drum up business for the company, some 11,000 of them wrote in seeking to become UTI agents. All the applications are likely to be accepted.

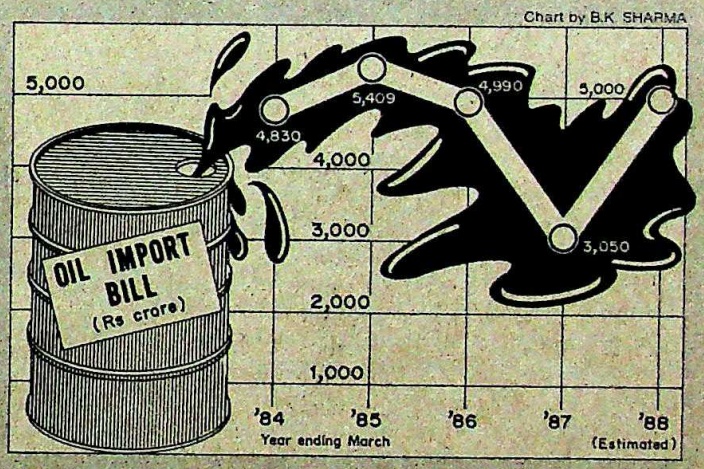
FOREIGN FARE

HOTEL Corporation of India, the Air-India subsidiary that runs the Centaur group of hotels, is planning to wing its way overseas. The company has proposed investments to the order of Rs 30 crore in two hotels in London and Singapore, cities where Air-India regularly spends sizeable amounts of foreign exchange on crew accommodation. The proposals are part of the corporation's ongoing eighth plan exercises. The Centaur group is hopeful that the Government will clear the plans for the hotels overseas as the group has fared well in the recent past, with revenues steadily on the upswing.

OIL TURMOIL

HAPPY days are over vis-a-vis oil imports. Throughout this decade, India has been able to contain its oil import bill: first, by a trebling of domestic crude production during the sixth plan period and then, with the help of the collapse of international oil prices. Now, however, with domestic production levelling off at about 31 million tonnes, and global oil prices rising again, the oil import bill will increase dramatically. Last year, the bill was no more than

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Rs 3,050 crore. This year, the figure is expected to be Rs 5,000 crore, an increase of 66 per cent. This is so despite the fact that physical imports have risen only modestly for crude (from 15.6 million tonnes to 17 million tonnes) and have fallen for petroleum products (from 3.7 million tonnes to 3 million tonnes).

MATCH POINT

ITC, the cigarette giant, is now planning to diversify into safety matches. Initially, the company will only be marketing matches manufactured by small-scale companies in Tamil Nadu, and test marketing has already begun in a couple of states. Later, the company proposes to organise cooperatives of match-makers and, if quality is assured, to promote its own brands of matches. The diversification is seen as logical as ITC can use its existing distribution network (with as many as one million retail outlets) to sell the matches. Earlier attempts to use its marketing strength, by selling items like tea, had not worked out as suppliers could not provide the required quantities to feed the trade pipeline. This time, however, ITC feels there should be no supply bottle-neck.

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THE RUPEE

Diminishing Returns

SIX years ago, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), while negotiating the grant of a $5 billion (now Rs 6,435 crore) loan to India, had suggested that the Government follow a "realistic exchange rate policy" for the rupee. Since that time, the rupee has lost 40 per cent of its value against both the dollar and the deutschmark, 10 per cent against the pound, nearly 60 per cent against the yen, and 15 per cent against the French franc.

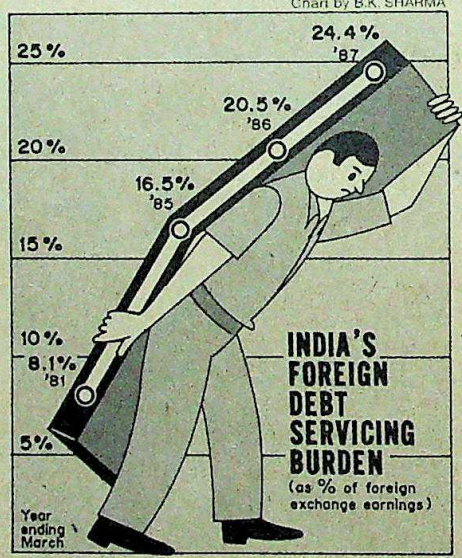
Even as government economists argued that this 'devaluation' had been unavoidable and was delivering results (in terms of increased exports), reports last fortnight about the World Bank demanding a further 25 per cent devaluation sparked off another controversy.

Traditionally, devaluation has been a dirty word in India, especially after the disastrous experience with a 1966 devaluation of the rupee (which was done under World Bank pressure). And the Government itself has devalued the rupee steadily over six years, not overnight as in 1966. But however carefully the rupee's external value has been reduced, the devaluation issue was pushed firmly to the forefront last fortnight, with opinion divided on the merits of what has already been done, and what needs to be done in the future.

Any devaluation of a country's currency makes its exports cheaper abroad, and imports more expensive at home. Logically, exports are supposed to get a boost, and imports to come down. But critics argued that the country's trade deficit this year would be about the same as a few years ago (more than Rs 5,000 crore), even as government spokesmen said the policy was beginning to yield results now, with exports picking up.

A government economist pointed out that India's rivals in export markets had, in fact, devalued their currencies even more, so that they gained in competitiveness against the rupee. The examples that were cited were of Bangladesh (which is scoring in jute), Hong Kong (a rival in garments), and South Korea (in construction and engineering goods). Compared to 1979, even France and West Germany have devalued more than India, he pointed out. "We shouldn't treat the rupee's exchange value like virginity, as something that cannot be touched." Another economist argued that India has been having a higher level of inflation than several other countries, and that if Indian exports were not to get out-priced as a result, some degree of devaluation was unavoidable on a continuing basis.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

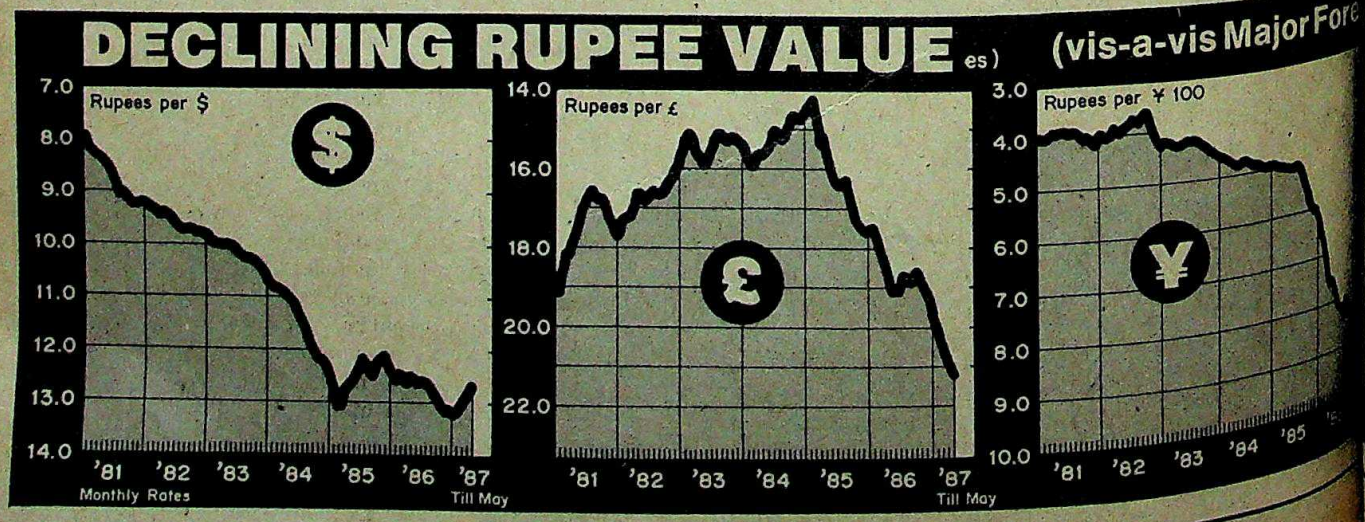


That was logical, and several exporters were enthusiastic votaries of what the Government had done. Said Jatin Mehta, chairman of the Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council: "You get better value for your exports, and the rise in our exports last year was partly because the rupee was devalued." But devaluation is not without its costs, and the critics highlight this, arguing that the Government policy has not delivered results.

A lower value for the rupee is meant to make imports more expensive, and thereby discourage imports. But, said one dissenting Planning Commission economist: "The problem is that most of our imports are of bulk items like oil and fertilisers, which are essential. So they will be imported anyway, irrespective of the price. And because they get more expensive, they result in inflation at home."

On other counts too, the results so far have been mixed. Devaluation and the IMF loan were part of a larger strategy to tackle India's balance of payments problem with a liberalised policy package. But the latest confidential forecasts show that the trade deficit (after dipping last year because of lower oil prices) will keep increasing for the next decade. Loans to service this deficit have to be repaid, and the debt servicing burden has gone up from barely 8 per cent of foreign exchange earnings five years ago to around 24 per cent this year—well above the 20 per cent danger mark.

In the business world, meanwhile, opinion seemed to be mostly critical of the devaluation. Inevitably, companies complained of higher costs in a host of areas (ranging from component imports to royalty and know how payments), warned of



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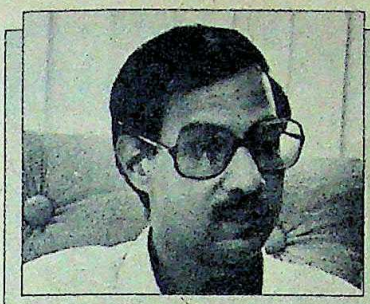


"The authorities are devaluing the rupee more than necessary."

R. SESHASAYEE
executive director, finance, Ashok Leyland

"The rise in exports last year was because the rupee was devalued."

JATIN MEHTA
chairman, gem and jewellery Export Promotion Council

...increased burdens in re-...ing foreign loans, and ...ned about the uncer-...ties that have flowed ...sharp and unex-...ed changes in the ...pee's exchange rate. A ...ernment economist ...ribed all this as "the ...ally bitter taste that is ...hallmark of any good ...dicine", but there was ...getting away from the ...blems that corporate ...utives were faced ...

Several companies ...ch have been affected ...the bigger import bills ...the light commercial ...icle manufacturers) ...been screaming in protest. Said ...ber Goodearth Chief Executive Subodh ...gava: "Since September 1985, the ...of our component imports has gone ...by Rs 75,000. Of this, Rs 70,000 is ...use the rupee has lost against the ..." Vehicle costs have gone through ...roof, raising the break-even point in ...city utilisation (in Eicher's case this ...up from 40 per cent to 60 per cent in ...last six months), while the market has ...ched. Another sufferer was Karnataka ...Bearings, whose Rs 12-crore expan-...project has ended up costing Rs 24 ...because the rupee has been deval-...against the yen as well as the mark. ...the company's Managing Director ...Mehta: "Our liability has gone up. ...is a no-win situation." For Maruti ...g, the rupee devaluation has pushed ...the project cost, in terms of foreign ...ange, from Rs 89 crore to Rs 110 crore. ...aging Director R.C. Bhargava says ...ponent import costs in turn have ...up by 67 per cent compared to 1982.

"That's pretty stiff," said Bhargava. Added Pradeep Saxena, vice-president of American Express: "The devaluation policy is damaging industry more than it is helping exports."

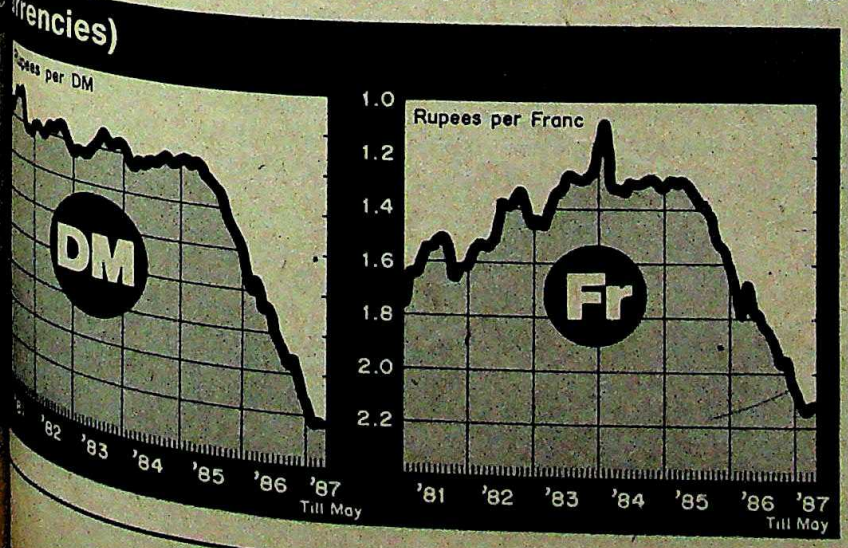
Meanwhile, each dollar of repayment has to be earned with more rupees now than before. For instance, the National Thermal Power Corporation finds that because of the rupee losing ground vis-a-vis the pound, its cost of servicing a loan taken from Britain has already gone up by Rs 55 crore. Said Finance Director P.S. Bami: "This means our project cost will go up, and because we have to recover costs, the electricity tariff will go up." Added M.K. Jhawer, managing director of Usha Telehoist (which finds its raw material imports costing more as the yen has risen in value): "In certain items, when you have no alternative but to import, you are in a very tight corner."

Even those who were once in favour of devaluation now feel that enough is enough. Abid Hussain, member of the Planning Commission and the author of the 1983 proposal for an 'aggressive' exchange rate policy, argued last fortnight that devaluation of the rupee had been taken far enough, that it wouldn't help in today's difficult trade climate, and that "quality and effective marketing are far more important factors for promoting Indian exports. The concept of devaluation has been devalued". His views were echoed by R. Seshasayee, executive director of Ashok Leyland, who said: "The authorities are getting a little paranoid and devaluing the rupee far more than necessary. It will help promote some part of India's exports, but the price advantage may not be significant in other commodities." In areas like computer software or project exports, he added, marketing was far more important.

Even though devaluation has more critics than votaries, the policy has clearly helped in many cases. Eicher has been able to export profitably to Bangladesh and West Germany, while several companies have been forced to speed up their indigenisation programmes and cut down on their imports. And, with import values going up in rupee terms, the Government has also earned more from customs duties (which are usually charged ad valorem).

Nevertheless, even pro-devaluation experts felt that the rupee was now reaching its proper level. Argued foreign exchange consultant A.V. Rajwade: "The devaluation over the last three or four years was aimed at reaching the real exchange rate; from now, changes will be determined by relative inflation in India and outside." That runs counter to the latest World Bank prescription, but it may well be the Government view also, for the rupee has held reasonably steady over the last few months. And as a government economist said: "We have drastically reduced the difference between the official price of the dollar and the black-market price. So we are roughly at the level where we should be." But the next few months will show whether the World Bank has been able to convince the Government that a few more doses of admittedly bitter medicine are called for.

—T.N. NINAN and PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI



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R.P. GOENKA

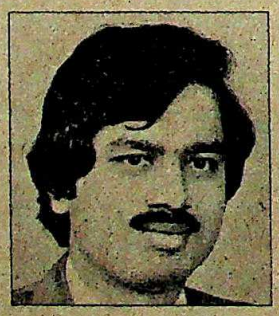
Surprise Move

TAKEOVER wizard Rama Prasad Goenka is now allowing someone else to take over from him. Come July 1, he will hand over the chairmanship of his group of a dozen companies to older son Harsh. Younger son Sanjeev will be one of three vice-chairmen (the other two being professional managers). Goenka will confine himself to the recently-acquired Gramophone Company of India (GCI), and the Rs 1,400-crore Haldia petrochemical project.

Barely 57, Goenka can still look forward to at least a decade more of being at the helm. His sons are only in their 20s. However, explains Goenka: "First, I want to let my son run things himself when I am still available to give advice. Second, I want to give a fitting reply to the criticism that I have only indulged in takeovers, and that I have not set up new projects or nurtured sick units."

R.P. Goenka

Harsh Goenka



Sanjeev Goenka

That explains his decision to concentrate on Haldia and GCI. Goenka says: "Haldia is not a venture, but an adventure"—the single largest project ever undertaken in India's private sector. And he has ambitious plans for GCI, a troubled unit badly in need of resuscitation. The plans include recording cassettes of Vedic chants, and a recitation of the Quran.

Several of his friends still believe that Goenka is not serious about his 'retirement' plans, but the tycoon says he has been planning such a step for some time. He intends to resign from the chairmanship or board of several companies that he took over in spectacular raids or through negotiated deals, or which he set up on his own (including Searle India, Kamani Engineering, Murphy India and Deccan Fibreglass). But he will keep the Ceat Tyres chairmanship for a while longer.

Once Harsh takes over as group chairman, he is expected to become as peripatetic as his father, and Sanjeev (who looks after Dunlop) will get charge of India Polyfibres, a telephone cable project in Rae Bareli and some other companies. Goenka, however, denied reports that the group itself would be restructured.

The Rs 1,000-crore group (with profits last year of Rs 75 crore) might, instead, get more active in its expansion plans. Goenka has been lying low for the last couple of years ("I was scared of V.P. Singh"), and has also been strapped for cash because he has had to pay Rs 43 crore to the Government to get off Singh's blacklist of tax-defaulting companies. Now he will have to fork out Rs 80 crore as his contribution to the share capital of the Haldia company. All this, plus the loss of political clout in recent years, has stilted his planned forays into such areas as electronics and telecommunications.

But this might now change. Goenka scored some personal mileage last month as the outgoing president of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), when (for the first time in a decade) he got the prime minister to inaugurate FICCI's annual jamboree. He also announced last fortnight that he was taking on the work of modernising the Delhi-Jaipur highway. But he rejected a proposed takeover of the troubled Nirlon outfit even though son Harsh was in favour. "I will take the tyre cord unit separately, if they offer it," he explained. "The rest of it doesn't make sense."

Company insiders as well as the rest of the business world will be watching to see how what is widely seen as a premature experiment succeeds. This is particularly so amidst reports (which Goenka flatly denies) that there is tension between him and his partners in the Dunlop takeover, the Chhabrias.

—T.N. NINAN

SUPER-COMPUTER

Stalemate

IN the chandeliered ball-room of the Willard, Washington's most prestigious hotel, located near the White House, Indian captains of industry and representatives of some of the biggest multinational corporations in the US gathered last fortnight to work out ways of improving Indo-US commercial ties. But unexpectedly, the shadow of Cray Corporation's super-computer loomed large over the entire conference, at times almost obstructing all other issues from view.

Rahul Bajaj and Vinay Bharat Ram had questions only on the super-computer when Frank Carlucci, President Reagan's national security adviser, appeared for the conference's closing session. Earlier, R.P. Goenka also focused on the same super-computer when Robert Dean, Reagan's special assistant on national security, took the microphone. "I have always resisted the idea that the super-computer was the flagship of our relationship," Dean said. But there was no getting away from the sticky stalemate on the issue.

The American side argues that the Cray XMP-14 is good enough for India. "It is our understanding that, with this computer, the quality of weather forecasting in New Delhi will be better than in New York," said Robert Peck, assistant secretary of state for near-eastern affairs. But Indian officials say this model will take seven hours to process six hours of Insat data, whereas the Cray XMP-24 can do the job in two hours.

Contacted over long-distance telephone at the Cray Corporation's Minneapolis headquarters, company spokesman Rob Gaertner said the difference between the two machines was that the XMP-14 had one processor, whereas the XMP-24 had two. Both have the same memory capacity, of four million words. Added Gaertner: "While in the past it has not been possible to upgrade one system to the level of the other, it is possible to do so now." The two systems cost $7 million (Rs 9 crore) and $9 million (Rs 11.5 crore), respectively, and upgradation will cost about $5 million (Rs 6.4 crore).

US officials use the upgradation argument to urge that India settle for the XMP-14. But with India digging its heels in, even a super-computer will fail to predict the final outcome.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Washington

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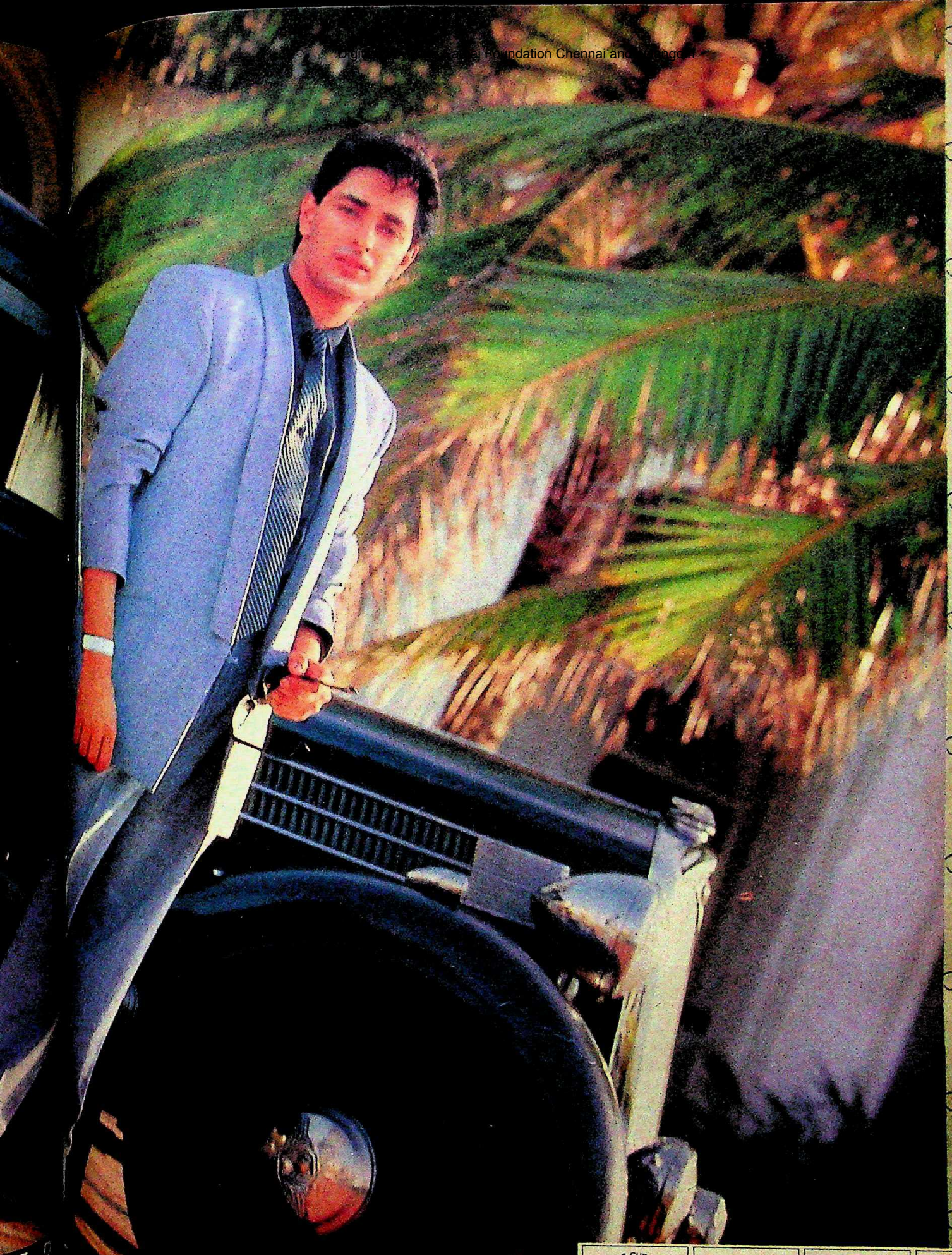

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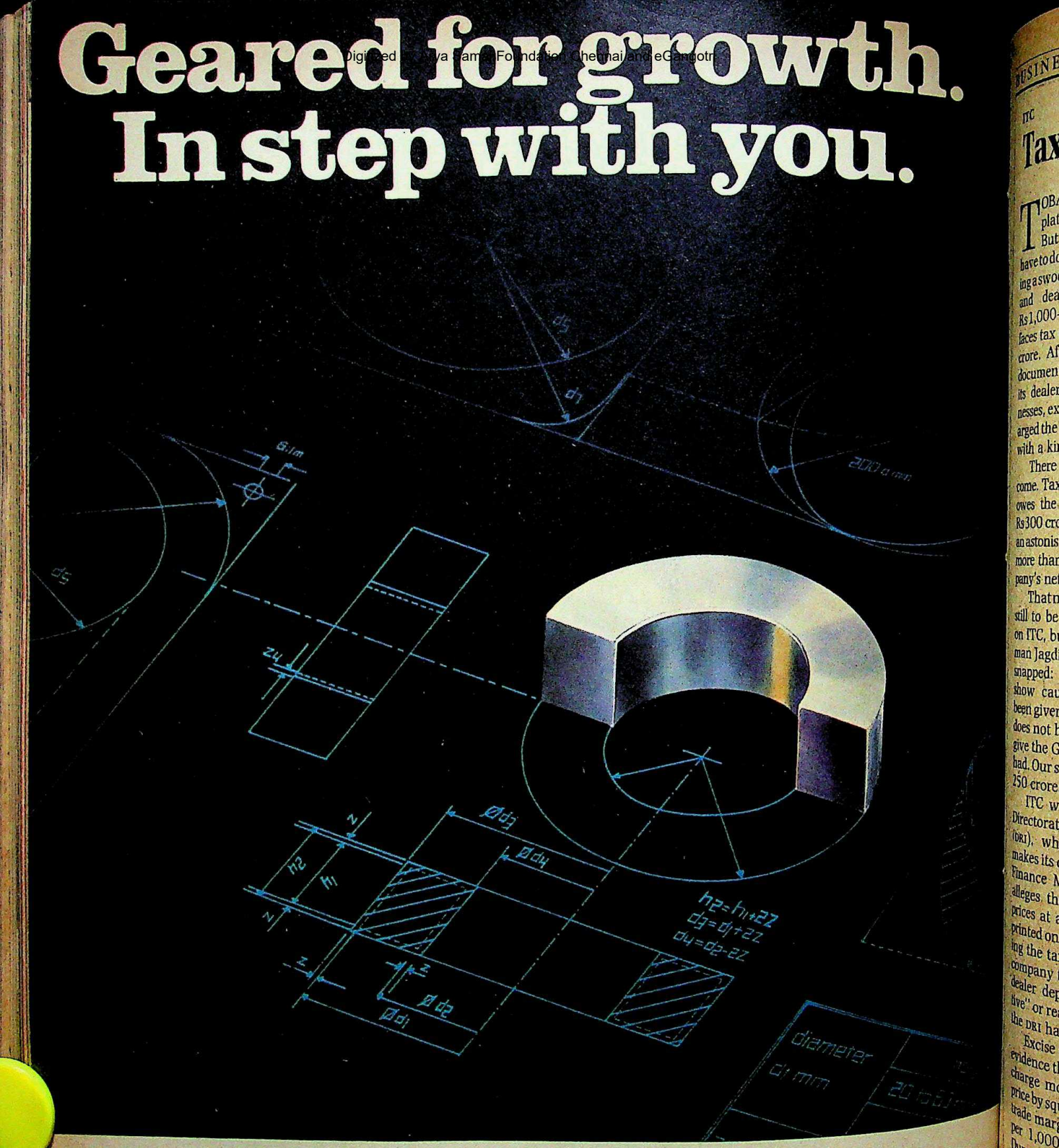

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ITC

Tax Trouble

TOBACCO giant ITC was all set for a platinum jubilee bash this year. But far from celebrating, it will have to don sackcloth and ashes. Following a swoop by tax sleuths on its factories and dealers in mid-February, the Rs 1,000-crore cigarette manufacturer faces tax demands of a punitive Rs 803 crore. After scrutinising about 5,000 documents seized from the company and its dealers and quizzing several witnesses, excise officials have charged the Calcutta-based outfit with a king-size tax fiddle.

There could be worse to come. Taxmen reckon that ITC owes the exchequer an extra Rs 300 crore, taking the tally to an astonishing Rs 1,103 crore—more than four times the company's net worth.

That notice has still to be served on ITC, but Chairman Jagdish N. Sapru snapped: "It is a ridiculous show cause notice that has been given to us. The company does not have Rs 800 crore to give the Government. It never had. Our sales net of excise are barely Rs 250 crore."

ITC will certainly go under if the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), which orchestrated the raids, makes its charges stick. Specifically, the Finance Ministry's investigative wing alleges that ITC fixed retail cigarette prices at a level higher than the price printed on packets, the difference escaping the tax net by flowing back to the company through a complex system of dealer deposits. ITC circulated "effective" or real price lists to its dealers, and the DRI has obtained such lists.

Excise officials also claim to possess evidence that ITC compelled retailers to charge more than the printed packet price by squeezing their margins. In fact, trade margins dropped to just 10 paise per 1,000 cigarettes, on all brands. Durgapur wholesale dealer Radhe Shyam Agarwal told the DRI: "I feel that the price strategy of Messrs ITC is such that retailers are bound to sell over and above the printed price."

"It is true that we squeezed the trade margin, and that the trade charged more than the printed price," admits Sapru. "But the excise people should realise that we have been forced to do so in order to survive. Our option was to close down. And we have been pointing this out to the Government over the years." He has a point. Nearly two years ago, the Government introduced a new excise structure that left wafer-thin profits for manufacturers, forcing them to trim retail margins. But as far as the DRI is concerned, the key question is whether this practice meant breaking the law. And the Finance Ministry's investigative wing has little doubt about the answer.

But the ITC chairman argues that his company did not hawk cigarettes to wholesalers at more than the printed price, implying thereby that retailers were the culprits. He also adds that the effective price list was meant for internal purposes to assess what consumers actually spent on cigarettes and did not reflect company prices.

The DRI demurs. They point out that, after the latest budget shifted the basis of taxation to cigarette length instead of its printed price, the effective market price has become the same as the printed price in most cases. As for the retailers being guilty (and not the company), excise men had in fact arrested Calcutta retailers last year for peddling cigarettes above the printed price, but documents seized showed that ITC had instructed its executives and dealers to help bail out the retailers. The DRI also brandishes the testimony of distributors suggesting ITC rigorously policed them to ensure their compliance with its higher unofficial prices, sending them written but unsigned instructions. Worst of all, a company document showed that the cigarette giant had fixed the real sale price of a forthcoming filter blend higher than its printed price, even before it was kicked off—which it could not have forecast if retailers had been the villains.

Indeed, taxmen now believe they have a strong case against the company. But Sapru has a valid point that the Government's actions are at variance with what it told the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) last year. A Central Board of Excise and Customs member gave a clean chit to the deposits obtained by cigarette firms from their dealers.

At that time, the excise authorities put ITC's rival GTC Industries in the dock, charging the Sanjay Dalmia-owned outfit and two of its Hyderabad-based suppliers with evading excise duty of as much as Rs 5.74 crore from October 1985 to April 1986—taking GTC's total alleged tax dues to over Rs 68 crore—simply as cigarettes were retailed at higher prices than the packet price. Taxmen alleged that the extra cash was either funneled back by distributors to GTC or spent on advertising and other expenses.

A few months later, excise officials charged the Calcutta-based New Tobacco Company with evading over Rs 28 crore in taxes by clandestinely removing cigarettes from factories and by floating concerns that collected from wholesalers more than the sums mentioned in invoices, in the guise of service charges.

While their guilt or innocence may finally be decided by the courts, the charges against cigarette companies stem essentially from an unrealistic tax policy that has now been dumped. In any case, where will the money to meet the tax dues come from? ITC does not have the cash to fork out over Rs 1,000 crore. Clearly, a compromise will have to be negotiated. The alternative could well be an industry leader going up in smoke.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

RANJAN BASU

ITC Chairman J.N. Sapru

Following a swoop by tax sleuths on ITC's factories and dealers in mid-February, the cigarette manufacturer faces tax demands of a punitive Rs 803 crore.

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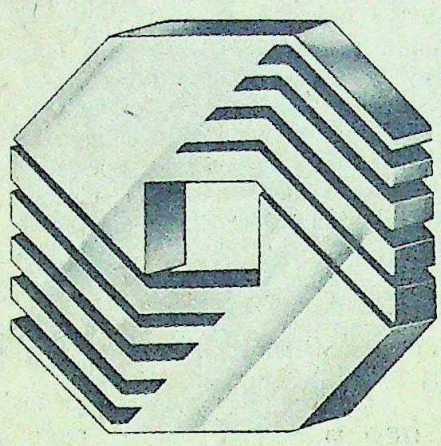

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BEER INDUSTRY

Hung Over

AFTER years of spiralling sales, the party seems to be suddenly over for India's brewers. This summer, for the first time, there was no shortage of beer anywhere in the country, bringing home the chilling possibility that drinkers may have finally begun to choke on the high prices of the golden liquid.

Traditionally, brewery executives were besieged in summer by irate wholesalers clamouring for lager. The wholesalers would then extract up to Rs 10 extra per crate, from retailers desperately trying to meet the demand from thirsty drinkers. But this year, the tables have been turned. Says Shekhar Wagh, general manager of Hindustan Breweries: "It has been a very quiet summer for all the breweries. And when the demand plummets with the monsoon, the beer industry will be faced with a terrible crisis."

For the last five years, breweries coasted along as the beer market expanded steadily, by about 12 per cent annually. Drinkers seemed to be quaffing beer faster than it could be fermented. And with the demand outstripping supply by nearly 30 per cent, there was inevitably a chronic beer shortage. Also, the typical beer drinker was very undiscriminating, guzzling even third-rate, hastily produced lagers with outlandish names, as long as the bottle was chilled. All that has now changed, and brewers estimate a fall of at least 15 per cent in sales in 1987, even as the opening of new breweries has resulted in a glut.

This sudden surfeit of beer has left many in the industry befuddled as to what went wrong. "Usually, from March onwards, we are in a complete flap trying to meet the demand. Now, for the first time in 10 years, there is any amount of beer available, even in north Indian breweries," says U. Huq, general sales manager of Shaw Wallace.

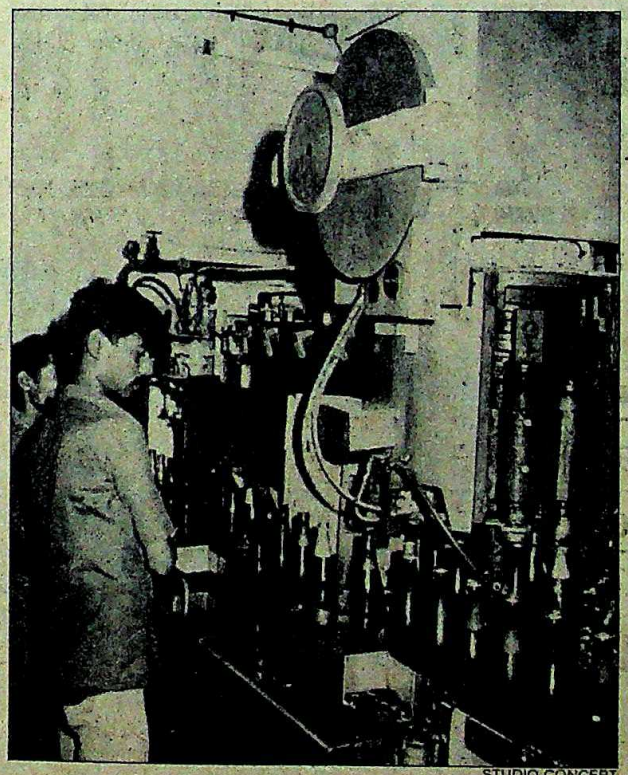
Brewery executives give a variety of reasons for this glut. Freak rains have led to an unusually mild summer in many states. And there has been the campaign against liquor in Punjab, a major consumer of beer between March and June. But it isn't so much Sikh fundamentalism as the Government's thirst for extracting revenue from liquor sales, that has hit beer companies the hardest.

Following the Andhra Pradesh excise hike in March, Karnataka has hiked its sales tax on beer this summer and Orissa has begun taxing beer brought in from other states. Andhra Pradesh has also effected a steep rise in licence fees for beer outlets, raising the retail shop price of better known brands to as much as Rs 15 a bottle—almost twice the price four years ago. Bangalore and Andhra Pradesh have the second and third largest beer markets, after Bombay, and both have seen the sales graph hiccup.

"It has been a quiet summer. During monsoons, there will be a terrible crisis."

SHEKHAR WAGH,
general manager, Hindustan Breweries

Work at a distillery: summer surfeit



STUDIO CONCEPT

"There's a 5-year cycle. We're now in bad years, but 1989 should be a boom year."

D. MURUGESAN,
chief executive, Associated Breweries

The excise shock in Andhra Pradesh came after Mohan Meakin, a major producer, flooded the state with beer from the new Mohan Breweries and Distilleries set up in Madras, in partnership with a local business magnate. And in Sikkim, Danny Denzongpa is starting his Yuksom Breweries, while some troubled breweries in the north have been revived. Increased production has combined with unexpectedly low sales to create an industry crisis.

This is clear despite the absence of precise statistics: most breweries hesitate to give sales figures, and even the All India Brewers Association pleads ignorance. Part of the problem is that while most breweries are licensed to produce 62,500 hecto litres per year (eight lakh dozen bottles), they have been producing 100,000 to 150,000 hecto litres annually, for the last three years. "If there's a complaint, the Government conducts an inquiry. But nothing comes of it. So every brewery sees its licence as permission to produce blindly," says a brewery manager.

To this flood of frothy lager, Mohan Breweries added another 150,000 hecto litres annually. And while prices have risen, quality has suffered due to overproduction. Some breweries tried to overcome consumer resistance by introducing new brands. But overproduction will persist due to the entry of new breweries.

Some experienced brewers are confident the sales slump is temporary. Says D. Murugesan, chief executive of Associated Breweries: "There is a five-year cycle in beer sales. We are now in the bad years, but 1989 should again be a boom year." But many breweries may discover that the heady days of unlimited beer sales are finally over.

—M. RAHMAN

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PARRY

Overhaul

M.V. SUBBIAH has much to celebrate. Three years after he moved over from his family-controlled Tube Investments (India) to E.I.D. Parry as vice-chairman and managing director, Parry is readying to kick off a bicentennial jamboree next April. More important, the once-losing Parry's fortunes are on the upswing. Flab has been shed, new products have been launched, and sales and profits are expected to be up by some 10 per cent and 15 per cent respectively by the month-end when the company's financial year closes. What is more, around Rs 200 crore is to be invested over the next five years in existing areas of business.

The sunny outlook marks a dramatic change because the company had been in the dumps for years. E.I.D. Parry was off the dividend list for a decade till 1985-86, and had piled up losses of Rs 5 crore till the year before. The work-force was bloated, wages were 40 per cent to 50 per cent higher in some Parry units than was the industry norm, productivity was low and management controls were lax. "The company's problems were more internal than external, because its products enjoyed a good image in the market," explains Ajit B. Mantagini, a Parry vice-president.

To halt the slide, the financial institutions exercised their 28 per cent equity muscle in the diversified group—taking in the units of sugar, confectionary, fertilisers, sanitary ware, engineering products—and brought in a professional manager to run it. But he got caught in a controversy over the chief executive's rights.

When Subbiah's older brother, M.V. Arunachalam, had moved in as non-executive chairman earlier, the institutions were still virtually the major presence in the company. Finally, four years ago, the Government invited the family to buy Parry's 14 per cent overseas holding. This it did, quickly bolstering it with 10 per cent bought from the market.

Enter Subbiah, with a tough-guy reputation (he had sacked 170 violent employees during a strike at Tube Investments). "When I walked into Parry, a union leader told me: 'Don't try your tricks here. A year later, he opted for voluntary retirement," chuckles the Parry managing director.

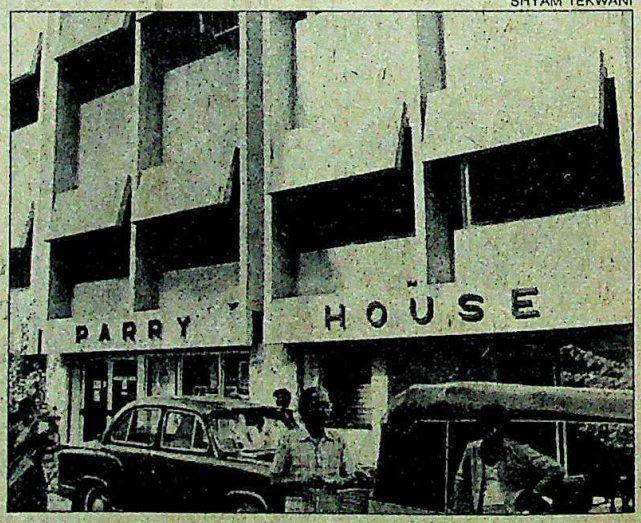
As Subbiah tells it, he was a hatchet man for the first two years. And he wielded his axe with a vengeance. Employee strength, which once ran to over 6,000, was pruned by 40 per cent after a voluntary retirement scheme was launched. Nearly all those who received a golden handshake were workers and supervisors (the bill: Rs 6.5 crore), but five top managers were forced out too. New men were brought in at the senior rungs, so much so that 25 of the 30 executives above the general manager level today, have been with Parry for less than five years.

PRASHANT PANJIAR

"A union leader told me: 'Don't try your tricks here.' A year later, he took voluntary retirement."

M.V. SUBBIAH
managing director, Parry

SHYAM TEKWANI



Parry House: dramatic turnaround

Nor was this all. Unprofitable lines of business were hived off. Parry represents a number of other firms, but some of this agency business was simply not lucrative and clients wanted to distribute their own wares. For instance, a Kirloskar company ended an agency arrangement worth almost Rs 20 crore to Parry, while HMM, the Horlicks people, terminated a similar agreement last June, valued at Rs 12 crore. Company officials insist that the parting of ways was mutual and smooth, pointing out that HMM absorbed 40 Parry salesmen.

Then, tight controls were clamped on the use of inventories and funds. "There were no controls on working capital or stocks," maintains M.V. Wagle, a top finance executive of the Tube Investments group, who put in a stint as group vice-president of Parry. Stocks used to be rotated three times a year instead of the desirable 6 or 10 times, adding to costs. And interest payments chewed into profit margins because funds were not used efficiently enough. One indicator: in the past, a Rs 18-lakh overdraft limit was never enough during peak times of the year. Now the company manages with Rs 13 lakh.

The new management also took a hard look at costs. "Obvious wastages occurred in travel, where, for instance, there was a free-for-all," notes a senior executive. And at the factory level, production bills were stratospheric because equipment was obsolete. In the ceramics division, for instance, the newest kiln was 25 years old, leading to high fuel bills. "Power and fuel account for 30 per cent of the cost of production," says Mantagini, "and we've gone in for modern kilns that use naphtha and liquefied petroleum gas as fuel."

Some of the belt tightening was cosmetic. All top executives began flying economy class with Subbiah setting an example. "People begin to watch what you're doing, and once they do, they say that this man means business," he explains.

Finally, the management was thoroughly overhauled. For starters, an effort was made to provide monthly operating results within a fortnight to a manager, instead of the two-and-a-half months it used to take. Apart from such details, centralised systems were dismantled. Functions such as materials management and procurement used to operate independently, but these were brought under "strategic business units" or independent profit centres, each of which now operates as a company within a company, under a vice-president. This offers the advantage of helping responsibility to be fixed. Equally important, the group's overheads are now spread among these units. Each has to make enough money to cover the over-

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heads before fresh expenditure is sanctioned.

The results of all this were visible last June when the company declared a 10 per cent dividend, after notching up a pre-tax profit of Rs 2.30 crore (it was in the red the year before). The profit is perhaps small beer, but it was made on a reduced sales volume of Rs 149 crore.

Company executives and Subbiah argue that a good portion of the change that has taken place at Parry is in its culture and that this is percolating down the line, citing here the fact that all employees at a Pune electrical connectors unit wear the same uniform and eat lunch at the same canteen.

Excellence gurus Peters and Waterman would no doubt be extremely pleased, but it is clear that the turnaround at Parry has also taken a toll. Hiving off agency businesses has told on the outfit's sales figures. They have yet to bounce back to the highs of the past. But with proposals for huge investments before the board of directors, the springboard is taut and ready.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI in Madras

HSL

In the Dock

WHEN President Zail Singh unveiled a plaque to mark the inauguration of the Rs 40-crore covered building dock complex at the Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL) in Vishakhapatnam last month, the 8,000-odd employees cheered enthusiastically. But there was less cheer in the boardroom, where the HSL bosses had before them a report that pointed to the dock project as a scandal, and where decisions have to be taken on how to revive a company that has accumulated losses of a staggering Rs 100 crore.

Most of HSL's problems are traced to the six-year tenure of former chairman and managing director K.R. Menon, when a modernisation programme was launched. But project costs shot out of control, and the company went deep into the red. Last year, Menon left under a cloud, with the CBI probing his assets.

An internal inquiry by the company turned up devastating findings. But new chairman Rear Admiral S.C. Bindra has received reports, arguing that "there is a use pointing the finger backward", and that officers were looking into the conduct of people who were senior to them. Inevitably, this has caused considerable dissension in HSL, amid allegations that the truth of the charges that have been aired will never be known.

The inquiry reports themselves are damning. They talk of Menon acting arbitrarily and committing the company to wasteful expenditure of Rs 7 crore, of falsifying statements, making incorrect projections to the board and keeping it in the dark. Expenses were incurred without proper sanction and no justifiable technical reason was given for changing the new dock from an open to a closed one. Added cost: Rs 18.58 crore.

The reports stressed that the change was made on the suggestion of a former shipping ministry secretary after a visit to European shipyards. But HSL investigators questioned the rationale for the change. They pointed out that no study was made about the actual number of man-days lost on the hull of a ship being built in the open due to adverse weather conditions, and no attempt was made to understand why shipyards in Europe had covered docks. The inquiry committee emphasised that the cost over-runs were inexplicably high, and that civil works alone had gone up fivefold.

Also, no technical reasons were given for buying a 225-tonne crane, while a 12-tonne crane was repeatedly shown to the board as being a 20-tonne crane. And the board was not kept fully informed on the various foreign collaborations that had been entered into.

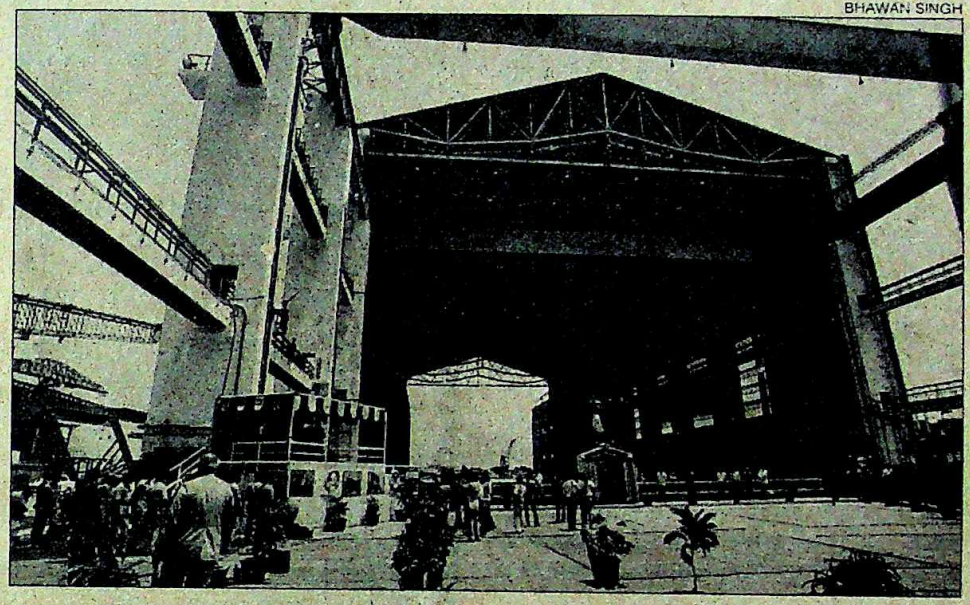
Asked for his comments, Menon said: "All this is like blaming the floor for breaking the egg. I took charge of HSL in 1981, when staff morale was low and everybody hoped for better days. I pushed through the modernisation programme to improve the shipyard, and while I have not taken note of all the commas in the rule books, I have never acted against the company's interests."

Several senior executives remain unconvinced. But with Bindra putting the lid on the affair, the truth about why HSL has been a sinking concern is unlikely to surface.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

HSL dockyard: high cost

BHAWAN SINGH



K.R. Menon

With Bindra deciding to shelve the investigation reports, the full truth about charges made against Menon will never be known.

S.C. Bindra

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BINNY

Jockeying for Control

FOR almost six months now, the troubled Binny Ltd has intermittently hit the headlines in the financial press. But hidden from the glare of publicity, it has been the focus of protracted backroom parleys. And push might now come to shove for Binny Chairman S.N. Hada.

Last month, the furious jockeying for the driver's seat at the south India-based textile outfit acquired a new edge. The Tamil Nadu Government wrote to the Department of Textiles in New Delhi, backing the claims of liquor baron Ramaswamy Udayar for management control—implying thereby that the Centre should withdraw support from Hada.

The latest round of lobbying tops a volley of earlier letters written to New Delhi. Some months before, a Binny union leader along with an official of the Congress(I)-controlled Indian National Trade Union Congress separately wrote to the Finance Ministry extolling Hada's efforts at turning Binny round, even as critics charged him with mismanagement. At the root of the manoeuvring for the driver's seat is a simple issue—money. The government-owned banks and financial institutions, along with three state governments, own over half the company's equity. Six years ago, they roped in Hada, a Calcutta-based textile magnate, to run the Rs 139-crore company. He later acquired a 15 per cent overseas holding in Binny, and made efforts to try and staunch the outfit's financial haemorrhaging.

But Binny's textile mills have to be modernised if they are to become viable. The banks and the institutions are not ready to put up all the money for this because Binny is nearly Rs 64 crore in hock to them. So they asked Hada to chip in with 10 per cent of the cost. This Hada declined to do. And the Tamil Nadu Government says Udayar will gladly cough up if given the company.

"The financial institutions have one complaint about Hada. He didn't bring in money for modernisation," says a senior Central Government official. But Hada argues that he has invested in the shares and doesn't have to pump in more money, that the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) is required to put in 80 per cent of the funds, 16 per cent has to come from a government modernisation fund and the company can ante up the rest.

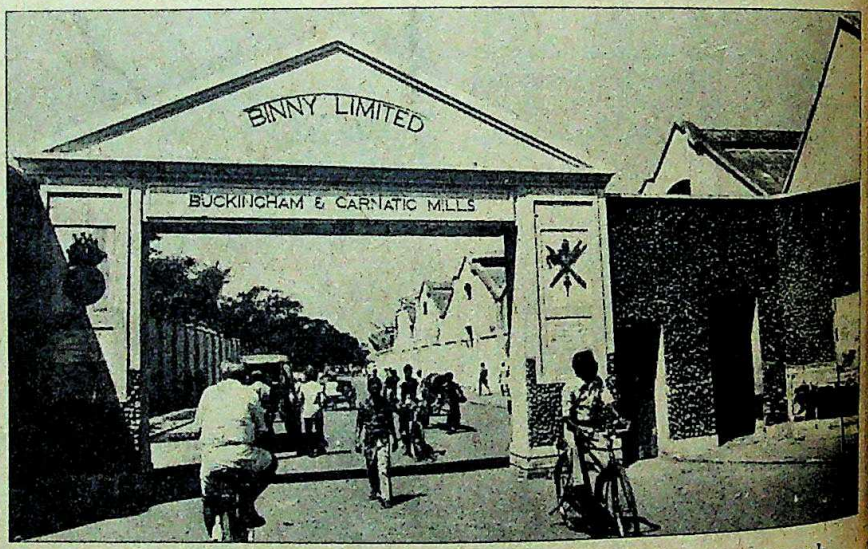
The institutions didn't buy this and began shopping for another promoter. Enter Udayar, known for his friendships with Tamil Nadu's politicians. Last month, the liquor baron was parleying with the institutions. Hada was quick to point out that no final decision had been taken, but a well-informed source said the institutions were "very seriously considering the offer."

Even before these developments, the Madras Labour Union which represents Binny workers wrote to Minister of State for Finance Janardhan Poojari offering to buy any shares the banks were willing to unload. It hopes to raise the cash from a wage award that it expects to come its way. "We've had no response to the offer," says R. Kuchelar, the union's president.

The institutions plainly do not take the offer seriously. And if they are talking to Udayar, it is also because they do not accept Hada's contention that Binny can afford to contribute cash for modernisation because it turned the corner and made a net profit of Rs 1.08 crore last year. An institutional nominee on the Binny board even claims that "the profit is due to the adjustment of excess depreciation of previous years and the sale of real estate." The company's chairman dismisses such suggestions as "bogus".

Hada has also contended in the past that the way out for Binny is to hawk its valuable surplus real estate. The institutions went along with this (roughly Rs 10 crore worth was sold with their concurrence, and property worth another Rs 23 crore still remains) but have now barred further sales. They have listed at least two conditions for any new entrant to run the company: he must put cash down, and must not auction company property.

While Udayar seems to have agreed to these terms, the big question is why he wants a stake in the company at all. Apart from its debt burden, Binny has steadily piled up losses (the tally is now Rs 39 crore). What is more, it recently lost a long-standing defence order—which accounted for 20 per cent of its turnover—to the state-owned National Textile Corporation. Binny made a net profit of Rs 1.[illegible] lakh in the first seven months of last year but could wind up in the red again because its engineering division has been



The Binny gate: cash crunch

"Whatever the Government decides will be my stand. If they ask me to sell my shares, I will do so."

S.N. HADA
chairman, Binny Ltd

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Liquor baron Ramaswamy Udayar is parleying with the financial institutions for control of the South Indian textile company.

cked out for over a year.

Logically, therefore, the company ould not be attractive to any buyer. ut," points out a company official, inny is a status symbol in south India." d some argue that the company can entually stand on its own legs, and that ada has proved this. Almost immedi- ly after taking over in 1981, he cut any's losses to Rs 1.76 crore as against Rs 10.69 crore projected by an institu- nal team sent to study Binny. Subse- ently, the company's accumulated ses were trimmed from around Rs 50 re to Rs 39 crore, and production and ductivity were jacked up. Given ney for modernisation and a profes- nal management, the argument goes, mills can get out of the woods.

One question that surfaces is: will da bow out if the institutions plump for ayar? Says Hada: "Whatever the Gov- ment decides will be my stand. It's an sted company. If they ask me to sell my es, I will do so." He may have no other ion. Loans totalling some Rs 29 crore not carry any interest and the com- y would face an additional Rs 4 crore den if the institutions crack the whip, ightaway putting the company's fi- nces further out of joint.

So the ball lies in the institutions' rt. They are now picking a managing ector for the company (the last one signed a few months ago). With a new repreneur poised to enter the picture, e institutions are clearly bent on weav- g in changes at the top in one of the gest textile groups in the country.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI in Madras

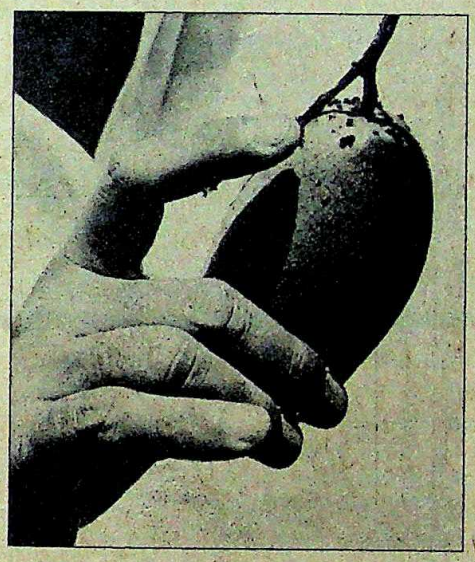
crunch

their concur- another Rs 23 e now barred ed at least two ant to run the sh down, and y property. o have agreed tion is why he y at all. Apart y has steadily s now Rs 39 ecently lost a r—which ac- turnover—to Textile Cor- profit of Rs 1.2 hs of last year he red again sion has been

MANGOES

Bitter Harvest

FOR Mallihabad's mango growers, 1987 has turned exceptionally sour. The region near Lucknow, well known for the *dashehari* mango—considered one of the most delicious—was last fortnight witness to a struggle to save what was left of a bumper crop of nearly 5 lakh tonnes, valued at Rs 50 crore. The mango crop has been ravaged by a still unidentifiable species of mango hoppers, which has been resistant so far to all insecticides. According to owners of the 5,000-odd mango orchards and scientists studying the phenomenon, the *dashehari* mango has been sucked dry by the insects, losing its size, taste and appearance. Only a crop of one lakh tonne remains.



A damaged mango: big loss

Mallihabad symbolises the havoc wrought across the state where the hoppers have destroyed more than half the mango crop. However, Mallihabad's plight is by far the worst because production is mainly for commercial purposes.

The insect resembles the mango hopper—the *Idioscopus Clypealis*—but is twice the size of the variety commonly seen in Mallihabad. The hopper raid is so intense that anyone walking between mango trees is soon covered by a layer of insects. "This hopper has puzzled all our scientists who have been working on mango for years," says Dr K.C. Srivastava, director of the Central Institute of Horticulture for Northern Plains (CIHNP). To identify the species, insect samples have been sent to the Indian Agriculture Research Institute in Delhi and the Institute of Entomology in London, among other research centres.

Researchers are also baffled by the insect's uncharacteristic breeding pattern. Normally hoppers breed during the first two months of the year, during which time growers spray the trees at least three times to destroy the pests. But this year "we discovered this pest on March 12 and were shocked to find it breeding so late in the season," says Dr R.P. Srivastava, senior entomologist in CIHNP. Searching for answers, scientists concluded that the untimely rains and low temperatures prevailing this year might have prolonged the hopper's breeding season.

By mid-April, the hopper had turned active. It started sucking the tender sap of the mangoes, resulting in the drying up of the infested tissue. The hopper also secreted a sweet sticky substance which led to the growth of a fungus—the sooty mould—adversely affecting the trees' photosynthetic activities and stunting growth. Nonplussed by the invasion, Kamil Khan, 65, a prosperous grower in Mallihabad says: "I have never seen anything of this kind before. Even if I spray my fields well, they come from the adjoining orchards and raid my trees the very next morning." Adds Aziz Hasan Khan: "I have spent over Rs 60,000 on spraying pesticides this year as compared to Rs 20,000 at other times. And yet, I cannot export fruit worth more than Rs 1 lakh."

The Mallihabad Mango Growers Association had petitioned the state Government in April that the orchards should be aerially sprayed. But till last fortnight, growers were still to receive any assistance from government agencies. The state Government has not declared the hopper raid an epidemic, although privately, most of the concerned officials admit that it should have been done at least a month earlier. Instead, the Government has been viewing the problem as a routine one. J.B. Singh, joint director of the Horticulture (Mango) Department says: "We have formed two high-power committees to look into the matter. We will decide on the next step when they submit their report this month."

The *dashehari* mango growers' future does look bleak. Resigned to their fate, Aziz Hasan Khan, the secretary of the association, says: "The insect has not only destroyed the present crop but it has also eaten the new leaf which would have flowered next year. We won't be able to eat a square meal next year." This will prove to be no exaggeration if the state Government does not act quickly.

—DILIP AWASTHI in Mallihabad

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Creative Hard Sell

MANY critics of advertising have called it a waste. Lord Leverhume, the founder of Lever Brothers, once said he believed one-half of the money he spent on advertising was wasted. It is a feeling I have often shared, but for a different reason: it is my belief that a great deal of advertising does not work hard enough, does not have a cutting edge.

In India, at least until recently, it did not matter. Most marketeers operated in sellers' markets—there were six-year waiting lists for Bajaj scooters, cooking medium brands like Postman and Dalda commanded a premium at festival time, and consumers were used to buying alternatives when they didn't get brands they wanted.

Now, this has changed dramatically. Today, there are over 20 manufacturers of two-wheelers, over 40 marketeers of TV sets with national advertising budgets, and scores of brands of detergent powders and cakes, textiles, packaged foods, toiletries and readymade garments. This 'explosion of choice' is not restricted to consumer products. There are over 80 companies selling computers, more than 30 brands of photocopiers and some 25 brands of electric typewriters are available in the market. In such a context, it is imperative to question the effectiveness of all advertising.

The failure of over a dozen brands of toilet soap, numerous brands of toothpaste, many TV sets and two-wheelers, launched recently, stands as evidence that such an enquiry will not occur a moment too soon. And there are some key factors that make for the success and failure of advertising campaigns.

Creative Positioning: The first basic factor is whether the sharpness of creative expression is good enough to help a brand stand out amongst the crowd. The classic work in campaigns such as Chivas Regal and Benson & Hedges is now part of advertising lore. But there are examples closer home.

Garden Silk Mills, when it started advertising about a decade ago, had a smaller budget than many others. It was the quality of creative work in its ads that set it apart—this has been maintained. It is no wonder that today, the name is synonymous with the best in sarees. In a recent survey in Bombay, 63 per cent of the women asked rated it their number one choice for special occasion wear.

Courage: A related factor is whether an advertiser has the courage to back such breakthroughs. "Never show your product in less than a perfect light," is the conservative view. But Onida has consistently shown its TV with a smashed screen! And the ad is undeniably outstanding. Also, the advertiser's courage has been well-rewarded. A Bombay survey showed that, once again, the brand that has the highest spontaneous awareness (91 per cent) and advertising recall (77 per cent), has the largest share of the colour TV market.

> "The key test for advertising is whether it is successful in establishing high saliency, relevant for launch strategies. It is at this stage that a brand must establish top of mind awareness. Low-key launches often mean low-key market share."

Marketing Savvy: Good, closely-checked, finely-tuned homework can often produce the critical difference. Cameras, for instance, have been made and advertised in India for many years. But the market had remained stagnant for over a decade. The usual reasons quoted were the high cost of cameras and film and the absence of facilities for cheap, quick processing and printing.

It was not until recently that Photophone realised that there was a large market-in-waiting for a camera, *provided you made it a fun thing*. The entire campaign was evolved on this understanding, resulting in a marketing equation: Cameras = Hotshot = fun. Photophone and Hotshot have expanded the market over eightfold in the past five years. And they have over a 50 per cent share of it. Their success has led to the emergence of a whole new infrastructure for quick, inexpensive processing!

Re-examining the obvious: With the emergence of a multitude of brands, the distinctions between competing products are bound to blur. The existence of product-inherent USPs (Unique Selling Propositions) will, therefore, be rare. The answer in such situations may well lie in re-examining the obvious to help a brand get a large share of mind.

Some years ago, while examining how to advertise KLM, the agency realised it could be positioned as 'The Reliable Airline' on the basis of the many pre-flight tests it carried out. The result: a successful campaign and a long-term position. The marvel of this strategy was that all airlines carry out these tests; they are standard procedure. But everyone had missed the obvious, until KLM utilised it.

Promise toothpaste had a similar success. All toothpastes contain clove oil, but Promise was the first to use it in advertising. Today, Promise and clove oil have become synonymous and the brand has the second-highest market share. It is the only toothpaste in recent times to have established a significant share against the Colgate colossus.

Front of mind, front of share: This link between top of mind awareness and brand share is well-known. Research has repeatedly shown that few consumers recall more than seven brands and most recall only two or three. Various studies, including some at Stanford University, have shown that in many such markets, top of mind awareness is the single most important measure of market share. The key test for advertising then becomes whether it is successful in establishing high saliency. This has particular relevance for launch strategies. It is at this stage that a brand must establish top of mind awareness. Low-key launches often mean low-key market share.

Examples are easy to come by. Maggi noodles were launched with this understanding. So were Maggi sauces. Liril, Vicco Turmeric Vanishing Cream, Nirma. All have obtained high top of mind awareness and high market share.

The lesson for the '90s is clear. If consumers think of a brand first, they'll pick it off the shelf first.

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Pinsel and Sentinel.
Now together. To bring you diskettes world leaders put their data and trust in.

Two names that stand for quality and reliability now come together.

Pinsel, a part of the progressive and innovative Jayant Dalal Group of Companies.

And Sentinel Technologies Inc., one of America's largest and leading manufacturers of diskettes.

Bringing you the same quality diskettes that major corporate houses all over the world insist on.

The Sentinel Standard

Pinsel Diskettes are manufactured on the same lines as Sentinel's.

On the same machines.

Using the same raw materials.

With the same burnishing process that provides an advanced degree of surface smoothness allowing for maximum head to media contact.

And meeting the same rigid standards.

These diskettes are available in two sizes – 5¼" and 8".

In single, double or high density with or without reinforced hubs.

The Cover Story

In bringing you a world-class diskette Pinsel has looked at both the sides.

The inside. And the outside.

Because a jacket is as important as the disk it protects.

Every Pinsel Diskette comes to you sealed in a carefully manufactured static-free jacket.

Lined with a non-woven, self-cleaning material that maximises the cleaning action and minimises wear.

Pinsel jackets are manufactured in-house, to tighter tolerances than industry standards providing the ultimate in media protection and overall diskette performance.

Shades Ahead

Along with world-class quality, Pinsel Diskettes offer one significant difference.

Colour.

Available in Medium Blue, Light Blue, Green, Yellow and Red, besides Black.

Offering the unique advantage of colour coding your data for easy identification.

The Pinsel Promise

Each Pinsel Diskette is 100% error-free not only on all tracks but also between tracks, to ensure the highest level of operational integrity.

So confident is Pinsel of the quality that it's put it down in writing.

A guarantee assuring flawless performance for as long as you own it.

Of course there's still another way to ensure that you're getting a world-class diskette.

Check with IBM, Wang, Honeywell, Commodore....

AVAILABLE IN 5 COLOURS, BESIDES BLACK.

PINSEL Diskettes.
Only the best in the world can match them.

Pinsel Computer Products Ltd., Jehangir Building, 133, M.G. Road, Bombay 400 001. Tel: 270833/272442. Tlx: 011-3426
Branches: Universal Building, 2/2A, Asaf Ali Road, New Delhi 110 002. Tel: 274466/278335. Tlx: 031-63131. • 46C, Chowringhee Road, Calcutta 700 071. Tel: 431518/447907. Tlx: 021-2435. • 50 Kasturi Ranga Road, Madras 600 018. Tel: 453449/453076. Tlx: 041-6295.

everest/87/PD/237

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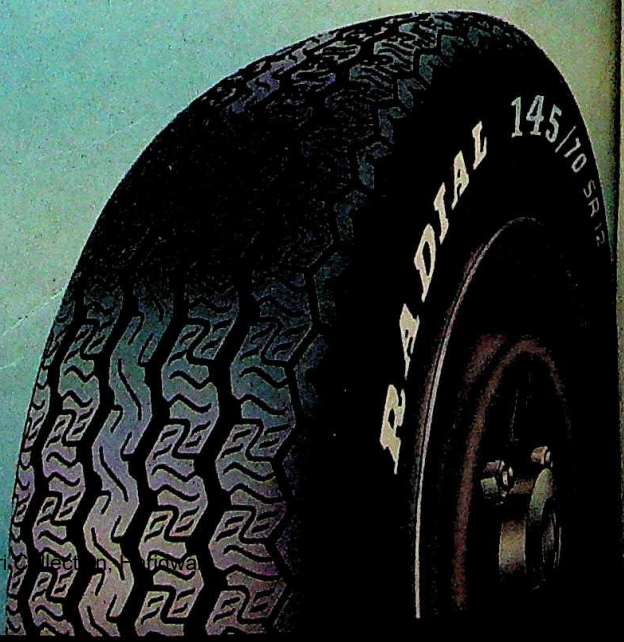
Maruti owners can now travel

DUNLOP

Radial Class

From Dunlop,
the first and only radial for the Maruti.



DUNLOP
Radial Car Tyre

Dunlop is Dunlop.
Always ahead.

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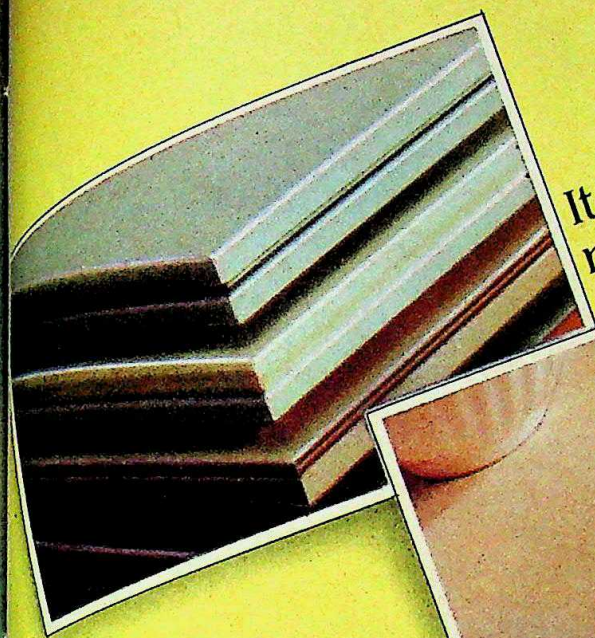
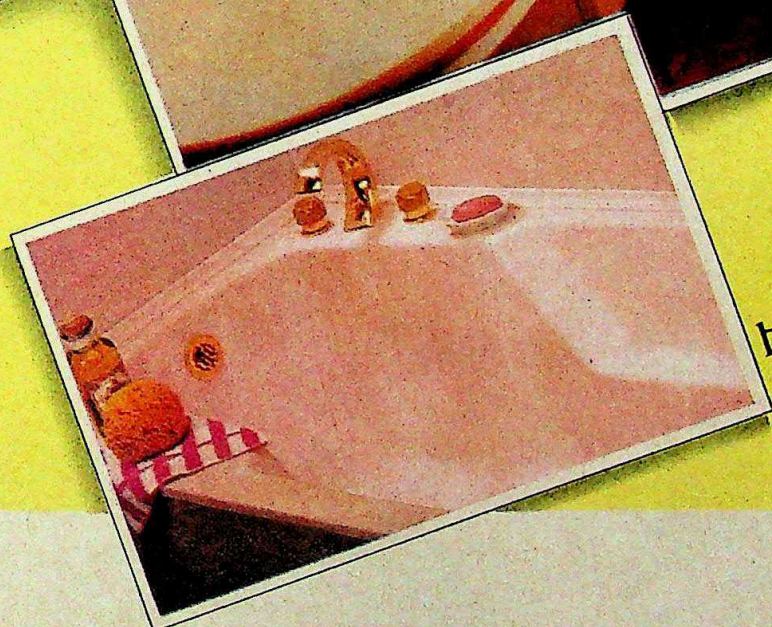
Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri



It looks like marble...

feels like marble...

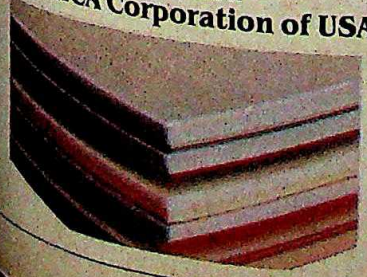


but is better than marble...

What is it?

It's WILDON cultured marble building products.

Now manufactured in India in technical collaboration with Wildon Industries Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of the world-renowned FORMICA Corporation of USA.



Wildon cultured marble building product has the satin low lustre finish of natural marble. It has all the class, and elegance of marble. With the strength, benefits and economy of an ideal building product.

Made for the first time in the country with American collaboration.

It gives walls, and window sills a distinctive touch. Adds class to a reception or work area. It's ideal for vanity and kitchen counter tops, and bath tubs and surrounds.

What's more, it's chemical and stain resistant too, for years of enduring elegance. Can be supplied in any width and dimensions — and, for the discerning, can be 'custom-made' too!

WILDON W

WILDON INDIA LIMITED

6-3-655/12/A, Ground Floor,
Somajiguda, Hyderabad 500 482.

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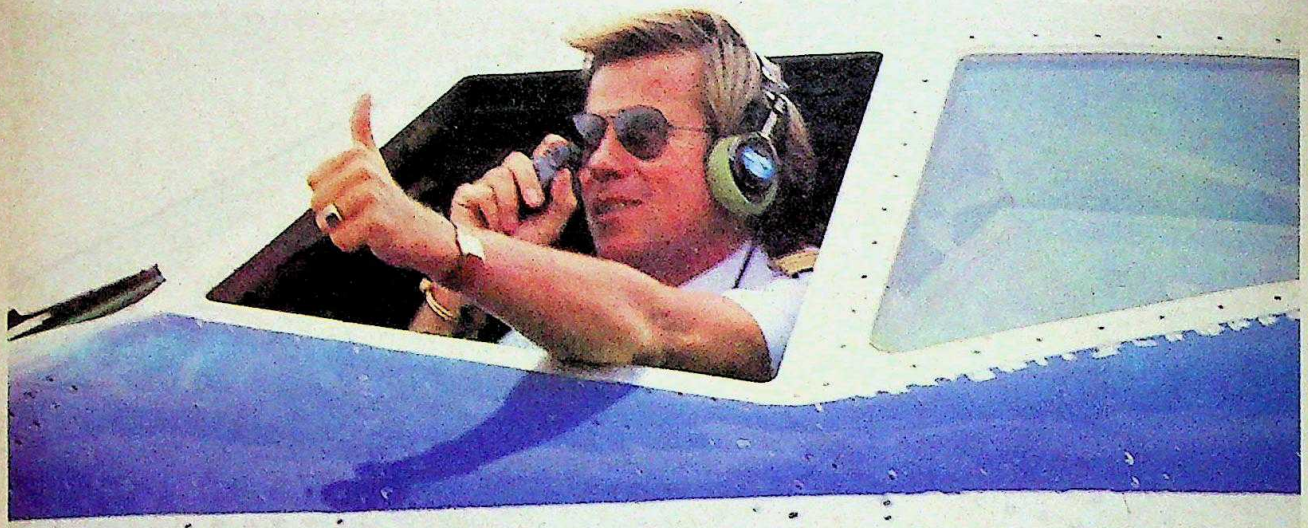
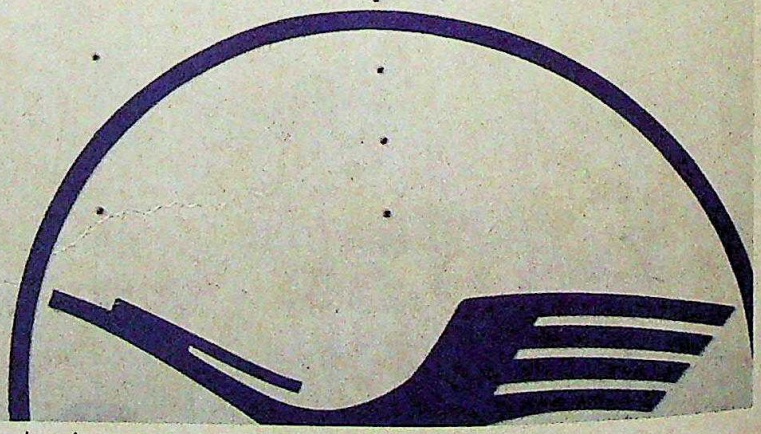
The more important the meeting, the more important the airline.





Flying on Lufthansa means reaching your business appointment on time.

Lufthansa

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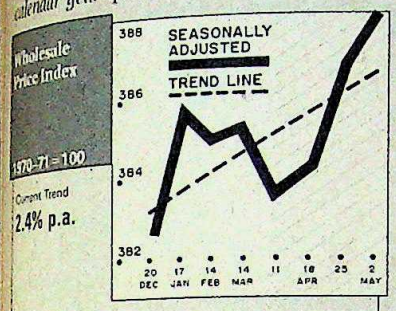
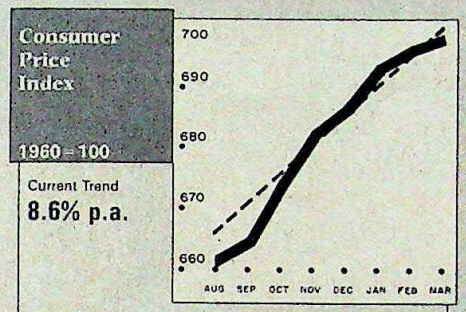
THE ECONOMY MONITOR

MONEY supply is still way above target, and much of this goes to the government sector. Exports have surged, imports are steady and the trade balance is down. The rupee has appreciated, bears still rule the roost on the stock-markets and gold prices are going through the roof.

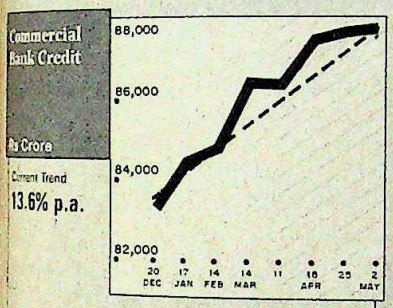
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months (weekly data) or two years (monthly data) figures. The quarters referred to in the text are calendar year quarters.



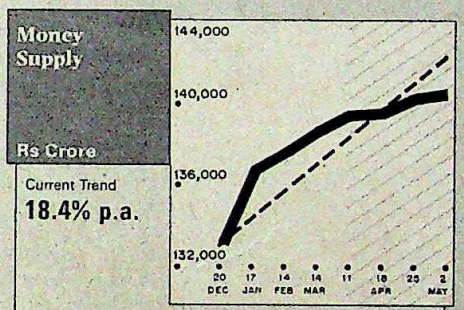
Though wholesale prices seem to be under control, the last month saw an increase of over 1 per cent.



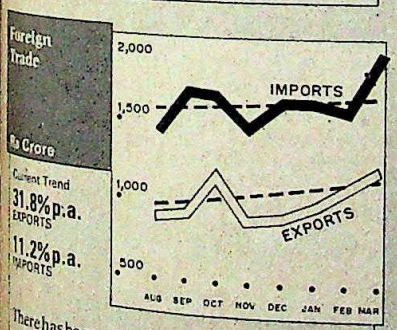
During the first quarter of 1987, consumer prices rose by 1.7 per cent. It remains to be seen how the budget will affect prices.



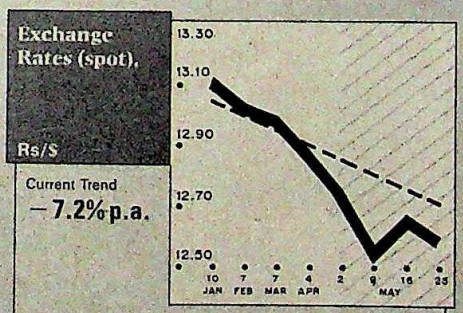
April saw a marginal easing of bank credit to the private sector. Nevertheless, it remains almost 5 per cent points behind money supply.



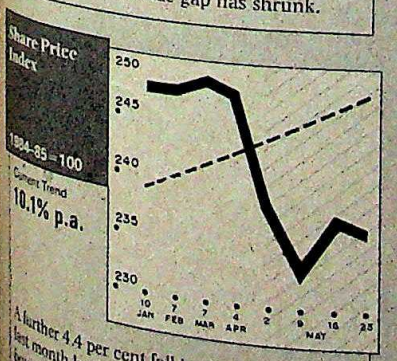
Money supply is growing well above target. Against a 16 per cent trend last year, the current trend is above 18 per cent.



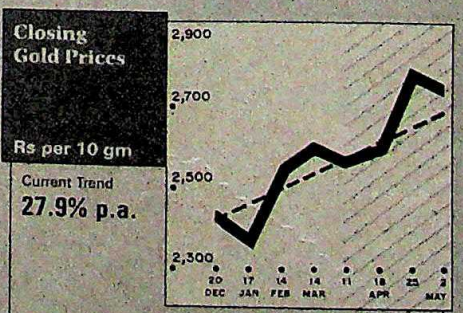
There has been a 33 per cent growth in exports in the first quarter of 1987, but imports shot up in March. Overall the trade gap has shrunk.



The rupee has appreciated by 2.2 per cent over the last month. Going by this trend, the Government seems to have reversed policy.



A further 4.4 per cent fall in share prices in the last month has spread even more gloom at the bourse.



Gold prices have increased sharply, this may have been money flowing out of the depressed stock-markets.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items in April 1987

	% Growth
Tyres	36.89
Plywood	35.79
Onions	16.46
Fish	15.71
Boilers	14.84
Utensils	14.59
Cotton Seed	13.29
Gram	11.13
Oranges	9.45
Biscuits	9.09
Cigarettes	9.07
Tobacco Raw	8.22
Barley	8.17
Art Silk & Artificial Yarn	7.47
Power-Driven Pumps	6.54
Camel Back	6.27
Eggs	5.95
Cotton Raw	4.48
Groundnut Seeds	3.92
Goundnut Oil	3.83
Tobacco & Other Tobacco Products	3.52
Handloom & Powerloom Products	3.43
Tea	3.35
Groundnut Oilcake	3.31
Coffee	3.28
Pipes & Tubes	2.83
Solvent Extracted Oil	2.7
Ragi	2.68
Gingelly Oil	2.37
Masoor	2.26
Logs, Timber & Bamboo	2.24
Iron Ore	2.03
Furnace Oil	1.67
Bajra	1.59
Synthetic Fibres	1.49
Bananas	1.45
Tapioca	1.4
Woollen Cloth & Woollen Khadi	1.39
Lubricating Oil	1.3
Kerosene	1.29
Board	1.13
Diesel Oil	1.07
Polythene Moulding Powder	.99
Aviation Spirit	.93
Petrol	.93
Phosphatic Fertiliser	.92

Of the 139 series considered, 67 of them with a total weight of 39.32 had a positive growth and 72 of them with a total weight of 47.30 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1987	1986
Petroleum Crude		
Thousand Tonnes, April	2,541	2,588
Petroleum Refinery Products		
Thousand Tonnes, April	3,772	3,316
Fertiliser		
Thousand Tonnes, April	500.8	377.2
Letters of Intents		
Numbers, April	111	105
Industrial Licences		
Numbers, April	46	53

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THE MARKETS

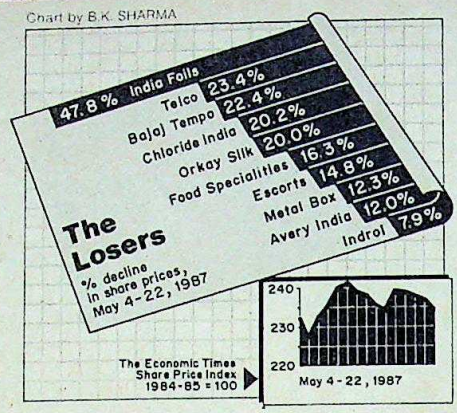
Looking Up

THE financial institutions finally returned to centre-stage in the trading ring. The result, last fortnight, was an end to the panic and some steadiness on the market. But other buyers remained hesitant, fearing that an upturn may still be some distance away. And the markets remained weak, lacking in confidence about the future. Without the support of the institutions, *The Economic Times* share price index would have continued to drop, instead of managing to hold its own as it did.

The institutional buying—announced in advance, at a meeting called by the finance secretary in New Delhi—was selective, and handled carefully in order to avoid losses in a market that could still plunge downwards. After all, companies continue to announce disappointing results, reflecting lower profits and often reduced dividends.

Nevertheless, it was a change to see that if several shares continued to lose ground, several other shares gained in value too. Among them were key units like Bajaj Auto, Century Enka, Mahindra & Mahindra, Orkay and Southern Petrochemicals. DCM gained because a court order allowed the company to go ahead with its plans to make money out of its real estate. But Tata Steel lost ground despite the Government clearing its bonus issue proposal. Tata Engineering lost too.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Some of the decisions taken by the market authorities and by others helped in arresting the decline. For instance, some shares were moved onto the forward list, and these quickly attracted buying support. Then, the Reserve Bank announced a slightly more liberal policy regarding bank finance for sharebrokers. And the Government itself announced tax reliefs for light commercial vehicle manufacturers. Coming after the relief announced earlier for the polyester industry, this suggested that the Government was now more alive to problems being faced by the industry.

Some of the the stability was also brought about by the mildly reassuring political news from New Delhi. But the earlier decision of the market authorities to lift the ban on short-selling, brought about fresh pressure from the bears, who (despite all the favourable pronouncements) continue to have the upper hand vis-a-vis the bulls.

There is little doubt that the market is going to be very choosy in the coming weeks. Though there will be good pickings available at the reduced prices that now prevail, weak shares will be subjected to careful scrutiny before anyone puts his money down. In the context of a slight industrial slowdown and a squeeze on profits, this is only to be expected. What it means for the market is the absence of any real hope of an immediate return of buoyancy.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1987 HIGH	1987 LOW	CLOSE 22.5.87	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	35.50	28.00	35.00	3.00 +
Associated Cement	241.50	170.00	173.00	8.00 –
Atlas Copco	150.00	105.00	130.00	12.00 +
Associated Bearings	810.00	500.00	725.00	65.00 +
Avery India	169.00	132.00	132.00	13.00 –
Bajaj Auto	4925.00	3950.00	4375.00	25.00 +
Baroda Rayon	260.00	205.00	228.75	5.00 –
Bata India	160.00	120.50	129.00	7.00 –
Bayer	785.00	600.00	750.00	15.00 –
Bharat Forge	79.00	63.00	79.00	8.00 +
Blow Plast	126.00	92.50	101.00	2.00 –
Bombay Dyeing	78.00	40.50	74.25	3.25 +
Britania Ind.	190.00	145.00	167.00	10.00 –
Brooke Bond	101.00	77.00	92.25	1.75 –
Ceat Tyres	70.00	48.00	65.00	nil /
Century Enka	1160.00	850.00	960.00	80.00 +
Chloride India	148.00	71.00	71.00	14.00 –
Citurgia	70.00	53.00	70.00	1.00 +
Colgate	391.25	327.50	372.00	9.50 +
DCM	39.00	23.00	35.00	12.00 +
Dunlop	77.75	71.25	72.00	0.50 –
E.I. Hotels	56.00	41.00	46.00	3.50 +
Escorts	84.00	42.00	43.00	5.00 –
Finolex Cables	190.00	114.00	180.00	2.50 +
Food Specialities	188.50	126.50	128.00	23.00 +
Garware Nylon	36.00	20.50	21.00	1.50 –
G.E. Shipping	23.00	16.00	22.50	4.50 +
Gujarat St. Fertilisers	183.50	120.00	128.00	7.00 –
Grasim Ind.	95.00	80.00	88.00	2.50 –
Hind. Aluminium	126.00	71.00	104.50	3.50 –
Hind. Cocoa	262.50	205.00	205.00	10.00 –
Hindustan Lever	212.00	165.00	180.00	6.00 –
Hindustan Motors	35.35	22.70	22.90	1.35 –
Hind. Dorr	407.50	295.00	365.00	25.00 –
IEL	61.50	45.00	54.00	4.00 +
Indian Organic	78.00	51.00	63.00	6.00 +
Indian Rayon	76.50	51.00	58.25	4.25 –
Indrol	510.00	215.00	228.00	12.00 –
Ingersoll-Rand	352.50	272.50	341.25	1 25 +
ITC	78.00	40.00	49.00	5.00 +
J.K. Synthetics	93.50	47.00	53.25	0.75 –
Kinetic Engineering	312.50	220.00	235.00	7.50 –
Kirloskar Cummins	97.50	67.00	95.00	2.50 +
KSB Pumps	375.00	220.00	365.00	3.75 +
Larson & Toubro	100.00	67.00	71.00	0.50 –
Lipton	79.50	60.00	71.50	nil
LML Ltd.	32.00	13.00	16.00	0.50 +
Madura Coats	73.00	66.00	71.50	1.00 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	55.00	38.00	55.00	11.00 +
Motor Industries	400.00	335.00	335.00	22.50 –
Mukand Iron	81.00	63.50	78.00	1.50 +
National Organic	577.50	435.00	450.00	nil
Nirlon	26.00	11.00	15.00	1.00 +
Orkay Silk Mills	115.00	30.00	36.00	1.00 +
Peico Electronics	57.25	36.00	41.50	1.50 +
Otis Elevator	215.00	155.00	210.00	5.00 +
Ponds	375.00	295.00	315.00	5.00 +
Premier Auto	30.00	21.00	23.00	1.00 –
Ranbaxy	135.00	79.00	81.00	6.00 –
Raymond	79.00	64.00	72.00	4.00 –
Reckitt & Colman	200.00	160.00	163.00	4.00 –
Reliance Industries	277.00	118.00	136.00	nil
Rechardson Hind.	326.25	210.00	325.00	15.00 +
Shriram Fibres	36.00	24.00	24.00	4.00 –
Sandoz	140.00	70.00	77.75	2.25 –
Siemens India	144.50	68.00	80.00	7.00 +
SPIC	53.50	36.50	43.00	2.00 +
Tata Steel	1207.50	945.00	1002.50	22.50 –
Telco	665.00	415.00	425.00	130.00 –
Vulcan Laval	62.50	45.00	60.00	5.00 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.1627	9.1110
Austria	Schilling	100	102.0143	101.1547
Bahrain	Dinar	1	33.6223	33.5742
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.3536	42.2960
Canada	Dollar	1	9.4524	9.3765
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.9055	1.8909
Egypt	Pound	1	9.3900	9.3200
France	Franc	1	2.1413	2.1253
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6307	1.6197
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0700	0.0700
Iran	Rial	100	18.0100	17.9832
Italy	Lira	100	0.9900	0.9800
Japan	Yen	100	9.10	8.95
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7942	0.7739
Kuwait	Dinar	1	46.4032	46.2389
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1623	5.1117
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.0210	1.0000
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6020	0.5990
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.3278	6.3165
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7399	0.7200
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.0287	5.9804
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1001	0.0998
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4422	0.4300
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.0451	2.0292
Switzerland	Franc	1	8.7250	8.6598
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.2200	0.2100
Thailand	Baht	100	50.2432	49.0000
UK	Pound	1	21.3720	21.2426
USA	Dollar	1	12.7150	12.6350
UAE	Dirham	1	3.2620	3.2336
USSR	Rouble	1	20.2720	20.2230
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.1633	7.1123

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 22.5.87.

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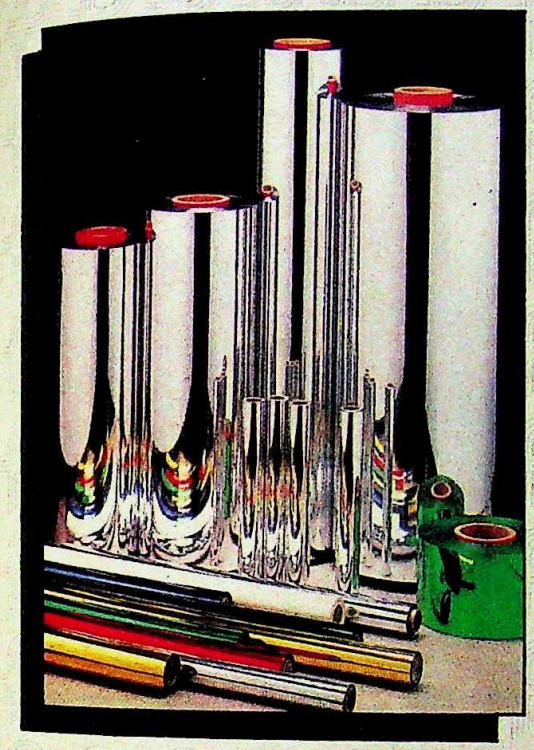

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Saving foreign exchange.
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ECOLOGY

India's Vanishing Wildlife

SNOW LEOPARD

"THE sun had not long risen, and the foliage of the trees and the slender fronds of the bamboos cast long shadows across the glade. Here stood three or four herds of spotted deer, some browsing on the grass, some standing on their hind legs to pluck the young shoots from the bamboos; a herd of nilgai was on the bank of the water course; a pair of four-horned antelope were feeding beneath a banyan tree: monkeys, with grey-fringed black faces, were clinging to the trees; pea-fowl in numbers were not far from a pool in the nullah; two wild dogs, which should surely have caused the disappearance of all this game, stood unconcernedly in the middle of the glen; there were before me the tracks of a tiger and a leopard; and a bear, climbing in search of honey, had scored deep marks with his claws on the bole of a tree.

Farther up the hillside, a sambar belled loudly; perhaps the tiger, which was not far ahead, passed that way; the nearest hinds uttered shrill barks of alarm and soon all disappeared like spectres in the shades of the forest."

Photographs by RAJESH BEDI

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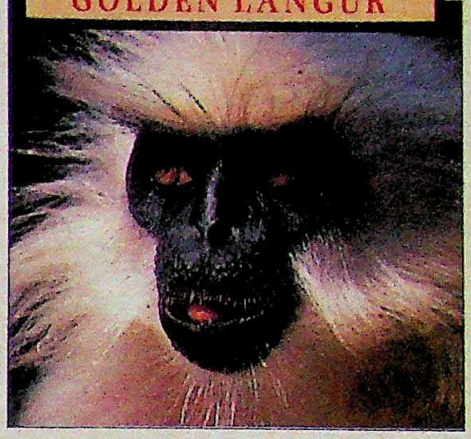
SIX decades after Brigadier-General R.G. Burton recorded this scene in his book, *Sport and Wildlife in the Deccan*, the sun is slowly setting on India's wildlife. Like spectres in the shades of the forests, the wildlife Burton saw has vanished, never to return. The vast Gangetic plain, which offered him a magnificent view of the wild, has now been converted into endless tracts of wheat and sugarcane fields. Houses have replaced trees. Village herds of cattle graze sullenly on the bare glades. The distant howl of the jackal, the frightened yelp of the deer, the deep roar of the tiger, the chattering of the langurs—all these have faded like a distant dream, only to be replaced by the raucous cawing of the crows, the noisy barking of the dogs and the steady chug of a tractor. And, above all, people, people everywhere.

From the rocky mountains of the Himalayas, to the vast grasslands of central India and the sparsely forested hills of the south, India's once rich wildlife has been relentlessly pursued and destroyed. Deprived of their original habitats and ruthlessly poached, India's wild animals are now making what could well be their last stand in the country's 59 national parks and 254 sanctuaries.

Yet this large number of reserves really means that all the country's wildlife is now crammed into an ecologically insufficient 4 per cent of the country's geographical area, occupying hardly 15 per cent of the rapidly dwindling reserved forests. "What is left for the animals today are small islands of protection in a vast ocean of human habitation," says H.S. Panwar, director of the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehra Dun. And even in these sheltered islands, increasing conflict between the wildlife and the people living around the area threatens to demolish the animals' last fortresses.

In fact, so systematically has India's wildlife been decimated that while only 13 species were in the Central Government's endangered list in 1952, the number went up to 41 species of mammals, two species of reptiles and 18 species of birds by 1972. Since then, the Government had been forced to periodically revise the list and, by November last year, the number of endangered mammals had shot up from 41 to 70, reptiles from two to 16 and birds from 18 to 38. "That number is only going to go up," warns J.C. Daniel, curator of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). A despondent Thomas Mathew, chief executive of the World Wildlife Fund's campaign in India, adds: "We are fighting a

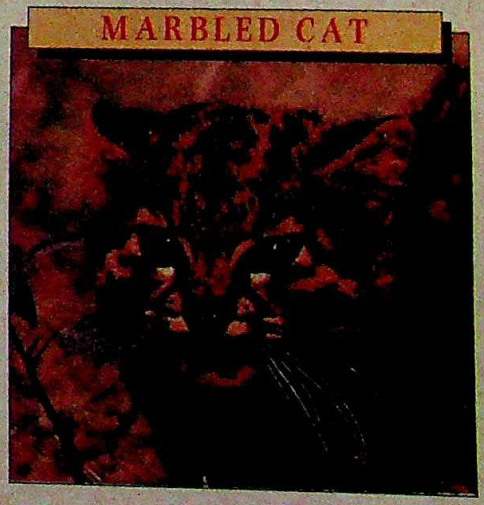
GOLDEN LANGUR



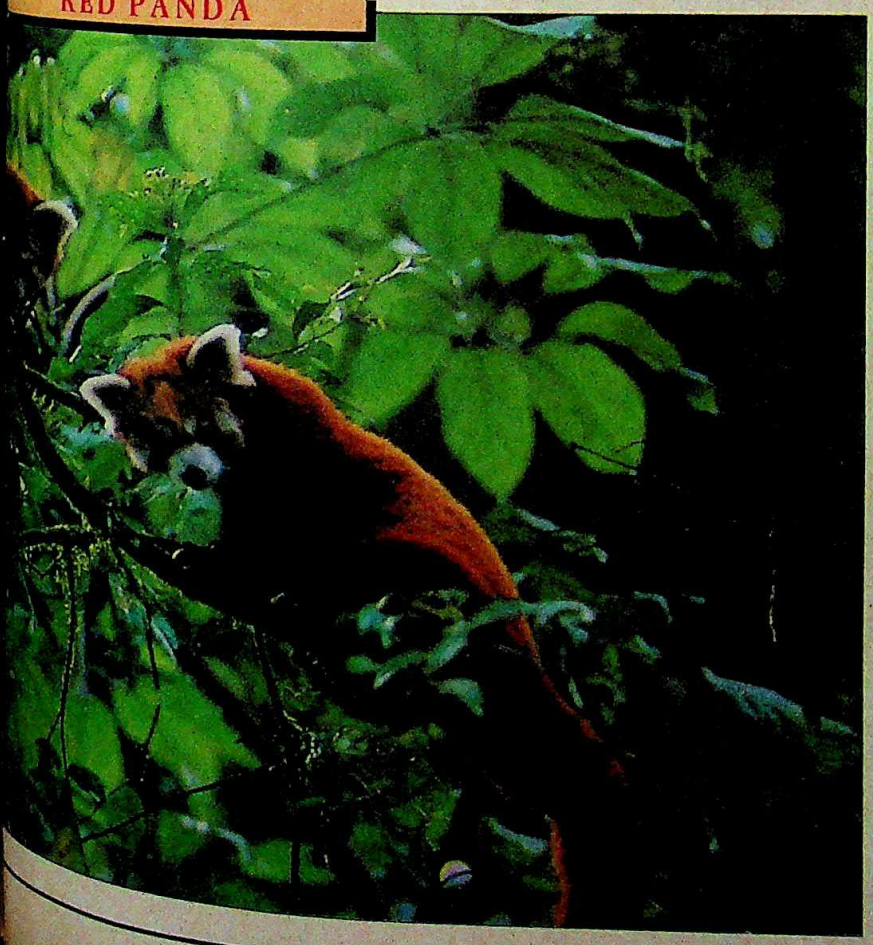
HANGUL

MONAL PHEASANT

MARBLED CAT



RED PANDA



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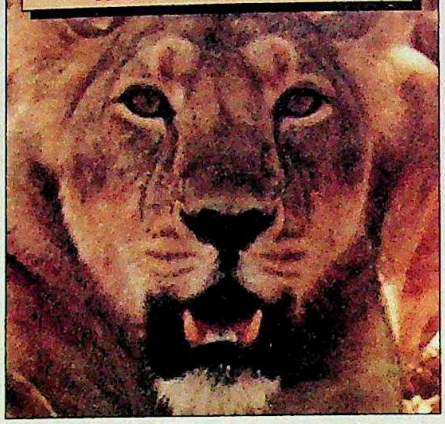
losing battle. Despite all the propaganda about saving wildlife, it just hasn't got into the minds and souls of our people."

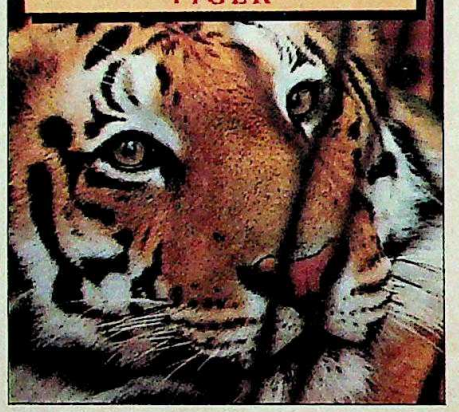
Species after species has fallen under the farmer's plough or the poacher's gun and is heading rapidly towards extinction. There are examples everywhere. The snow leopard was once the lord of the upper Himalayas. Its range spread from Kashmir to Bhutan, where it roamed the rocky heights at night, preying on wild sheep and goats. Its soft grey coat, dappled with rosette-shaped black dots, made it the best looking cat in the region. Today, it is visible only on the shoulders of fashionable women—as fur coats. In the wilds, ecologists can confirm its existence only by the pug marks. Optimistic estimates put the present number of snow leopards at less than 300, and dropping rapidly. By the turn of the century, it might, like the Indian cheetah that became extinct in 1948, exist only in books.

In the alpine scrubs of the lower Himalayas, the male musk deer, with its fierce looking canine teeth, is the gentlest creature of the region. But it is still widely hunted for the little gland above its abdomen, whose secretions perfume the cosmetic industry in the West. Each musk pod, when dried, produces between 20 gm and 50 gm of powder and to extract one kg 25 male deers have to be killed. An estimated 50 kg of musk, worth over Rs 3 crore, is clandestinely exported to Japan.

ASIATIC LION



TIGER



While the king of Corbett's India is making a slow come-back in the grassy *maidans* of Central India, the swamp deer or barasingha is making a quick exit. Hunted for its meat and deprived of an estimated 80 per cent of its original habitat, the barasingha, with its magnificent antlers, is now mainly confined to the Kanha National Park in Madhya Pradesh. The Hispid Hare, that scampered around on the foothills of the Himalayas near Assam, is also heading towards oblivion. The Indian wolf, long treated as vermin and wantonly killed, has quickly moved into the highly endangered list. The common Indian leopard has now become so uncommon that six years ago it was moved into the same highly endangered category.

Deep south, the story is no better. The Nilgiri Thar, the sturdy mountain goat that perches itself acrobatically on the steep grassy downs, faces extinction as it is regularly killed for its meat. The chatter of the black-faced Nilgiri Langur in the trees below is slowly falling silent. The oil from its fat is sold as an all-purpose balm and its flesh relished by poachers. The Indian python, in recent years, has been mercilessly killed for its skin. And the Indian elephant, believed to exist in such large

GHARIAL

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POACHING

The Big Kill

At Madras and Calcutta, a buyer can choose the kind of snake skin he wants: cobra, python or rat snake. In Trivandrum and Coimbatore, if someone has the right connections, he can have his pick of elephant tusks. In the busy markets of Srinagar, a traveller can name the fur he wants—and can get it. And in Lucknow, there are any number of people willing to get a person venison or even tiger fat.

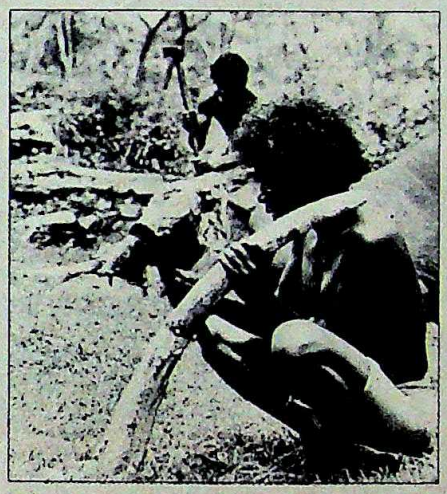
Despite severe government restrictions, poaching continues to flourish. Every year, an estimated 100 elephants, 30 rhinoceros, 200 musk deer, scores of snow leopards and jackals and over 10 lakh snakes are ruthlessly killed and sold in the booming international skin market. And the prices they fetch show inflationary trends. A rhino horn which is sold for as little as Rs 1,000 in the Guwahati black market fetches as much as Rs 50,000 abroad. A pair of tusks is sold for Rs 30,000 within the country and commands three times the price overseas. Tiger skins, which are sold for Rs 4,000 near Dudhwa, fetch around Rs 10,000 abroad.

The poachers are getting more ingenious. Being avid animal watchers, they use their knowledge with killing effect. At the Kaziranga National Park in Assam they know that the rhinoceros prefers to come back to the same place to empty its bowels. Poachers simply find a rhino dung heap, wait till it comes to the spot and shoot it down. In the Kashmir valley, they wait for the antlered stag's plaintive call for its mate to locate the animal and kill it. And the gangs of poachers are getting more daring and better equipped. At Dudhwa, they put poison in bait and wait till the tiger eats it and dies.

The extensive poaching has resulted in the depletion of several endangered species and is also seriously affecting the genetic balance. Since it is the male elephant that grows tusks in India over 750 have been killed in the past six years. This has brought the male:female ratio down from 1:5 to 1:10.

While poachers are getting more organised, the forest departments continue to be too badly equipped and short of staff to meet the growing threat. In Uttar Pradesh, for instance, to patrol a forest area of 51,266 sq km, there are only 438 wildlife guards. This means that each has a beat of 117 sq km—against the Central Government-prescribed norm of one guard for every 10 sq km. Guards have no option but to either close their eyes to poaching or even better, get a cut from the poachers by conniving with them. R.P. Sharma, the state's chief wildlife warden, candidly admits: "We are ill-equipped to deal with poaching. We have several plans but no money to implement them." Other states face the same problem.

Removing tusks (below); and arrested poacher: trading in death



Government laws have not helped either, with skin and tusk traders finding any number of loopholes to swoop through. Last November, in a bid to check tusk poaching, the Government banned trade of Indian ivory and asked all the dealers to liquidate their stocks within two months.

But the flaw was that since there were over 7,500 ivory carvers in the country, they were allowed to import African ivory. All the traders declared their stock as African ivory and since it can't be distinguished from Indian tusks, trade continues unchecked.

The whole poaching racket is complicated by the fact that Jammu & Kashmir, using its special status under the Constitution, enacted a wildlife law that made a mockery of the Indian Wildlife Act. While illegal trading in big-cat furs and foxes would invite imprisonment in the rest of the country, in Kashmir the offence usually results in only a fine.

And when the Central Government pressured the state to change its laws, it agreed but said that first traders should be given time to liquidate their existing stock. The result: traders declared mind-boggling stocks of 1.8 lakh jackal skins, 85,000 red fox skins and 20,000 various types of furs—more than the total population of wildlife in the country.

Worse, even if and when the poachers are caught, court battles are long-drawn out and very few end in convictions. Says an exasperated forest official: "Statutory protection doesn't make one single dent. Most of the operative parts of the law become unenforceable. In effect, it tells us to go climb a tree."

—RAJ CHENGAPPA,
DILIP AWASHTI
and INDRANIL BANERJI

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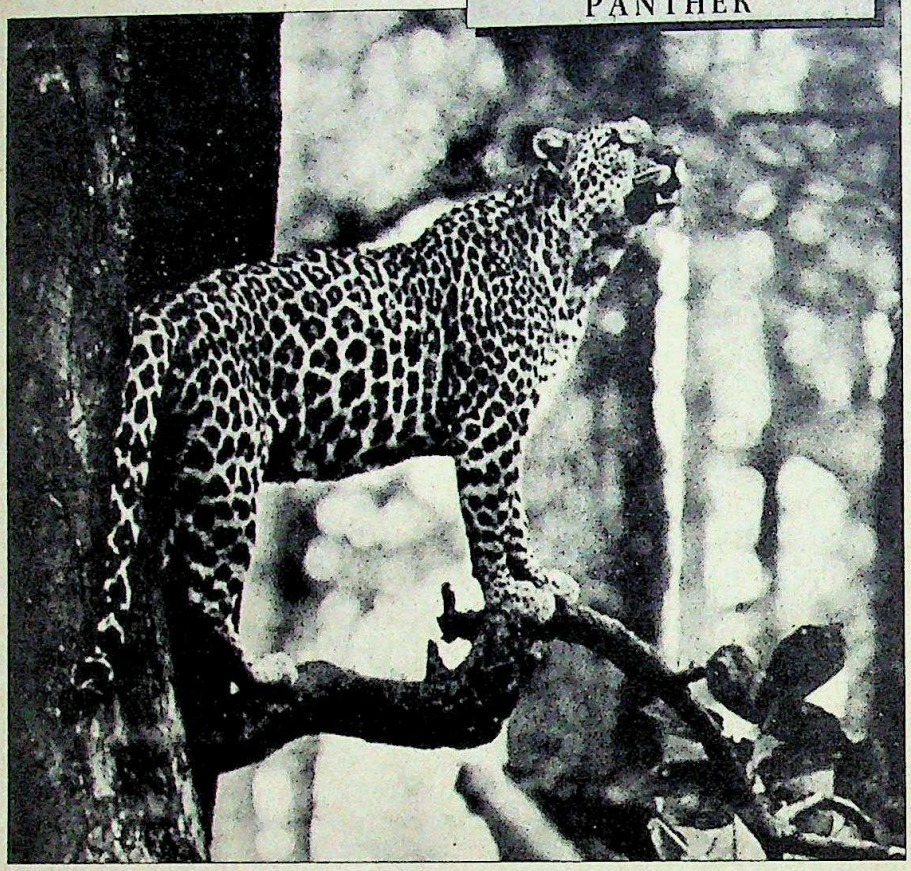
PANTHER



numbers that it did not need legal protection, has also been pushed into the highly endangered list recently.

Others that find themselves on the present endangered list are the desert fox, the golden langur, the bison, the Marbled cat, the Himalayan Ibex, the Indian dolphin and the sloth bear. And it is not just the animals who are in trouble. Birds like the black-necked crane, the pretty lesser floricans, the monal pheasant and the Jerdon's Courser (recently rediscovered in Andhra Pradesh) are seriously endangered. Among reptiles and amphibians, the Agra monitor lizard and several species of turtles are in trouble while the Ganges gharial, though being bred in captivity, is still threatened. The list has become so long that Vinod Rishi, field director, Sunderbans Tiger Reserve, says: "It would be easier to remember what doesn't need protection."

Only now are ecologists working out the true extent of the damage. Computing habitat details and animal populations for the first time, the Wildlife Institute of India has come out with some stunning findings. The Indian wolf, for instance, has lost 87 per cent of its original habitat; the Indian Gazelle, 88.4 per cent; the sloth bear: 83 per cent and the Hoolock Gibbon

HABITAT

Man vs Animal

TERROR stalks the dozen villages surrounding the Hazaribagh National Park in Bihar after unidentified animals—suspected to be wolves—have killed 122 children since 1980.

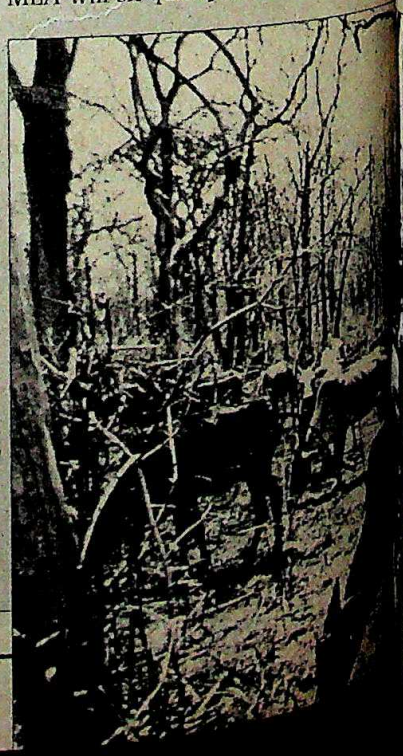
In the Billigirirangan hills of Karnataka, a herd of 60 elephants charged to a village pond and drank water thirstily while people fled in surprise.

And, in the foothills of the Himalayas in Uttar Pradesh, villagers live in constant fear of tiger attacks. Already an estimated 422 people have been killed since 1978.

Man-animal conflict, as ecologists call it, is a growing problem that threatens to undo the Government's efforts to conserve the dwindling wildlife resources in the country. Predicts M.K.Ranjit Sinh, India's wildlife preservation director: "The edges of parks and sanctuaries are going to be the main battleground for the future of conservation in the country."

With wildlife in India dwindling to its lowest in the '60s, the next decade saw the Government setting up as many as 14 national parks and 150 sanctuaries. This meant that villagers around the area, who had earlier used the forests to collect wood for fuel and graze their cattle, suddenly found themselves deprived of their traditional rights. And since the surrounding land was already stripped of forest cover, there was no alternative but to go into the forests; and the conflicts began.

Almost all the parks and sanctuaries are in trouble. At the Bharatpur bird sanctuary, frequent clashes have broken out between foresters and villagers over grazing cattle and the death toll stands at seven. At the Dudhwa National Park, where man-eating tigers have become a serious problem, last year the problem worsened when foresters banned the system of "mati" or wood and grass collection rights for the Tharu tribals living in 37 villages around the park. The tribals use the wood and grass for renovating their huts every year. Foresters argued that the influx of 400 carts and thousands of men into the core area of the sanctuary was one of the key reasons why many tigers turned man-eaters. But because as many as 25,000 people depend on the jungle for wood and elephant grass, the problem is turning political. As a local Congress(I) worker said: "If 25,000 voters are being deprived of their rights, do you think our MLA will sit quietly and watch?"



Cattle grazing inside a forest: serious threat

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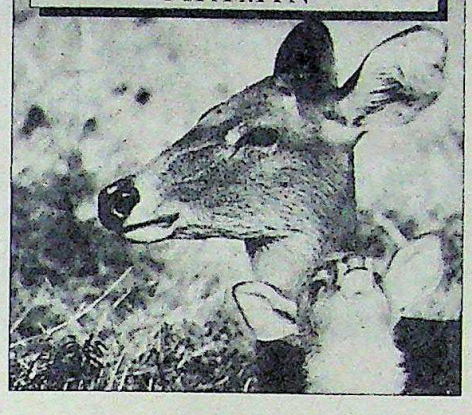
India's only ape), 87 per cent.

In fact, habitat loss is one of the major causes of the rapid depletion of wildlife. The first to go were the grasslands and easily conquerable scrub and thorn jungles that dominated the plains, in which roamed the tiger, the cheetah, the blackbuck, the Hispid Hare, the Indian ass, the wild ass, the wild buffalo, the barasingha and several other species of deer. Then fell the woodlands, where the elephants, the leopards and the monkeys flourished. And then followed the high mountain regions, where several rare species of goats and smaller cats lived.

Most of the animals that once roamed vast stretches are now reduced to single habitats. And even though some of them still figure in large enough numbers, they are under the constant threat of extinction. As eminent ecologist Madhav Gadgil points out: "The real threat is homogenisation of habitats. We are losing the mosaic and instead shrinking into a few islands. Catastrophic events like floods and disease can result in the whole species being wiped out."

Examples of single habitats abound. In Manipur's Keibul Lamjao National Park, dense floating vegetation in a lake live the Thamin or the Indian brow antlered

THAMIN



PANGOLIN

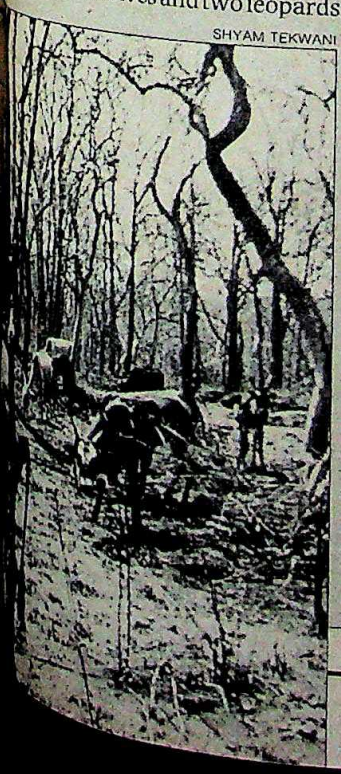
deer. Extensively poached by the locals, the deer faced extinction in the '70s, their number dropping to just 14. Although their numbers have since increased to 50, there are signs that the floating vegetation is naturally decreasing, thereby shrinking the Thamin's fragile habitat.

Not far from where the Thamins fight for survival, the Guwahati Trunk Road veers into swamp lands beside the Brahmaputra river. On the marshy grasslands on a clear day, herds of rhinoceros can be glimpsed grazing in peaceful unconcern. This is part of the Kaziranga Forest Reserve where the Great Indian one-horned rhinoceros, which once wallowed in the swamps stretching from the lower Himalayas to Burma, makes its last stand. But even in its last refuge, the one-horned rhinoceros is under constant threat. Expanding tea gardens and widespread deforestation have forced other animals like tigers, leopards and elephants to seek refuge in the same sanctuary. While the tigers and leopards now kill and eat straying rhino calves, the elephants chomp their way through much of the tree cover. And rampant poaching threatens to dwindle their numbers further.

And in the undulating hills of the Gir forest, the Asiatic lion fights its last battle

At Hazaribagh, where children are killed regularly by animals, a different kind of problem exists. Forest officials are still not able to ascertain whether it was the wolves that killed the children or vice-versa. Ever since the menace began, the Government launched flushing-out operations, hiring *shikaris* and even offering a reward of Rs 5,000 for killing the wolves. Over 12 wolves and two leopards

SHYAM TEKWANI



were killed in the operations, but the child-lifting continues. Bihar Additional Chief Conservator of Forests N.P. Prasad has the weird theory that the deaths began after the Hazaribagh jail authorities threw unclaimed bodies quite literally to the wolves, giving them a taste of human blood. With no concrete evidence yet, the Bihar Government last week banned the shooting of wolves.

With cattle grazing becoming a political issue, most foresters just turn the other way when cattle are spotted. The result, says an ecologist, is that "now most sanctuaries have 65 per cent cattle and 35 per cent wildlife". As a result of over-grazing, the undergrowth in most reserve forests has been depleted and unpalatable weeds are growing in their place. There is a danger of animals catching disease that afflict cattle, like rinderpest. Apart from that, animals like tigers and leopards start preying on the cattle, leading to even more conflict.

And keeping no buffer zone between sanctuaries and cultivated land is an open invitation to animals to either raid fields or attack domestic animals and people. Near the Palamau reserve forest, elephants frequently raid crops in the 80 villages that surround it. In the Bandipur Mudamalai region, farmers now put up electric fences to keep the elephants out. And in central India, hordes of bar-headed goose swallow freshly-planted seedlings like vacuum cleaners do dust. As ornithologist S.A. Hussain says: "How can you tell the farmer to protect wildlife and let his lands go to hell?"

There are other problems as well. In three-quarters of the sanctuaries the Government is fighting legal battles over resettlement of villages, grazing rights and fuelwood collection. In the Palamau reserve, three villages—Lattoo, Khajnum and Rand—are located in the heart of the core area and officials are finding it difficult to shift the entire population of 552 because they can't find alternative sites.

As the population grows, ecologists predict that the man-animal conflict will escalate to serious proportions. And they are pessimistic of the outcome. Ecologist A.J.T. John Singh says: "In our fight to protect wildlife, we would have only minor victories and major losses."

—RAJ CHENGAPPA, FARZAND AHMED and DILIP AWASHTI

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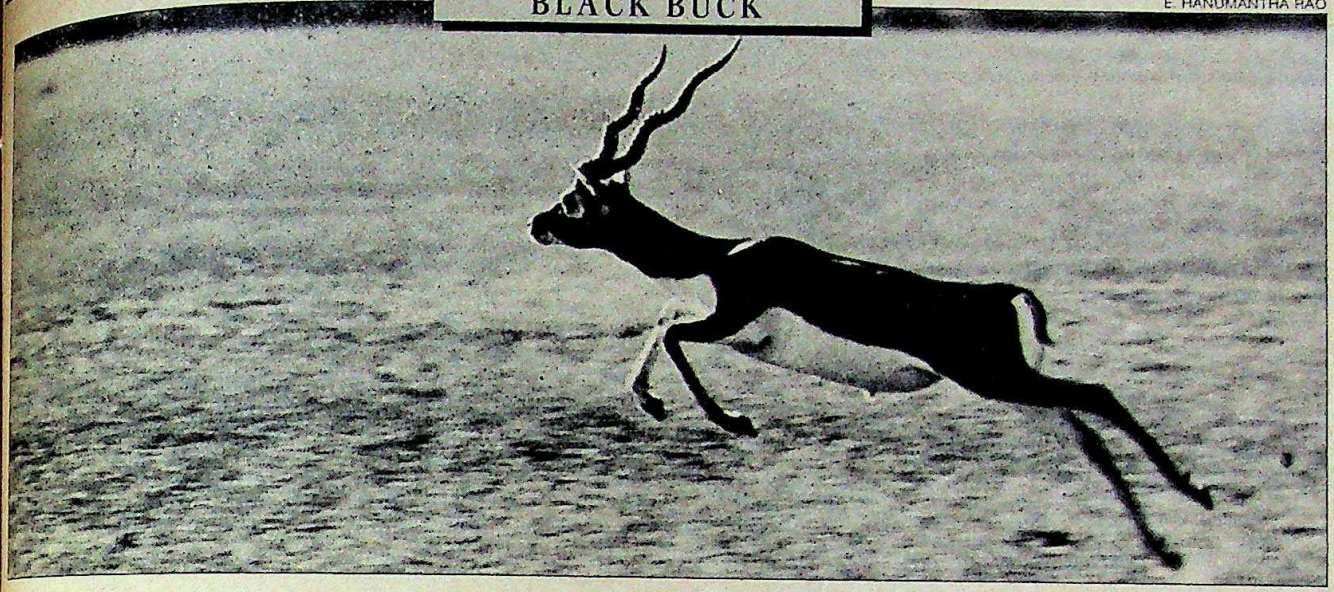
BLACK BUCK

E. HANUMANTHA RAO



for survival. The once proud lions dominated the grasslands but they were so systematically exterminated that by 1920, their numbers had dwindled to around 50. But with the Gir forest declared a sanctuary, their numbers have now reached a stable 200.

The Indian elephant too is in trouble. Although there are an estimated 23,000 elephants in the country, their habitats have been severely fragmented. The tuskers in the south face a serious threat of poaching. In the north-eastern states, which harbour the largest population of elephants in the country, they are under attack for other reasons. Meghalaya forests, for instance, can support just 750 elephants though the state has over 2,000 elephants. Much of their habitat has been degraded because of the slash-and-burn cultivation followed by the tribals. Deprived of fodder, the elephants have even started raiding crops. BNHS ecologist Ajay Desai, who recently made a survey of the problem, says: "The Asian elephant is slowly on its way out."

Probably the most successful conservation effort in the country was Project Tiger. The king of the jungle once roamed the entire Indian sub-continent but by 1970, tigers had been so rapidly killed off that their total number stood at just over 1,500. Stepping in just in time, the Government banned the killing of tigers and set up nine reserves, enabling their numbers to increase dramatically. By last year, there were 15 tiger reserves harbouring over 1,800 tigers.

Unwittingly, the Government's effort also showed that if the prime predator in the forest is well protected, the rest of the wildlife in the sanctuary also flourishes. Each of the reserves show higher numbers of deer, antelopes, leopards and wild dogs. But if foresters are busy patting themselves on the back over Project Tiger's success, they can hardly be complacent. As Union Environment Secretary T.N. Seshan says: "We know the battle has just begun."

The Government's move to establish more sanctuaries and national parks may protect animals in the short run but it will come into increasing conflict with India's burgeoning population (*see box*). The primary mistake the Government is making is that, while it cordons off area for wildlife, it does not provide alternative sources of fuel wood and cattle fodder to the deprived villagers.

INCREASINGLY, ecologists are talking of making wildlife protection go hand in hand with the alleviation of poverty. The buzz word now is "rural eco-development". And its key phrases are: find alternative sources of fodder for cattle while establishing sanctuaries, improve animal husbandry methods so that the cattle population dwindles, afforest areas around sanctuaries so that fuel needs of villagers are met and keep your fingers crossed and hope that family planning programmes will finally succeed in halting the galloping rate of population growth. As ornithologist A.R. Rahmani says: "The best conservationist is one with a small family."

Another area of neglect is the census of wild animals. Current government statistics, even at Project Tiger reserves, are at best wild guesses, as ecologist Ullas Karanth exposed recently. Taking pug marks from four captive tigers, Karanth subjected six wildlife managers to a test. None answered correctly. One even put the number at 24. Moroever, Karanth points out that if official statistics were to be believed, the tigers were breeding at an unbelievable 6 to 10 per cent.

The Government conservation effort has also failed to develop a scientific data base on wildlife to help manage the existing sanctuaries. By concentrating on the larger mammals, the lesser known species have been totally neglected. Conservationists are realising how delicate the ecological balance is in the wild. Even the decimation of a minor snake could lead to a chain reaction of extinction and cause the detrimental proliferation of one species.

Fortunately, of late, there has been a growing environmental consciousness, both among the people and the Government. People are beginning to understand that the wiping out of wildlife is not an isolated catastrophe. Along with the animals, forests would denude, rivers would flood and vital top-soil would be washed away. In short, it would be total ecological disaster. As ecologist Rom Whittaker puts it: "Wildlife is just the icing on the cake. Without forests and water resources, we are writing ourselves off." Adds naturalist E.R.C. Davidar: "Habitat destruction will get everyone, including us."

Ecologists shudder to think what would happen by the turn of the century when the population crosses one billion. In Dehra Dun, United Nations expert Allan Rodgers asks: "What would happen when the pushing tide of humanity engulfs the remaining natural areas? Where will the animals go, what will we do then? I think it's frightening." There are very few who don't.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA with bureau reports

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Of Inhuman Bondage

PARAJA
by GOPINATH MOHANTY
Oxford University Press
Price: Rs 50; Pages: 373

THE money-lender's clutches are like a spider's; and for the victim the web is invisible until too late. The passage to inhuman bondage of Gopinath Mohanty's tribal protagonists takes just a moment—the quick clink of the money-lender's coins.

Scores of articles and novels have been written about the stranglehold of money-lenders and of their usurping the rights of tribals. Yet, hardly has any outsider penetrated the bamboo curtain to present these people as individuals. But Mohanty's gripping novel *Paraja* has succeeded in doing just that: it brings to life the aboriginals living in the Katapura jungles in Orissa. Readers can see the yellow *olsi* flowers of their hillsides; taste the sweet liquor of the *mahua* flowers which makes that path to bondage all the shorter; hear the sounds of the tiger-infested jungles, the teasing laughter of the women; and feel the frenzy of their orgiastic harvest festivals.

Paraja is a story of the inexorable descent of the family of Sukru Jani, the "granite-faced" tribal patriarch—poor but proud—into bondage. Destiny sucks him and his sons, Mandia and Tikri, and daughter Jili into its vortex with the tragic inevitability of a Hardy novel. The men are tricked into becoming bonded labourers to the money-lender; and Jili, independent and yearning for love, into becoming his mistress.

The protagonists, the wretched of the earth, are really the victims of a changing world and its see-saw dynamics: from being lords of the jungle they become slaves on their own land—the biggest tragedy being that they are unaware of the process that has made them the dispossessed.

The novel—the translation of which from Oriya to English took over four decades—also studies the encroachment of the world of materialism on the simple life of the tribal. The most telling passages are about the court where an optimistic—and finally defiant—Sukru Jani sues the money-lender for his land only to find his whole world crumble before him. He finds that the court writer and the temple priest, after fleecing him have deliberately misled him about the date of his appearance in court, resulting in the dismissal of the case. Worse still is the final severing of the ancestral umbilical cord from the land which is more than just a means of livelihood for the tribal; the Parajas believe that their ancestors live on as stones on their fields.

The novel, at one level, is about the corruption of the tribals: they betray each other to please the man in power, even if he is way down the ladder. The red turbans or bands of the tax collector or forest guard are enough to chill their simple souls. The loss of innocence is movingly delineated in the change in Jili: she even begins to enjoy her new but fragile status (the new saris, the ornaments, the power) as the money-lender's mistress and is quite indifferent to what he is doing to her father and brothers. *Paraja* is a lament of this loss of innocence.

Where Jnanpith award winner Mohanty goes wrong in an otherwise compelling narrative is the insertion of explanatory asides which is like the intrusion of documentary footage in a feature film. The social anthropologist in Mohanty often gets the better of the writer in him. For example, the author attempts to define the tribal's perceptions of poverty and its relationship to possessions: "Only, in this primitive world, the individual's wealth is measured in terms of the quantity of grain in his attic. On the surface, there is little evidence of class snobbery or prejudice, but sooner or later its existence becomes inescapably obvious." There are long explanations about the Parajas' various festivals and customs which would be more appropriate in textbooks.

There are however, metaphors and passages of prose that have the power of poetry. The cameo of the headman's bonded labourer, the village idiot, touchingly gross like the hunchback of Notre Dame, remains etched in the reader's mind: "As he made his way back he looked even more monstrous than before, like a gigantic frog that pauses every now and then between bursts of ungainly movement." Or: "He followed Jili everywhere—a hideous shadow, like a black cloud floating behind the moon. The shadow kept its distance, but it was a shadow nevertheless."

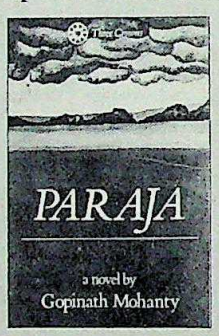
Or the relationship between man and soil: "Man does not possess the soil: he is possessed by it. He can grip the soil in his fist, but it laughs, and waits; and one day he drops down, and the soil is enriched. Grass and mandia and rice grow out of him, and they too fall back into the soil.... The soil was rising higher and higher inside Sukru Jani's battered body."

Mohanty's vision is grim indeed. There is no escape for the tribal dispossessed. Unlike Job, Sukru Jani does not even possess the patience to test the gods. In fact, his gods are cruel: "Their tears soaked the earth but were powerless to melt human hearts. And their gods laughed." Nor does he have the comforting cushion of fate: karma is a concept alien to the tribal.

—MADHU JAIN

EXTRACT

From every hill the red tracks came down and converged at the Sahukar's house like the threads in a spider's web, and along these tracks came many a tribesman from the remotest hills. Some brought their wives' ornaments to the Sahukar, wrapped in bits of rag. Others brought the produce from their fields. Others again had nothing to pledge but their own bodies. And the Sahukar's house swallowed everything up, and nothing that entered ever came out again; and the house grew and bulged.



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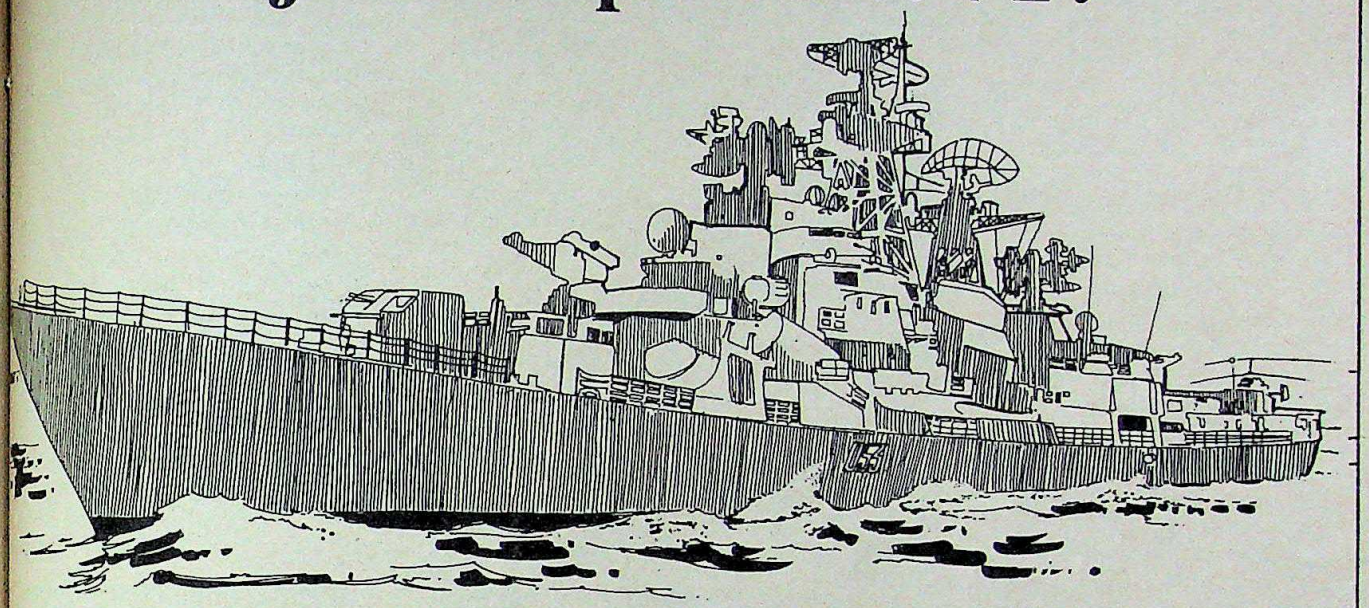

Here's a chance to chart the course of your future... hand in hand with Indian Navy.

1. Eligibility Conditions :-

a) **Age:-** Must be between 16 1/2–19 yrs (i.e. born between 01 Sep'68 to 01 Mar'71) for Executive Branch and 17 - 20 yrs (i.e. born between 01 Nov '67 and 31 Oct'70) for Technical Branch.

b) **Educational Qualification :-** (i) Candidates passing 10+2 or equivalent examinations from any recognised Indian University/ Board with first class and securing 65% or more marks for Executive Branch & 70% or more marks for Technical Branch, in Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics (passing in these subjects individually). (ii) Candidates should also have studied English (Core or Elective) either at the X or at the XII Class level and passed a public examination, obtaining atleast 50% marks.

c) **Physical Standards :-** Candidates must have a height of atleast 157 cms with co-related weight, well developed and proportionate chest with atleast 5cms expansion and have unaided eye-sight (distant vision) 6/6, 6/9 for the Executive Branch and 6/12, 6/18 for the Technical Branch.

d) An unmarried male Indian Citizen

2. Vacancies : Executive Branch - 80
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3. Training Pattern: Selected candidates will be entered as Cadets. On successful completion of training the Executive Branch Cadets will be awarded a B.Sc degree and Technical Cadets will be awarded a B.Tech degree and commissioned as Acting Sub-Lieutenant.

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5. IMPORTANT :

(i) For more details and the application format please see the detailed advertisement which appeared in the leading National Newspapers/Employment News during the months of May/June '87 OR write to the Directorate of Manpower & Recruitment, Naval Headquarters, 208, 'C' Wing, Sena Bhawan, New Delhi-110 011. or ring 3011213 or 3012047.

(ii) Last date for receipt of applications for the Executive Branch & Technical Branch is 15th June'87 and 6th July'87 respectively.

(iii) Separate applications are required to be forwarded if a candidate desires to be considered for both the branches.

INDIAN NAVY
A career par excellence

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PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT GROUP

Selling Sportsmen

THE by-line is now as familiar as, well, Sunil Gavaskar. Television viewers now wake up, every Sunday morning, to the announcement: "And now, Sunil Gavaskar presents...." And thereby hangs a commercial tale that has all the ingredients of one of the Little Master's memorable innings.

In 1985, Sumedh Shah, the then executive director of Trikaya Advertising, met Gavaskar and asked him whether he had read *What they don't teach you at the Harvard Business School*. Gavaskar replied that he hadn't but knew all there was to know about the International Management Group, the $ 500-million organisation that author Mark McCormack had written about. McCormack and his Group, famous as the biggest manager of sports celebrities, have made millions by procuring contracts of product endorsement for celebrity sports-persons like Bjorn Borg, Chris Evert Lloyd and Martina Navratilova. Shah suggested that Gavaskar begin a similar outfit in India. The Indian cricketer, ever the canny businessman, agreed. That partnership was the start of the Professional Management Group (PMG), an organisation which has changed for good the relationship between commercialism and sportsmen in India.

Said Gavaskar: "At that time, my only consideration was that I used to find it too embarrassing to talk figures with people who approached me for advertisements and endorsing products. I was too shy to negotiate terms." He had faced the same problem when Shah approached him for the Thums Up campaign and knew other cricketers felt the same way too. So the idea of forming the PMG appealed to him. "Not only would it be a manager to sportsmen, it would also be an organisation that could read into the fine print in these matters," said Gavaskar, now considered the most hard-boiled bargainer in the business.

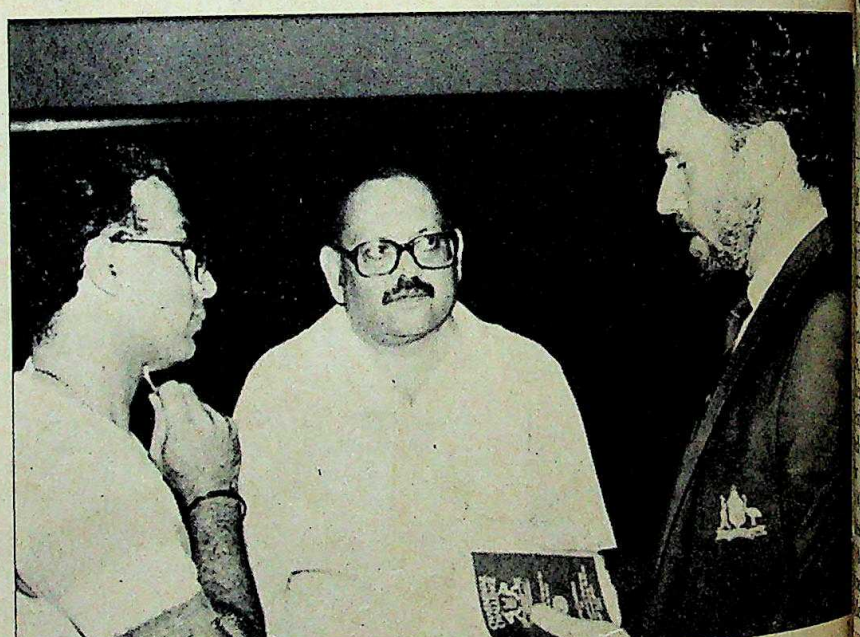
Though the partnership with Shah began with immediate effect, Gavaskar himself went touring overseas for the next couple of months. "It was a disaster to begin with," recollect both partners today. Their first assignment involved securing contracts for the Swedish Davis Cup team who were touring India a few months later. The team included three players among the top 10 in the international rankings of the Association of Tennis Professionals—Mats Wilander, Anders Jarryd and Stefan Edberg. "Abroad, these players would charge a quarter of a million dollars to wear a wrist band. We had managed to get them for peanuts at a lakh and a half," remembers Shah. But the response was cold. Numerous rounds of advertising agencies only brought ignorant responses such as: "Is McEnroe also coming?" or "Davis Cup? Isn't Wimbledon the international tennis tournament?" Nobody was interested in the Swedes. The PMG ran into a clean loss of Rs 40,000 in its maiden venture.

Gavaskar returned to India to learn that he was down Rs 20,000 as he was a 50 per cent partner. Said Shah: "He could have turned around and said 'I don't know you'. But all he said was 'These things happen in business. I'll send the money across whenever you need it'."

But having burnt their fingers, both realised that it would be difficult to sell any sport in India, other than cricket. So they returned to the crease and started syndicating newspaper columns beginning with Gavaskar's, which was hawked at Rs 1,200 for a single edition newspaper and Rs 1,600 for multi-edition ones. There followed Ravi Shastri and Bishen Singh Bedi, whose columns sold at Rs 1,000 each, and finally the visiting captains Alan Border, Viv Richards and Imran Khan joined the bandwagon. Imran Khan was the toughest bargainer—his columns were priced at Rs 4,000.

Maintaining a policy of 'only one paper, in one language, in one city', Gavaskar now syndicates his column to as many as a dozen newspapers. Of course, the Board of Cricket Control in India (BCCI) breathes down his neck for violation of regulations forbidding players from writing for the media during season. The board has sought explanations from both Gavaskar and Ravi Shastri on this account. While Shastri has now stopped writing, as he is playing county cricket in England, Gavaskar has requested a meeting to explain his position. According to him, as long as he does not give daily reports of the game during matches, the

(From left) Gavaskar, Shah and Border: big money



Sunil Gavaskar and Sumedh Shah's Professional Management Group has changed for good the relationship between commercialism and sportsmen in India.

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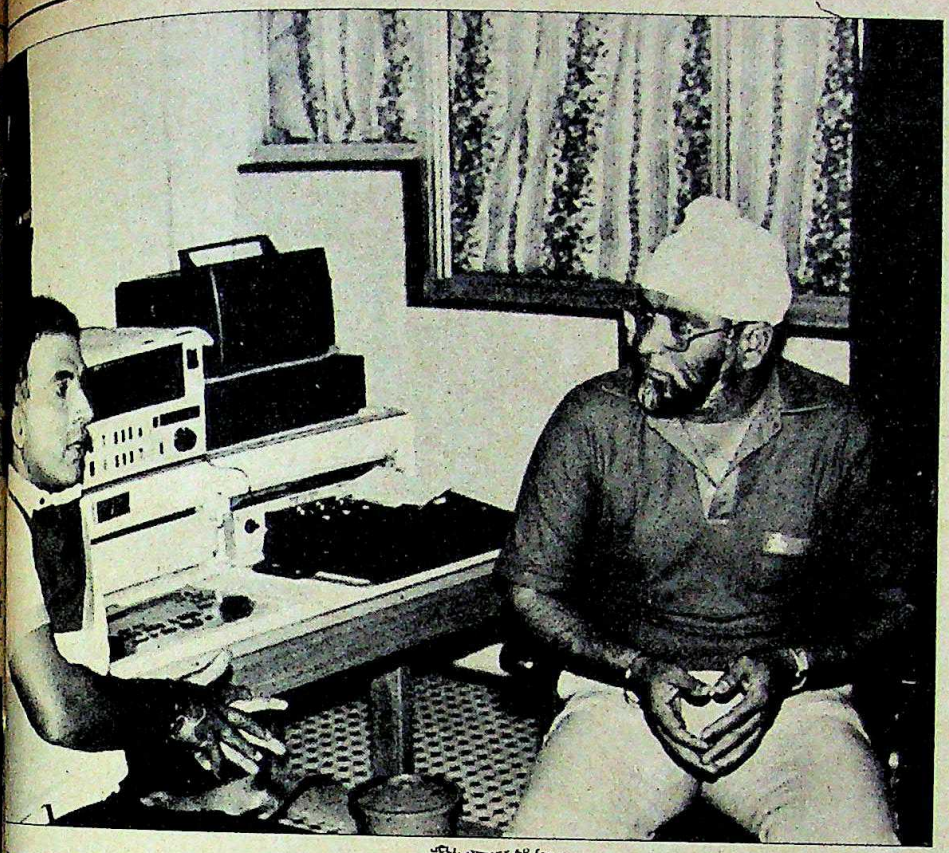


Gavaskar with Bedi in the studio: runaway success

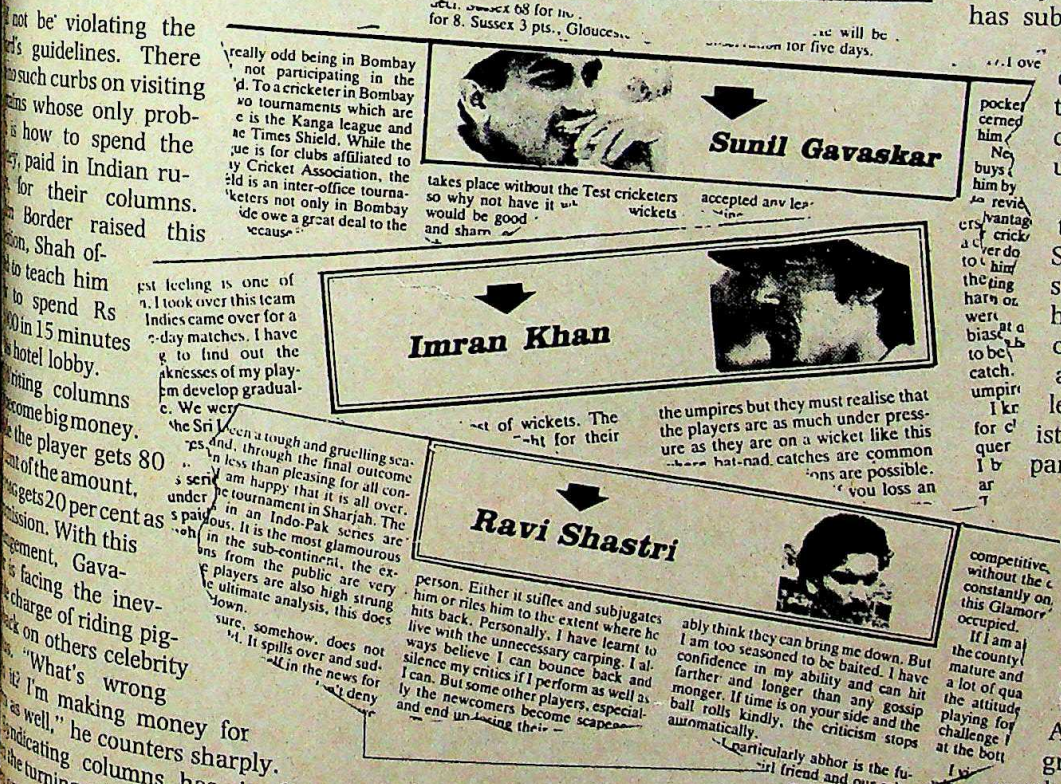
fortnight onwards. "Sunil Gavaskar Presents...", directed by Aziz Mirza and produced by the PMG, is proving to be a runaway success. Gavaskar, as anchorman, is a sell-out. Having already completed shooting eight episodes of the 13 part serial in double-quick time, Mirza couldn't help commenting to the serial's star that even Amitabh Bachchan didn't have such a busy shooting schedule. Gavaskar was quick on the rebound: "Amitabh who?" he asked.

Of late, the PMG has also been appointed consultant on sports sponsorships to Vazir Sultan Tobacco (VST). The VST group, which has a mammoth budget of Rs 1.5 crore for sports sponsorships, pays the BCCI Rs 15 lakh every year for the sponsorship of the Deodar Trophy and the Ranji Trophy tournaments. The PMG has submitted a detailed proposal to the company on how to draw crowds to the Ranji Trophy matches. "We are trying to use marketing tools to create excitement in the Ranji Trophy," says Shah. They have also submitted a proposal to hold a seminar on cricket, with 16 present and former cricket stars, leading sports journalists and BCCI members participating.

But it is spreading its wings slowly. After a bad start—in the first year, it closed with a loss of Rs 1 lakh—it expects to close this year in October with a turnover of Rs 50 lakh. And once again, the group plans to look beyond cricket. It is now trying to get contracts for P.T. Usha. "It's difficult as, in all other sports, we have to be careful about not disturbing anybody's amateur status," says Gavaskar.

And as for Gavaskar himself, with the PMG's success seemingly assured, there should still be plenty of cricket after retirement, even if it is not out in the middle.

—TANIA MIDHA in Bombay



Sunil Gavaskar

Imran Khan

Ravi Shastri

Syndicated columns: celebrity scribes

not be violating the ...d's guidelines. There ...no such curbs on visiting ...ians whose only prob... is how to spend the ...y, paid in Indian ru... for their columns. ...n Border raised this ...tion, Shah of... ...d to teach him ...to spend Rs ...00 in 15 minutes ...hotel lobby. ...iting columns ...come big money. ...the player gets 80 ...cent of the amount, ...gets 20 per cent as ...ission. With this ...gement, Gava... ...is facing the inev... ...charge of riding pig... ...back on others celebrity ...s. "What's wrong ...it? I'm making money for ...as well," he counters sharply.

...indicating columns has, in fact, ...the turning point for the PMG. From ...onwards, the group gained momen... ...and diversified into the endorsement ...ducts—Ravi Shastri and Kapil Dev ...in the greatest demand. Gavaskar ...ued his own advertising, separate ...the group. Today, he commands a ...of Rs 2 lakh for an advertisement much to the envy of professional models. Interestingly, his fee was jacked up as soon as Imran Khan was paid Rs 2 lakh per ad for Cinthol and Thums Up.

From endorsements and advertisements, the next logical step has been television serials. And so, aired from last

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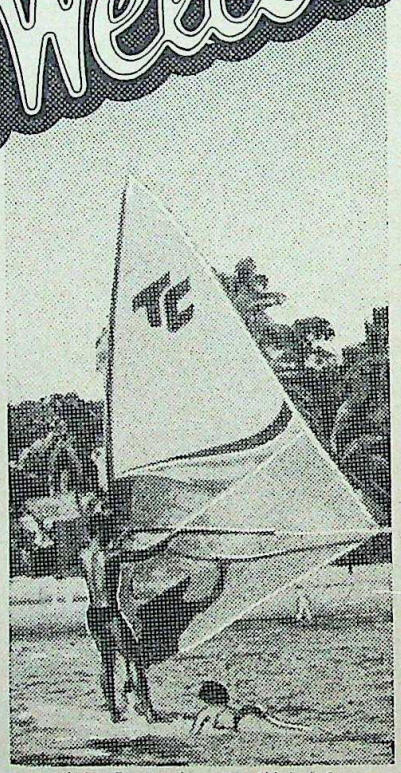
Take a Welcombreak!

Welcombreak is an exciting getaway for the entire family. Walk down shell-strewn beaches, and travel the timeless deserts. Play golf on velvet greens, or a set of tennis early morning. Or simply revel in the luxury of India's finest hotels. Welcombreak has it all!



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Short Break Rs.1099/-
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- 15% discount on health club and beauty parlour
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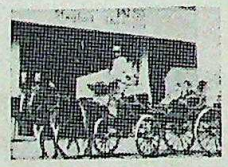

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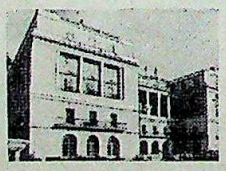

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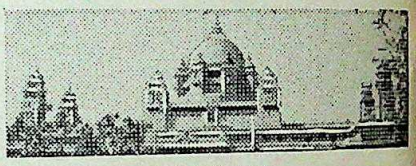

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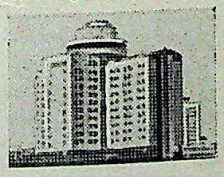

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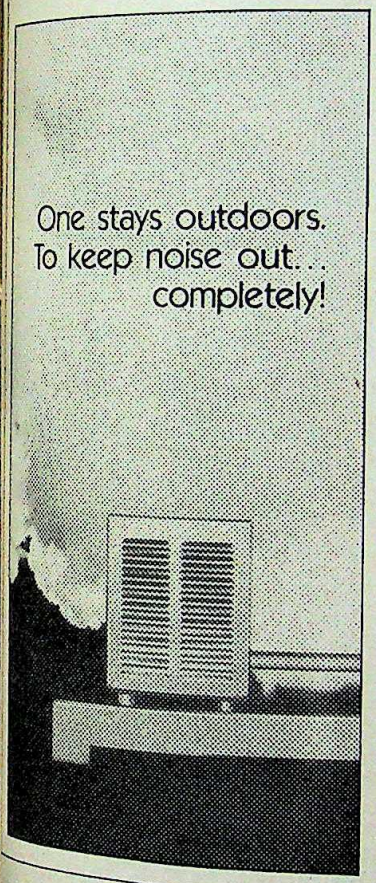

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THE US

Prize Catch

THE Liberty Shell gas station, perched on the south Atlantic highway where it passes the small New Jersey township of Aberdeen, 40 miles south of New York, is frequented by the 70-odd agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) who live in Aberdeen to beat high New York rents. But last fortnight FBI agents picked up something far more volatile than high-octane petrol as they swooped on the station to arrest Sukhminder Singh and Ranjit Singh Gill, two men considered to be among the most wanted Sikh terrorists in India.

It was an anti-climactic end to one of the most intense joint anti-terrorist operations launched by Indian and American lawmen, with the two alleged fugitives, key suspects in the murders of former army chief General Vaidya and Congress(I) MP Lalit Maken, surrendering without any resistance.

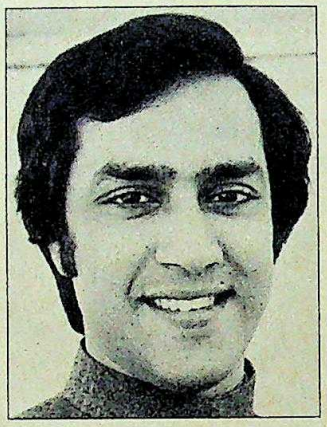
Having followed a desperate escape trial that took them from Illinois in the midwest to California in the west and then back east to New Jersey where they finally ran out of luck, the two terrorists now await extradition proceedings beginning July 14 in a New Jersey court.

Singh and Gill, who had thousands of dollars in their wallets when they were arrested, immediately pleaded innocence although Judy Russell, a government attorney, told the court that they had entered the US illegally. Their host Amarbir Singh, the 26-year-old Sikh owner of the gas station said they had been with him for less than six hours. Sukhminder is his old classmate from Government College, Ludhiana.

The day after the arrest, Maharashtra Police officers flew into the US to help investigations, and officials of the Indian Embassy joined them in putting together an effective case for extradition, and also in retracing the fugitives' escape trail. As Indian officials concentrated their efforts in Chicago, where the terrorists are reported to have found their main sources of support among the expatriate Sikh community, more arrests were being predicted. "This is a major achievement, a landmark case," said a US State Department official.

The arrest came just when the anti-American rhetoric was peaking in New Delhi, and the US Administration was at pains to use the success as evidence of basic American "goodwill" towards India. "It is absolutely wrong to suggest that America in any way wants to Balkanise India. The arrests provide a definite proof to the contrary," a senior State Department official told INDIA TODAY. Beaming US officials also repeatedly referred to similar statements made last month by Michael Armacost, under-secretary of state at the Asia Society meeting in Washington. Opposing Khalistan as a "vulnerable and indefensible entity lacking international support and strategic depth", he talked of the quiet cooperation between the FBI and Indian officials to "detect and apprehend terrorists before they can act".

Vaidya (left) and Maken: killers' trail



The arrest of Vaidya's killers marks a crucial turn in the battle against Sikh terrorists using the US for refuge.

Indian and American officials are, however, disinclined to talk about how exactly the joint operation has been conducted. But high-level sources say a foreign service officer on the Indian desk in the State Department coordinates with officials in the Indian Embassy on a full-time basis on anti-terrorism operations, and transfers operational information to the FBI which has now designated officials specially to deal with Sikh terrorists. Said Lane Bonner, the chief FBI spokesman in Washington: "We regard any terrorism as a serious problem and one of the bureau's four national priorities."

Bonner said that the bureau operates mainly on the basis of information passed on by the State Department. The FBI has established a fairly effective information network among the Sikh community. They also seem to know terrorist sympathisers among the prosperous expatriate community. But under American law there is little they can do against the sympathisers.

This influential ethnic support is part of the reality the officials face now that the initial euphoria of success is over. American officials admit that when it comes to anti-Sikh terrorist operations, New Delhi sets rather exacting standards as to what it expects from foreign governments. Consequently, the key question now is the extradition of the two suspects.

India and the US still work on the basis of a 1931 treaty signed between the United States and the British Government, providing extradition for certain offences—murder being one. Under the treaty, India should pass on the information to the US Administration through diplomatic channels, and then the US attorney has to produce evidence for extradition on behalf of India within 60 days. "In case the court sets aside the extradition case, the Government has no right to appeal. But the defendants have a limited right of appeal up to the Supreme Court," said Robin Frank, an official in the legal section of the State Department. She also stated that the evidence required for extradition is of a lower level than the one required for conviction. "It is the kind you need to get an arrest warrant," she said. On that count the Indian side is taking no chances and officials say they have an open and shut case.

But the battle for extradition promises to be a long-drawn one with the suspects being defended by Michael Kunstler, one of the most expensive and prominent New York lawyers who has figured in several high-voltage cases. Last year he defended another Sikh suspect Gurpartap Singh Birk. Kunstler is being paid by the Sikh Cultural Society. The verdict in New Jersey will set a vital precedent. More than anything else, it can have a crucial bearing on the already fragile Indo-US relations.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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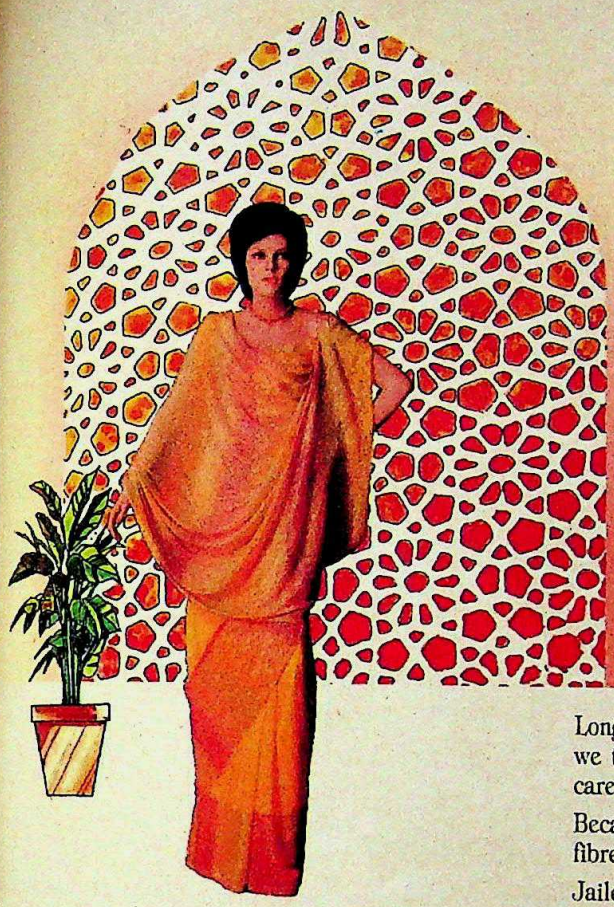

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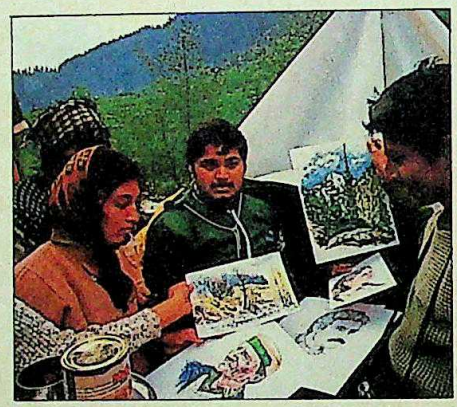
TREKKING

The Great Escape

■ *Half-past-five in the evening. As the young clerk walks briskly out of office and weaves her way across the main road, she is abused by an irate driver and then engulfed in a passing lorry's cloud of exhaust smoke. The queue at the bus-stop is 40 minutes long, and the still, hot air is overpowering: even the buildings seem to perspire. The bus groans slowly through the streets, oblivious of the impatience of the sweaty, smelly bodies inside, waiting for release. Caught in the crush, the clerk tries to concentrate on her journey's end: the walk home...she thinks of the cramped flat she shares with two others. Suddenly feeling suffocated, beaten, she closes her eyes.*

■ *Half-past-five in the evening. The young draftsman from an engineering company stares in awe at the panorama that begins at his feet and stretches down the mountain that falls away beneath him. As his three companions ready for the night, he sits transfixed, looking at the valley more than a kilometre below and the mountains that soar over it on the other side, their summits coated with a thick layer of snow. The view and the calm suddenly overwhelm him. He stretches out on the lush green grass, and using his rucksack as a temporary pillow, closes his eyes.*

The trekker as artist and (bottom) learning the ropes over the Beas



SRINAGAR, Manali, Nainital, Mussoorie, Darjeeling, Ooty.... These names, until quite recently, circumscribed the images that holiday-makers carried of their escape into the mountains. Though these hill-stations still entice, thousands every year are now busy fulfilling dreams that go beyond these names, and are just a little less traditional. Bent under the weight of their rucksacks, struggling up deserted slopes, the sweat breaking out on their backs as they try to control the wobbling of their untrained knees, they doggedly raid India's mountains in droves. Trekking, for these thousands, is more than just a holiday; for most, it is one

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the few adventures that they can act out their otherwise drab, regulated, urban lives. What is more, it can come with additional excitement—be it rappelling (descending a cliff) or the art of crossing a swift-flowing river.

In a sport as disorganised and new as this one, precise figures of the growth in interest are virtually impossible to gain. But the increased determination to go and spend those few days out in the great outdoors, is evident in trends across the entire country.

The Karnataka Mountaineering Association, which began with six members, has been organising local and Himalayan treks ever since it was founded in 1966. After 11 years, in 1977, the membership was still only 45. Today, the association has about 1,200 people on its rolls.

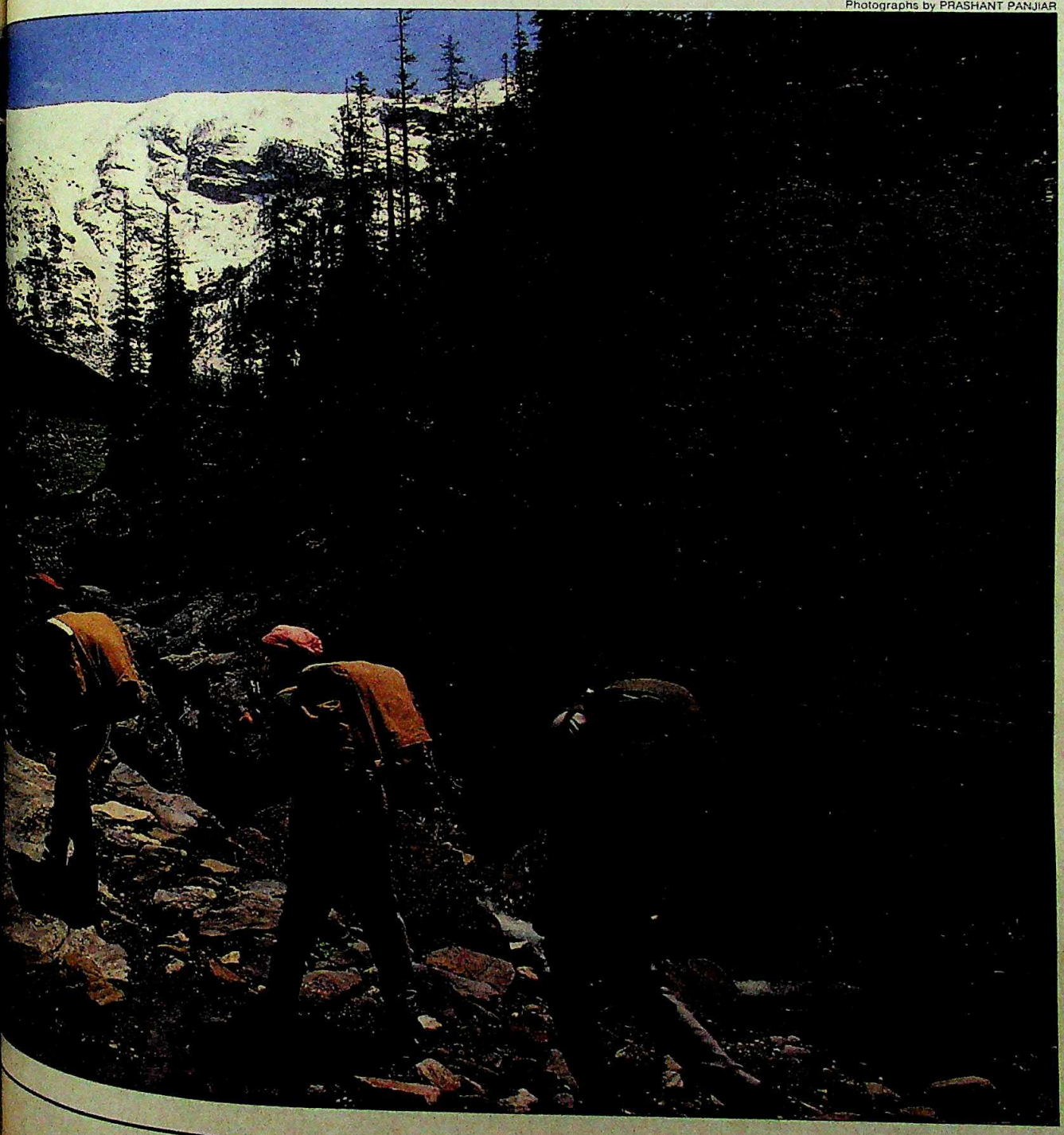
Yuva Shakti, a Pune-based organisation which promotes trekking, was formed just about four years ago, and already has a thousand members. According to Suresh Chauhan, a clerk in the Reserve Bank of India, Bombay, who is a camp leader, Yuva Shakti will send 500 people this summer to Jammu & Kashmir's Kishtwar region, on a fortnight-long trek. And in winter, more than 300 enthusiasts from the club will move around for a week in Maharashtra's Mahabaleshwar area.

Hoshang Master, 40, a Bombay lecturer and a veteran trekker, recalls that eight years ago when he went trekking on week-ends to the neighbouring Sahyadri hills "you had the place all to yourself. Nowadays, you have a hard time avoiding people there: it's so crowded". Master reckons that anywhere between 500 and 1,000 trekkers from Bombay, frequent the Sahyadris every week-end, during the June-November trekking season.

Calcutta, also carried away by the

Taking to the slopes near Manali: mid-summer dream

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR



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walking craze, has more than 60 trekking and mountaineering clubs registered with the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) in New Delhi. This does not include the dozens of informal clubs that have sprouted in city colleges and neighbourhoods.

In Uttar Pradesh's poorly connected Garhwal region, comprising five districts, trekkers were virtually unknown to the locals 15 years ago. By 1977, they still numbered only a thousand annually; that figure is now up to 9,000. Says Deepak Singhal, managing director of the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam, which runs 46 rest-houses and tourist bungalows: "We expect a 15 to 20 per cent annual growth in trekking traffic."

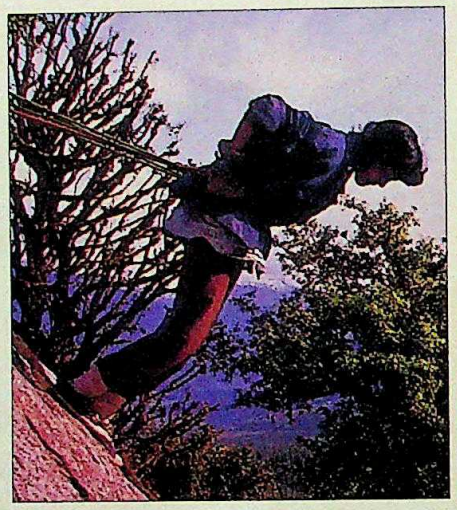
The National Cadet Corps (NCC), which introduced the sport in 1981, will send up nearly 10,000 school and college students this year—at a cost of Rs 64 lakh—as part of its national trekking programme. This summer, they will be seen in the Kulu-Manali region, in Uttar Pradesh's Gangotri and Valley of Flowers, around Yusmarg in Jammu & Kashmir and about the Ooty area. The rest of the year will witness cadets trekking in Sikkim, Goa and the Western Ghats in Maharashtra. These statistics do not include the thousands of youngsters from the NCC who will climb hills across the country as part of state-level programmes: in Karnataka alone, for example, they will number 7,200.

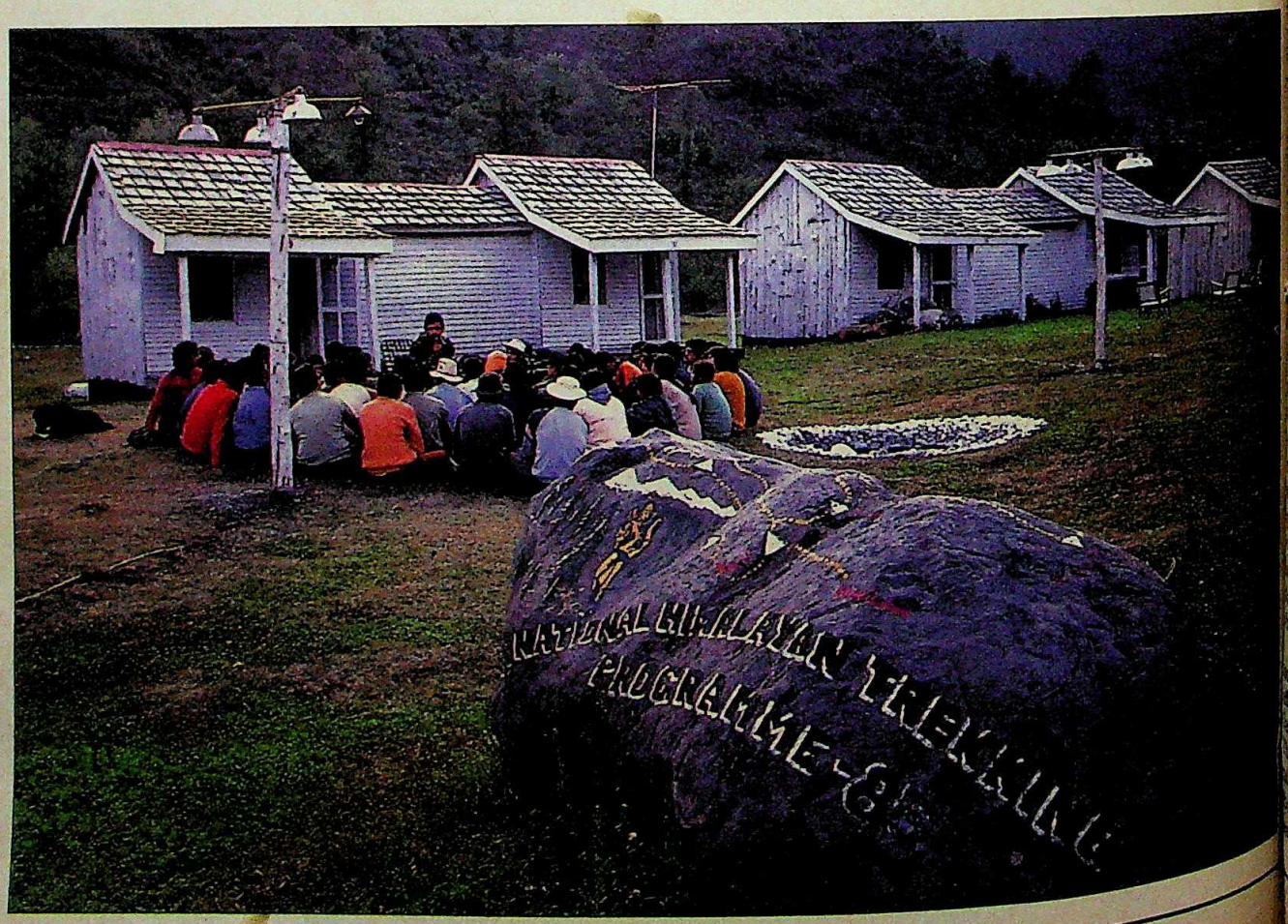
But the two organisations which represent this new eagerness best are the Youth Hostels' Association (YHA) and the Bangalore-based Spark. YHA, headquartered in New Delhi—but with branches all over—started its National Himalayan Trekking Programme in 1970. Response turned encouraging only six years later, when 440 people showed up for the 170-km trek in Jammu & Kashmir's Kishtwar region. By 1980, the participants were 1,200.

The upsurge of interest continued after a new trail was opened by the YHA in the Kulu-Manali area in 1981. In summer this year, about 2,200 people will cover this 140-km trail, which is so popular that booking turns full as early as January each year.

Running on its meagre resources—its annual government grant is only Rs 10,000—the YHA now conducts a short eight-day trek for 700 children in the age group 12-17 years, north of Manali; takes about 600 people to the Pindari glacier in Kumaon; and involves 500 youngsters in its Goa winter trek. Last year, it also took 400 people to Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh. Says Naresh Sharma, YHA's programme officer: "We are restricted by our resources. If we had more basic equipment, our participation could increase manifold—the response is tremendous." The YHA still manages with outdated equipment—rucksacks, tents,

Having a go at rappelling and (bottom) the YHA base camp at Raison





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tickets—that it purchased with a small Rs 5-lakh grant from the Central Government several years ago. Its fees and overheads are amazingly low because its programmes are run by volunteers who are all experienced trekkers.

The growth of Spark, started in 1981 with just 15 members, too has been phenomenal. It already has 6,000 members—half of them went trekking last year—and range from a four-year-old who took part in an 18-km trek near Bhremukh to people well past their 60s. Spark's prime mover and founder, interestingly is a doctor, T. Venkatesh, 38, an assistant professor in Bangalore's St John's Medical College, who believes that "treks must be educative".

The club, which has graded its treks carefully, at the lowest level takes children in the age group of three to eight on walks for a few hours through city parks—each carrying a little rucksack with food and water. The next phase is three-day trips at neighbouring Bannerghatta National Park. The third stage is treks in the Himalayas for children in the 14-16 year age group, after which come what are called exploratory trips over unmarked areas.

Spark, which operates on an annual budget of Rs 4 lakh—Rs 2 lakh in donations and the rest from the central and state governments—hopes to start a three-month programme in the coming winter, in the Western Ghats. It has also set up an outpost at the Everest base camp which not only leads trekkers but also carries out studies on mountain medicine, in collaboration with the Himalayan Rescue Association of Nepal. Not to be deterred by distance, the organisation plans treks in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, aimed at learning about tribals who live there.

The trekking fever has naturally touched students the most, but it hasn't left others unaffected either. Balkrishna S. Sawant, 56, a resident of Maharashtra's Ratnagiri district and a chief typist in the Railways, symbolises the wanderlust. Although suffering from a limp and asthma, last fortnight Sawant was at the YHA's picturesque base camp at Raison, on the banks of the river Beas, 17 km from Kulu: "The only way to get to know the Himalayas is to trek through them. I expect it to be difficult but I am determined to complete the journey."

Most of the uninitiated find it hard to understand what motivates a trekker. Why should a person actually want to sweat it, risk foot sores and aching limbs, on a well-earned holiday? How can this torture be read as a vacation?

Interviews with dozens of trekkers across the country produce varied answers. These range from "it is a nice way to socialise" to "standard holidays are so boring"; from "I want adventure" to "I love getting away from the competition in the city".

Posing for a group photograph in the Western Ghats: rising popularity

AJIT YADAV

A trekker in Kumaon with friends: a return to nature

But one basic theme that emerges is the trekker's desire to do something different from the usual. The fact that the sport is most popular in the metros where the pace of life is hectic, makes its own depressing statement about modern city life.

The desire to spend some time in quiet, in the wide open spaces, to leave behind—at least briefly—the intense struggle for existence, is an almost desperate one. The things for which a trekker "sweats it out" are simple and uncomplicated: it could be the sight of an unusual flower, a snow-laden mountain, a shepherd with his flock of sheep or a star-filled night. And trekkers swear that the special satisfaction of panting slowly to top a ridge or of having a cup of tea in a sun-drenched valley, engulfed in silence, or of simply sitting on a river bank watching the water rush by, can be rivalled by few city pleasures. Explains P.P. Manchanda, 36, a tax assistant from Delhi, who was recently in the Manali valley, scaling slopes: "Once the bug bites you, you can't escape it."

This desire has also been helped along by the fact that although rucksacks, tents and sleeping bags are still hard to come by, trekking is considerably cheaper—a 15-day YHA trek for instance, costs only Rs 470—than a holiday to a regular resort. A Central Government regulation from the mid-'70s granting one month's special casual leave to employees wanting to go on treks approved by the IMF, has also provided an impetus, the results of which are only now being seen.

Although the infrastructure for trekking is still meagre in the interior, the hordes of willing walkers do not seem in the least deterred by the the lack of proper food, electricity, bathrooms or a comfortable bed to sneak into—inconveniences that would upset them at any other time. This easy-going attitude springs from a willingness to rough it out and take life as it comes. Because that, in any case, is half the fun.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR with NANDITA SARDANA in Manali, ANITA PRATAP in Bangalore and bureau reports

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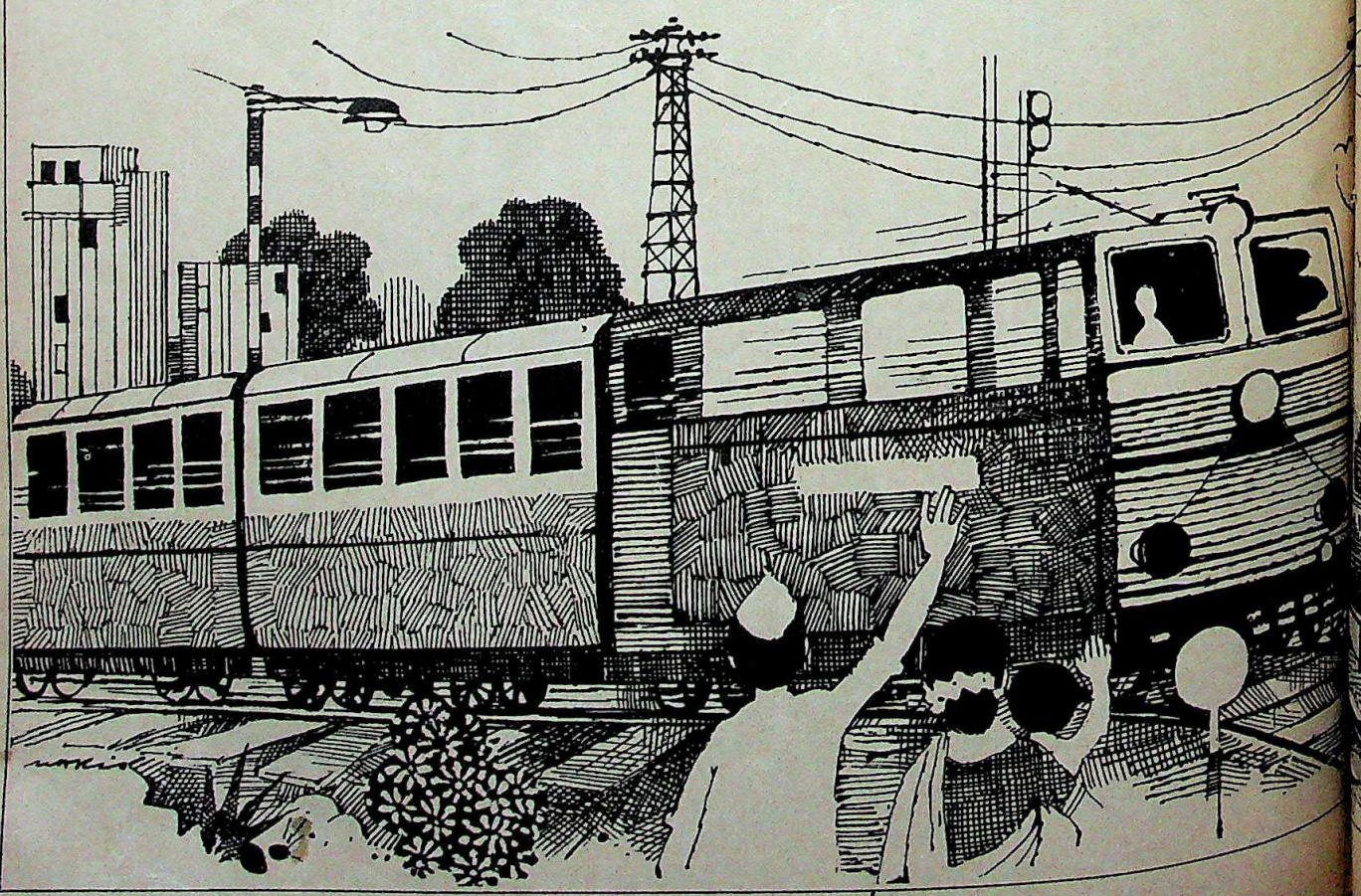

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PONDICHERRY

Au Revoir

PUDUVAI? The name of a new south Indian city? Alas no. Puduvai or Puducheri is the *nom de guerre* for Pondicherry, the name by which the historic former French colony is now increasingly referred to. And in the change of name lies the near-total change of culture and ambience that, till recently, had gifted Pondicherry with its unique Parisian flavour.

The signs of the new times are everywhere. If you're looking for a *maison* on Rue Bussy, a famous Pondicherry street, you'll find it instead on what is now the Lal Bahadur Shastri Road. The Bureau de Finance, one of the landmarks of the town has been renamed the Finance Department Building. And it's more than likely that the stranger on the road will brusquely pass by without bowing his head with a cheery *Bonjour Monsieur* like he would have a few years ago. Slowly but surely, *La Belle France* has gone out of Pondicherry, the charming colonial township on the southern Indian riviera that was a French colony for nearly 300 years till its merger with the Indian Union in 1963. Says Elizabeth Raj, the French wife of a Pondicherrian: "Ten years ago if one came to Pondicherry, one almost felt as if one was in Paris." Adds Gautier Divianandin, who is a French national: "Even after the merger with India, one could manage in Pondicherry by speaking French. It was the language of the street."

Now even the superficial links are coming undone. The Northern Boulevard has become the Sardar Patel Road, the bustling Rue Dupleix is the Jawaharlal Nehru Road, Rue Madras is the Mahatma Gandhi Road. As R.A. Alphonse, a long-time resident of the town sadly put it: "The historical fact that Pondicherry had a French connection may no longer be evident to a stranger."

Till well after the merger, the Union territory borrowed its moods from its fashionable counterpart in Europe. Pondicherrians dressed up for dinner. Known for their hospitality, the French Pondicherrian would clasp your hand between both his and plant a warm kiss on either cheek. In the *beau monde*, the men would tip their hats and bend down to kiss a lady's hand.

And as for a meal with a Pondicherrian, you could bet your life on the menu—freshly baked bread and meat sauteed in wine. As in France, the streets were dotted with clubs and cafes and the evenings inevitably ended at the Cercle de Pondicherry, a watering hole, where the men got together for a drink.

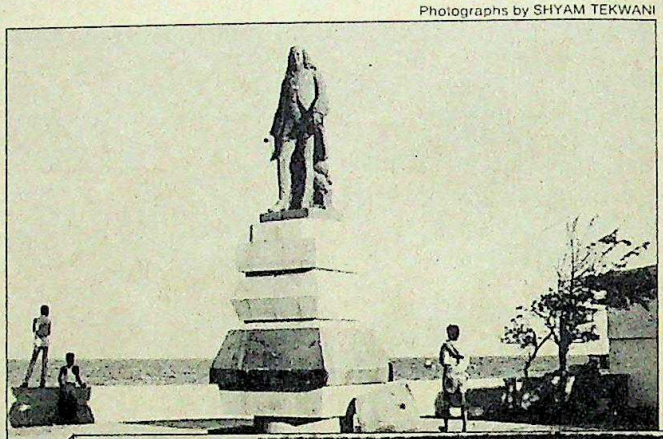
All the landmarks of the town were French: the Bureau de Finance, the Traveaux Public, and the Ecole Premaire. They're all gone now.

The Ecole Premaire has been renamed the V.O. Chidambaram Chettiar School and the old French buildings are being pulled down. In their place, functional, unimaginative and large commercial complexes have sprung up.

The imposing statue of Marquis Dupleix, which dominated the heart of the town, has been shifted to a lowly corner of Pondicherry beach—and Jawaharlal Nehru has risen quickly in his place. Another significant French statue, that of a prostitute called Aayi, has been uprooted and consigned to the museum. Said Paul Ratier: "The French history of Pondicherry seems to be slowly getting out of focus."

Nor does anyone hear a *c'est bien* on the streets anymore. The cacophony of words that now rise out

Photographs by SHYAM TEKWANI



(From top): New abode for Dupleix's statue; Indian name for French bookshop; English- and Tamil-medium school

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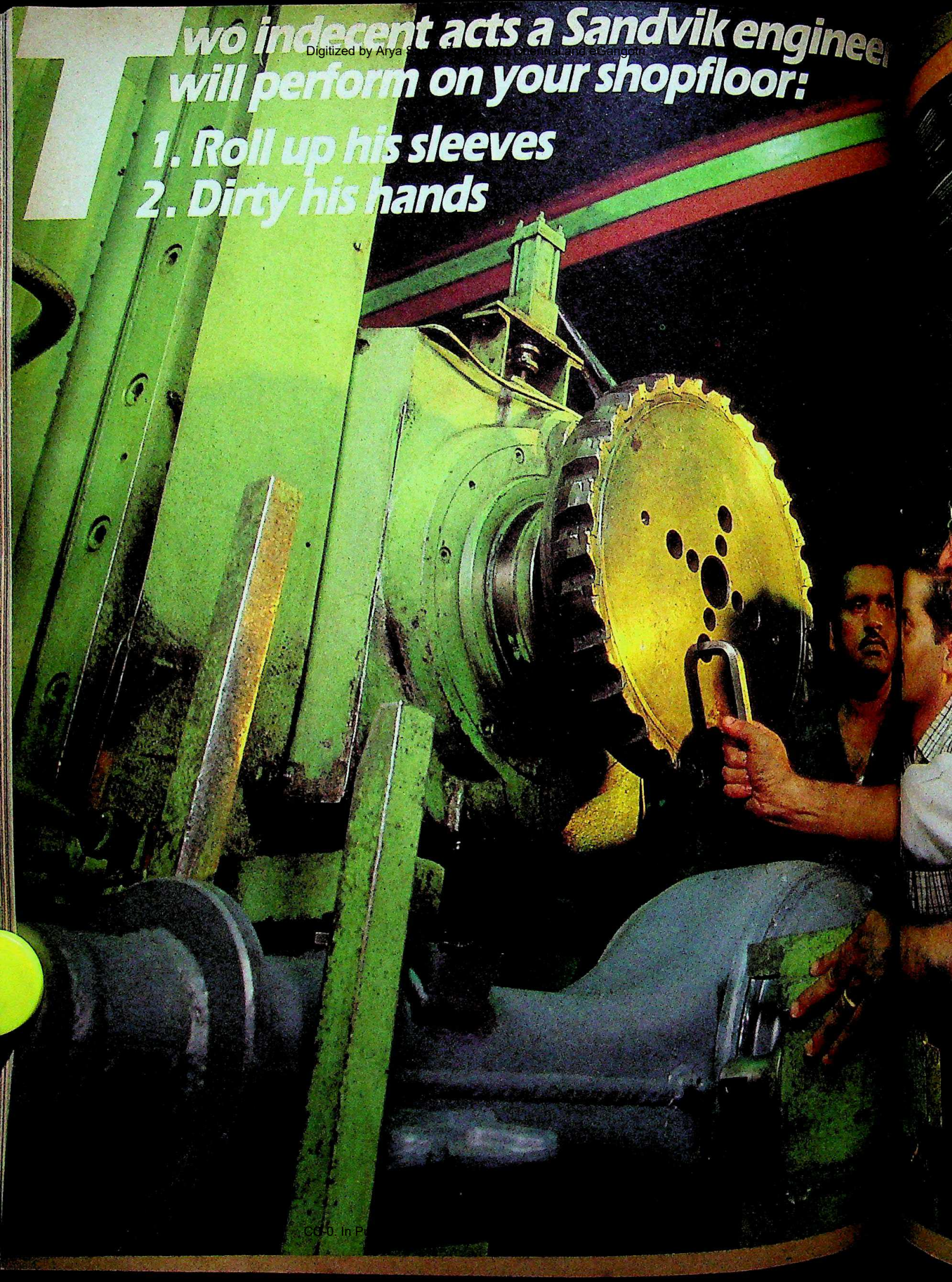

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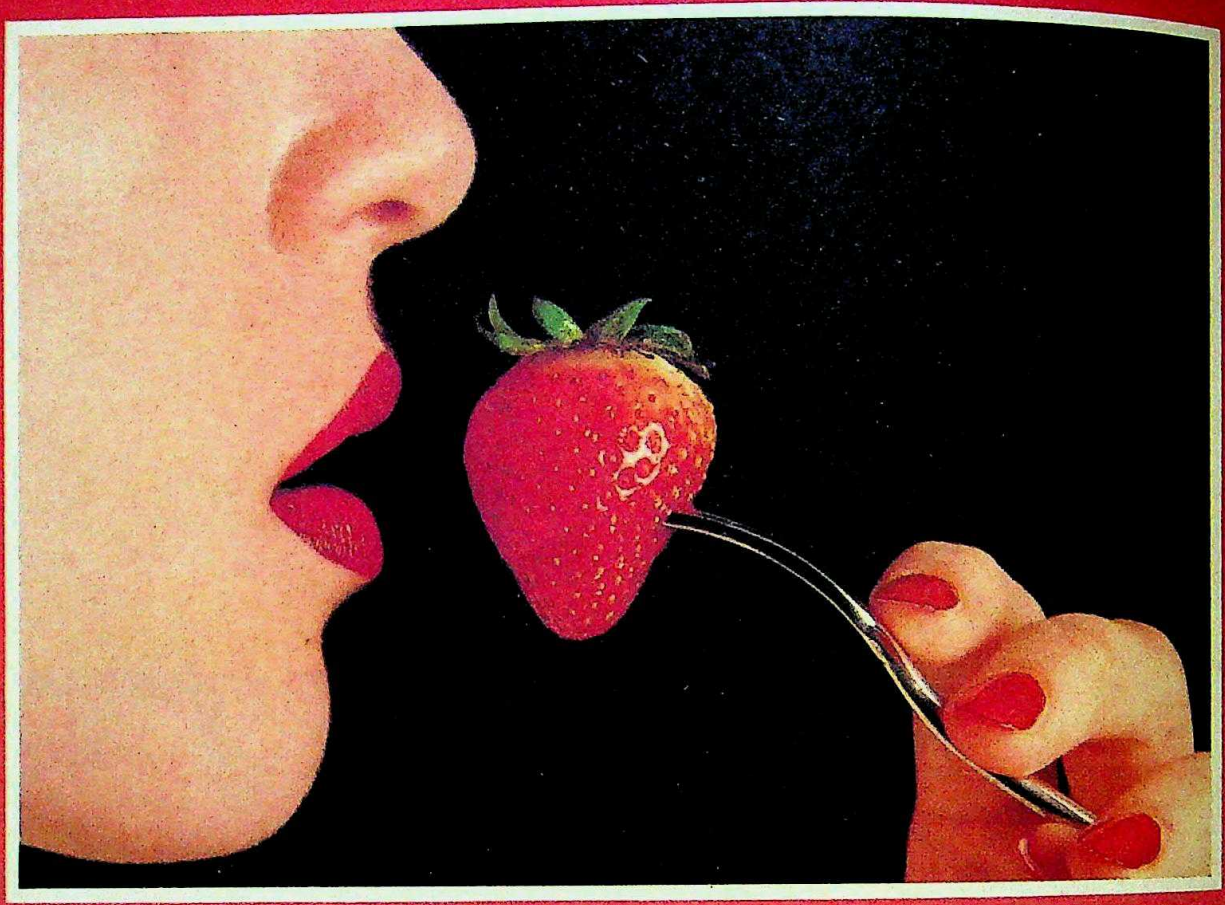

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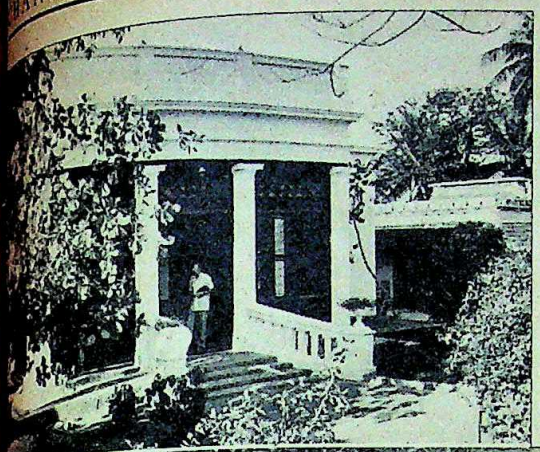
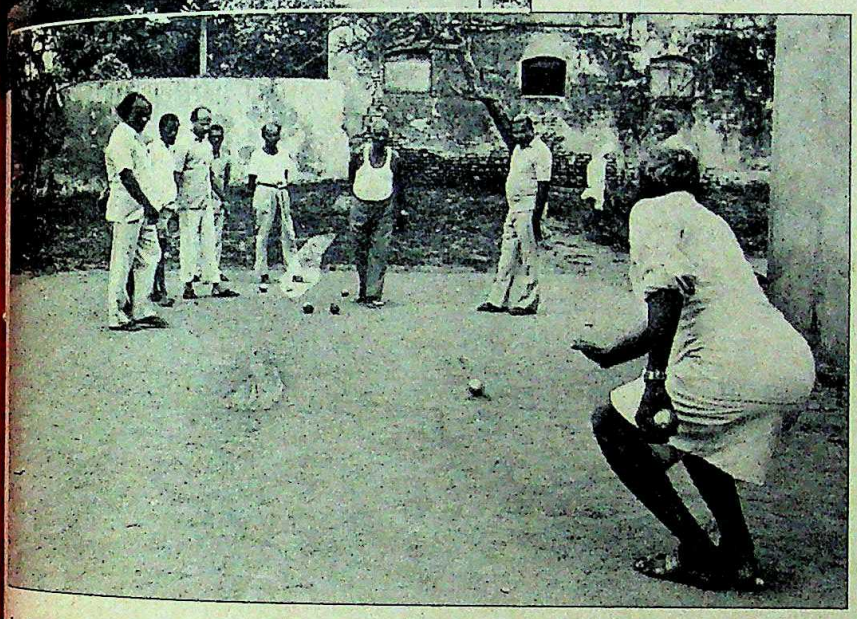




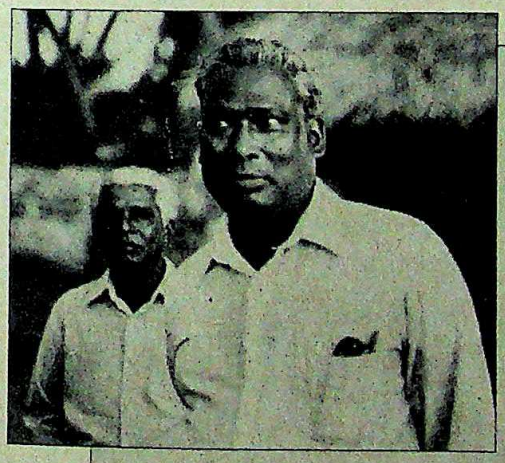
(Left) A typical French house; and playing *balle*: dying legacy

of the crowded Jawaharlal Nehru Street are all either English or Tamil.

Said Elizabeth Raj wistfully: "Perhaps French will totally cease to be spoken in Pondicherry." Danon Etoile adds: "Now if anyone tries to ask his way around in Pondicherry in French, he is unlikely to get anywhere. Even common French expressions are not understood any more." Till 1963, French was the only language which was in use in the civil and criminal courts in Pondicherry.

Now, not many of the 15,000 Indian-born French nationals in the Union territory speak French. Nor are many keen to join the Alliance Francaise to learn the language. The institute, which was once bursting with eager students, has seen a sudden decline in interest in the language.

The only French periodical to be published in Pondicherry, *Trait d'Union*, had a circulation of 3,000 before the merger. It now sells only 1,000 copies.



"The French history of Pondicherry seems to be slowly getting out of focus."

PAUL RATIER
Resident, Pondicherry

There are only a few French Pondicherrians who fly to Paris to work or study—and keep the Union territory's interest in France alive. More and more, these couriers of culture are preferring to stay at home. They no longer have any lively contact with France, the French language, life or culture.

Henri Coomes, the French consul-general in Pondicherry commented: "Five years ago, over 50 Pondicherrians used to go to Paris every year either for employment or for university education. Now, only 10 in a year go for higher studies and another 20 go for vocational training. And this figure will come down even further. Because of the growing unemployment in France, we are not able to welcome Pondicherrians with open arms."

With the French Government itself having lost interest in its distant former colony, people in Pondicherry have also forgotten their romantic, and not so distant, past. Says 54-year-old Joseph Goubert, son of the first chief minister of the town after the merger: "It all boils down to the French Government not spending money on Pondicherry." The distance between Paris and Pondicherry has remained the same but the gulf has widened unbridgeably.

The pressures of life and inflation have also found their way to this town, as they have everywhere else. Perhaps only the 2,000-odd French Pondicherrian pensioners here—who earn fabulous pensions ranging from Rs 4,000 to Rs 25,000 a month—can afford some of the luxuries of the old life: domestic servants, an afternoon siesta, beer in the morning, an aperitif in the evening. Admits Louis Clement, a 48-year-old prosperous pensioner: "We get together in the mornings and evenings in the bars and have a few drinks."

But these old world customs seem to be restricted to the pensioners. Like the young men of Tamil Nadu, their rich offspring have not maintained the old lifestyle and are now difficult to tell apart from their south Indian friends.

With the changes in the colony, the old-world ambience too is gone. Dr H.P. Mariadassou of the *Trait d'Union* says: "The habit of French courtesy has vanished from Pondicherry." The old gracious homes have made way for dingy cubby-holes, which give the town the flavour of Tamil Nadu rather than that of a gay Parisian suburb. Only one lawyer, G. Golandaivelu, bothers to wear the French robe in court anymore.

And what's left of France? A couple of bookshops, a restaurant or two, the antique French funeral carriage that is sometimes used—and a handful of people who still remember how to play the old French game *Jeux de Petanque*.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI in Pondicherry

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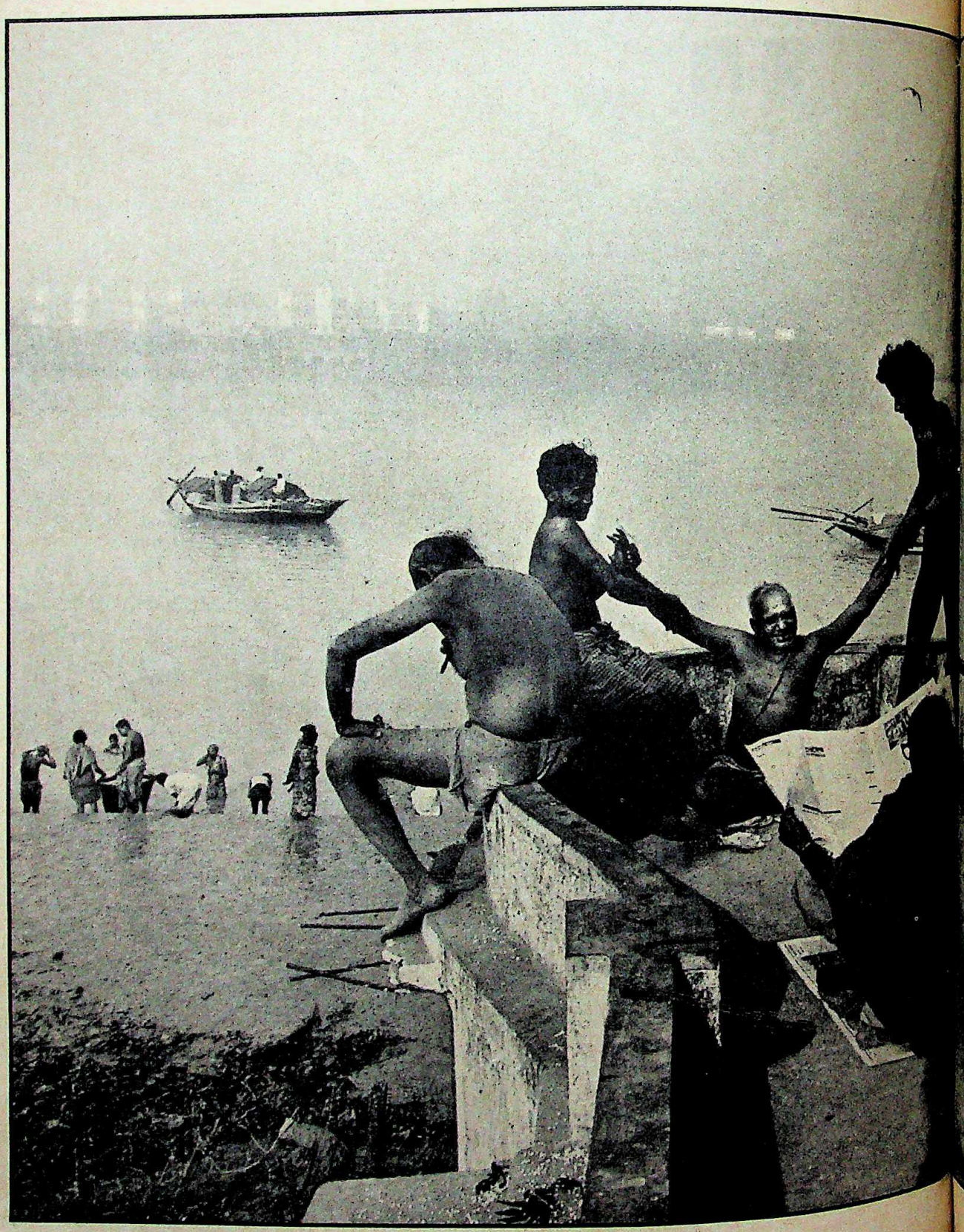

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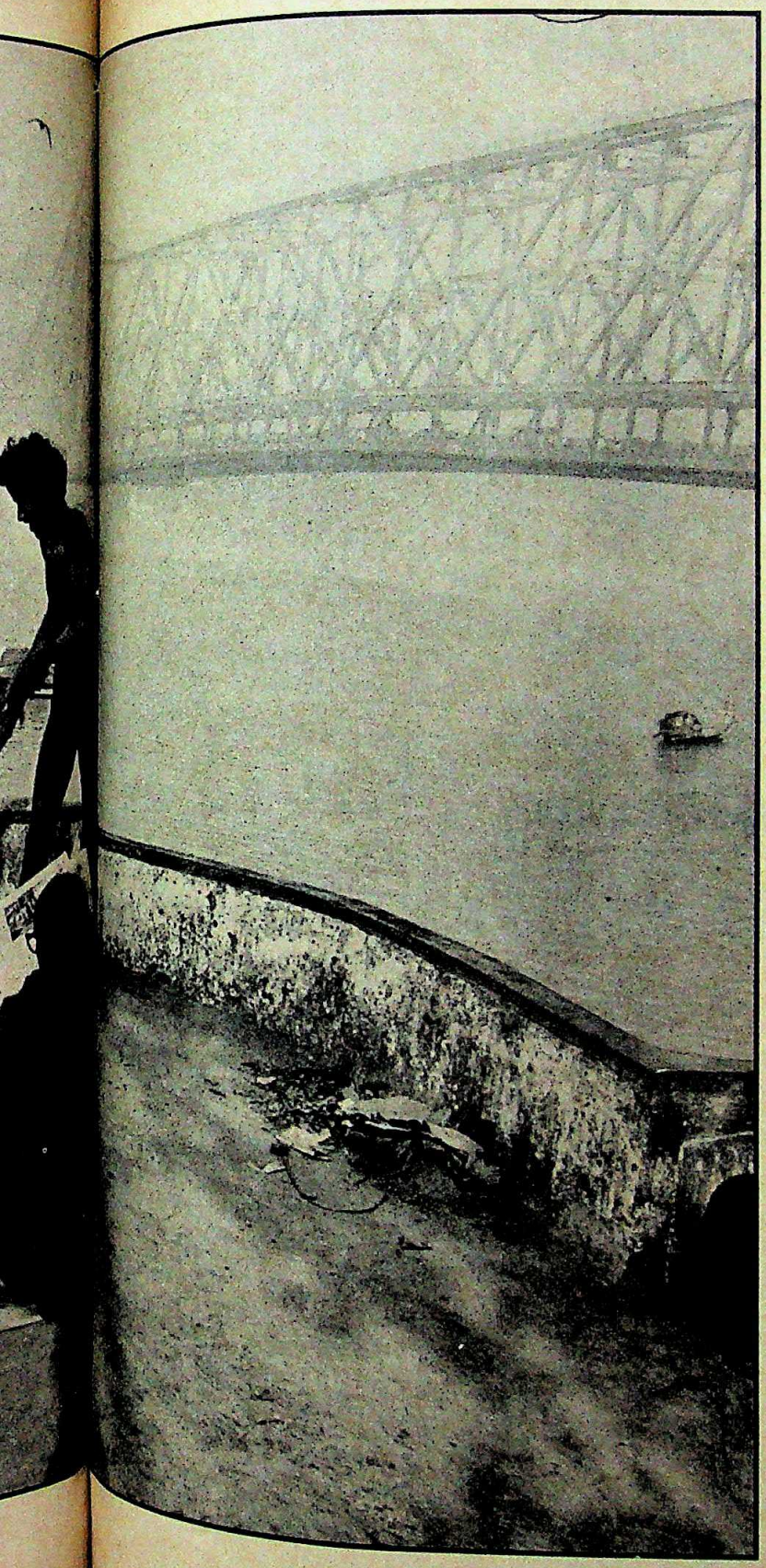

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BY RAGHU RAI

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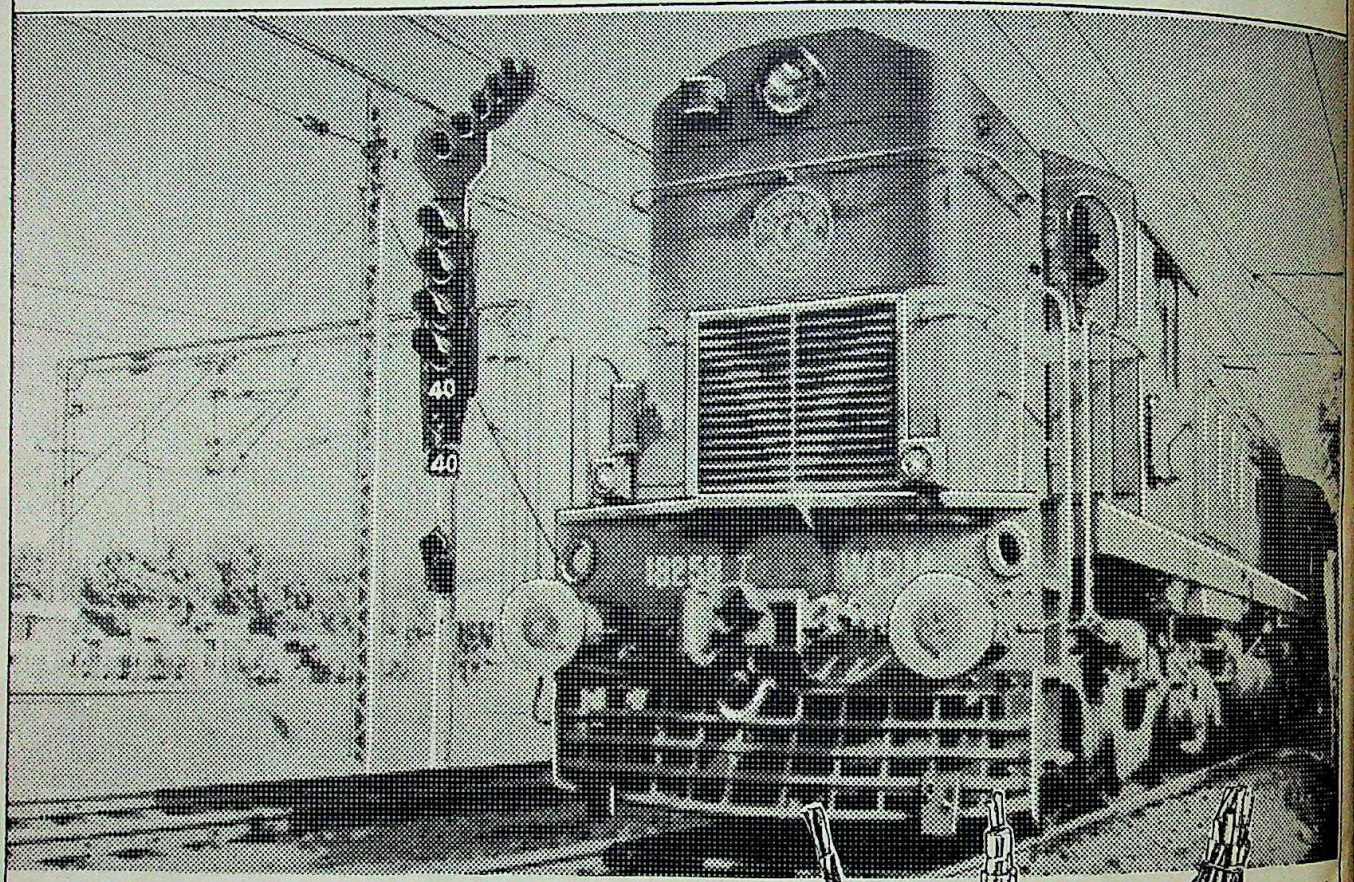

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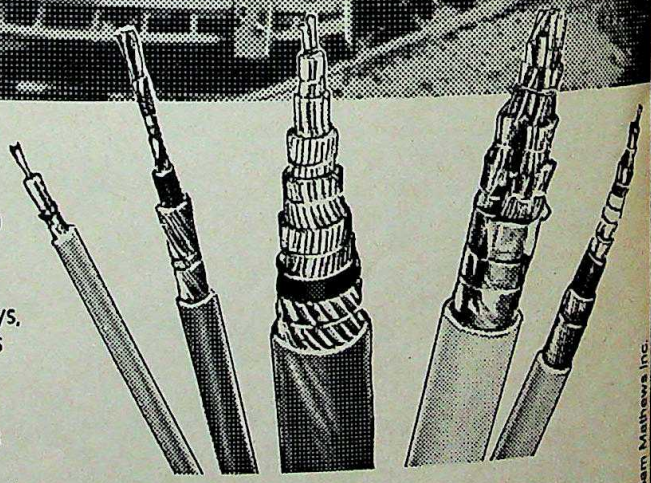

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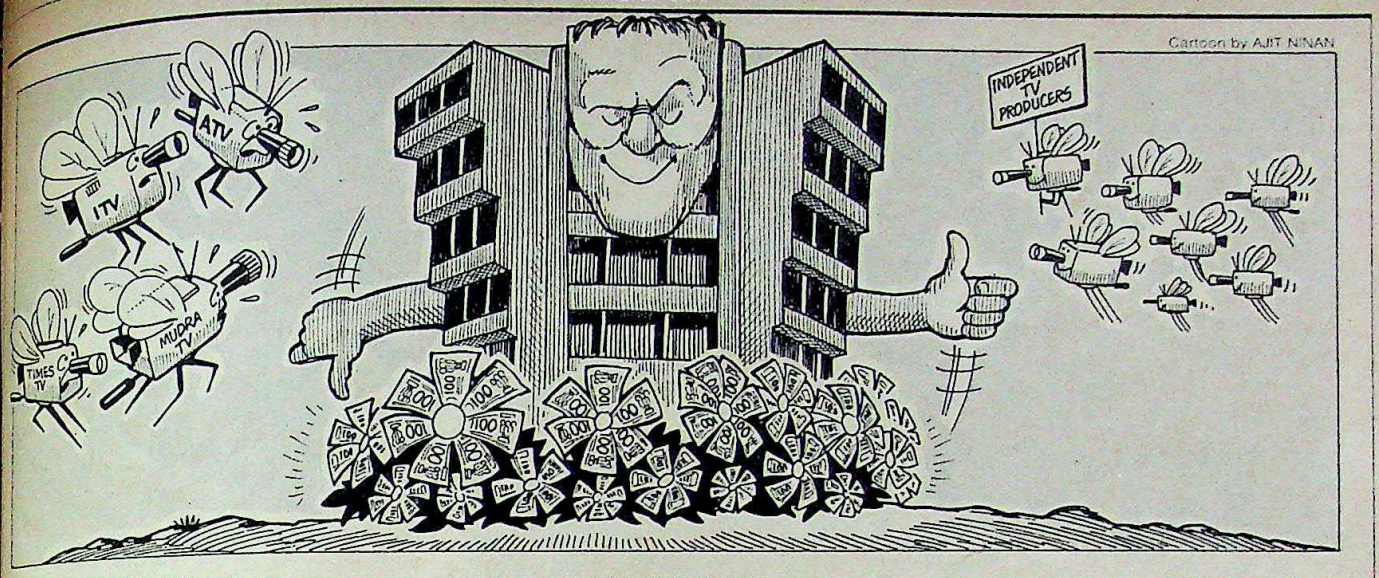

TV COMPANIES

Slow Fadeout

DOORDARSHAN two years ago gleamed like an El Dorado. Television companies sprouted overnight. Newspaper chains jumped onto the bandwagon—as did journalists believing that the age of TV journalism was finally dawning. But it is turning out to be MacKenna's Gold, an elusive mirage. The winding down of a few TV companies has begun. Others are diversifying or looking for new markets.

Times Television (from The Times of India group) has drastically cut down its production for the domestic market and begun to retrench; they are looking for buyers for their equipment. Says Gautam Adhikari, chief executive, Times Television: "We are reducing operations for our domestic production. But we are carrying on our international production." Mudra News and Features, set up last year, is sitting almost idle after having produced a few programmes for Doordarshan's morning transmission. ATV (Ananda Bazar Patrika group), with its trail-blazing current affairs programme, *Newsline*, is now concentrating on programmes for the external market, private and public sector firms. And Independent Television (ITV) has witnessed an exodus of staff and has problems with its new TV serial, *Bargat*.

The reason for the change of direction: Doordarshan has now decided to put on the cap of the producer. The mandarins of Mandi House want it to become a house of production rather than a clearing house. It has started to bypass the TV companies and go directly to independent producers. Explains Director-General Bhaskar Ghose: "Doordarshan had become a licence-giving authority. We were renting out our air time, like halls for marriages....Now we want to be more like a good publishing house. We will go to the producers with ideas which should be developed here. We would control the kind of serials and programmes we telecast, rather than biting our nails worrying about what is sent to us." In other words, "don't call us; we'll call you".

The process is already under way. Credit lines of the TV companies have begun to disappear: M.J. Akbar as presenter and Vinod Dua as producer do the current affairs programme, *Focus*—as they did *Newsline*—but they now do it for Doordarshan. The ATV logo does not appear. PTI provides news-clips and produces the economic programme, *Money Matters*, for morning TV, but no credit line either. Ditto Times Television's personality series, ITV's aerobics series and Mudra News and Features' *Suprabhat* programmes during the morning transmission. Obviously, Doordarshan wants to play down the contribution of "outsiders". Collective credit is given at the end of the morning transmission.

Doordarshan has succeeded in having its cake and eating it too. It continues to use outsiders as producers for its current affairs programmes—benefiting from any fresh approaches or technical finesse they might bring. Also, it no longer needs to use its editing scissors. Self-censorship is already the order of the day. Says an independent producer: "Some of us fear that we will end up producing slightly polished publicity hand-outs. But we really don't have any choice now." Thus, the current affairs programme, *Focus*, will be rotated amongst PTI, Akbar, Ashok Raina (formerly of ITV and Times Television), journalist Rasheed Talib, director Ramesh Sharma and others. There are plans to start a new current affairs programme, *Roving Report*, and another in Hindi.

In such a scenario, do big TV companies have a future? Dua believes they will have to change tack to survive. "They have a future provided they have good equipment like PTI. Or, they decide to become a satellite or an ally of Doordarshan. I would say that the individuals are more secure," asserts Dua. Adds Ramesh Sharma: "Doordarshan's appetite is gargantuan; it is becoming like a goat with a bottomless stomach, and Doordarshan alone does not have the facilities or the manpower to provide productions of an acceptable standard on a continuous basis." Sharma is also cautious about the change outsiders will bring: "They could bring technical expertise and create a new language within Doordarshan....But you can't expect an overnight change in their news and views." But Raina feels the mushrooming of studios and free-lancing technical expertise will help independent producers. "Three years ago you had to pay Rs 2,500 a day to rent a camera; today you can get one for Rs 900."

The larger TV companies have not quite pressed the panic button, but the mood is far from euphoric. Many TV companies are now concentrating on the domestic video market and overseas eco-productions as well as the ethnic market abroad. They are also concentrating on video programmes for private companies, state governments and public institutions. The golden goose is no longer the main dish.

—MADHU JAIN

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BANGALORE

Lingual Lesson

At the end of a narrow mud track in an outlying colony of Bangalore, is the Cauvery Primary School. It has a tiny yard as a playground and pigs wallow in filth outside. On its rolls are 75 students.

The Holy Jesus English School in Jayanagar has a picture of Christ wedged in between an array of Hindu gods. Over 100 children are crammed into one dingy room. Outside lies a handkerchief-sized playground with a rusty slide.

In Sarakki, the children of Modern School, located in a two-room tenement, face drying clothes and smells from the kitchens of a dozen households.

These are just three of the over 150 unauthorised English-medium primary schools that have mushroomed in one-room tenements, in backyards, in garages and even in shopping complexes in the past four years in Bangalore. Most are nothing but money-making rackets, horrifying examples of how dangerously commercialised primary education has become.

Most schools have about 30 students in each class and charge Rs 20 to Rs40 a month. All extort a non-refundable admission fee between Rs 100 to Rs 500. And most started as nursery schools for which no permission is required from the Government. Later, higher classes were added without informing the Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

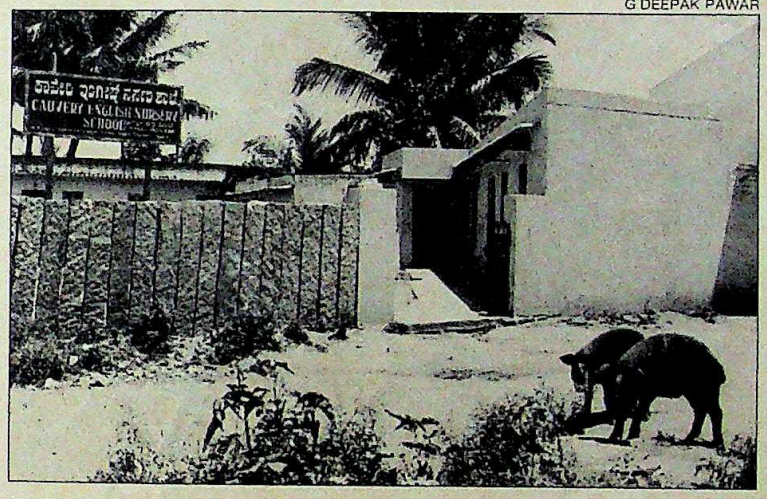
The main reason for the sudden spurt is a decision by the Janata Government, on the recommendation of the Gokak Committee report, that Kannada should be the sole first language of the state. The Government then imposed stringent regulations on the opening of English-medium primary schools. While private Kannada-medium schools were given permission, private English-medium schools were denied permission unless it was 'inevitable'. Says DPI Director C. Hanumegowda: "If we do not encourage Kannada in Karnataka, where else can it be encouraged?"

The result has been inevitable. Over 30 unauthorised English-medium primary schools have come up this year alone. The method is the same. A trust is formed and listed under the Registrar of Societies. The 'school' sports a large sign-board with the magic letter 'R', signifying it is registered. What parents don't realise is that it is the trust, not the school, which is registered.

The proliferation of such schools reveals that, in its zeal to promote Kannada, the state Government has overlooked the demand for English-medium schools. Points out Education Secretary Adip Choudhuri: "When there is a conflict between demand and supply, two things happen. Firstly, unauthorised English schools begin to mushroom. Secondly, the donation in the established schools goes up."

Primary school: illegal expansion

G DEEPAK PAWAR



Ever since the Karnataka Government decided to make Kannada the official language, unauthorised English-medium schools are mushrooming all over Bangalore city.

Both predictions have proved true. Donations in good schools, which till 1983 did not go beyond Rs 500 for a lower Kindergarten seat, have shot up to Rs 10,000. Also, most parents find it easier to send their children to schools close to their houses. And the unauthorised schools are mostly in south Bangalore, where the new housing colonies have come up.

To complicate the issue, many of the unauthorised schools which had sprouted in the initial phase of the boom were legitimised in 1984 by the state Government. "This was an anomalous decision," says Choudhuri, adding: "The law abiding citizen who wanted to start a school before 1983 but waited till he secured permission now has no chance. Those who took the law into their own hands and went ahead without getting permission prior to 1983 benefited".

Surprisingly, the DPI has no authority to take penal action against unauthorised schools. It can only issue a notification every year listing the unauthorised schools in the area. But, as DPI Deputy-Director Ravindranath, southern range, Bangalore, says: "The notification is only a warning to parents. Most of them do not know that the schools are unauthorised. We issue these notifications in the hope that parents will pull their children out of these schools and admit them to recognised schools."

The Education Department's helplessness has made many owners of these schools even more brazen. The Pearl Valley Vidya Niketan, a nursery which, in October 1985, applied for and was refused permission to run a primary school, went ahead and admitted students to Class I last year.

Ironically, these schools continue to flourish despite being illegitimate. Now, some have even started seeking affiliations to the Delhi-based Indian Certificate of Secondary Education Board and the Central Board of Secondary Education. And the state Government seems to be encouraging them. In the last two years, at least four schools have been granted a no objection certificate.

The answer to the problem is obvious. Says Choudhuri: "Judging by the public demand, the restriction curbing English-medium schools should be withdrawn." But as long as the state Government's education policy continues to be governed by language chauvinism, cash registers of unauthorised schools will continue to ring louder than the school bells.

—ANITA PRATAP

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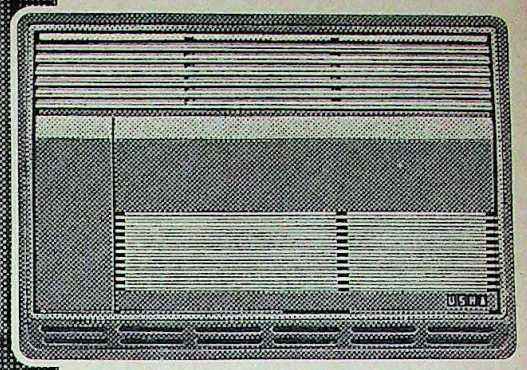

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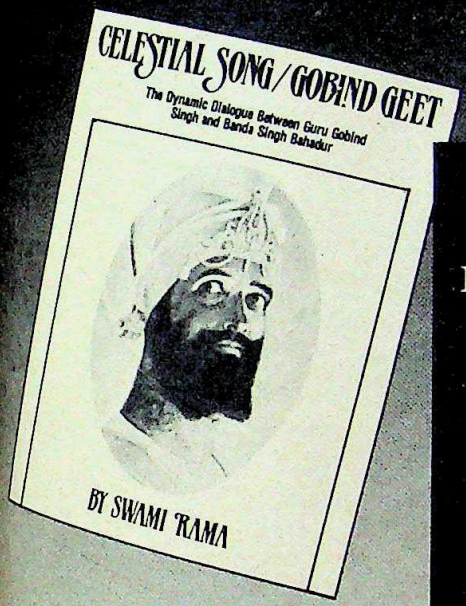

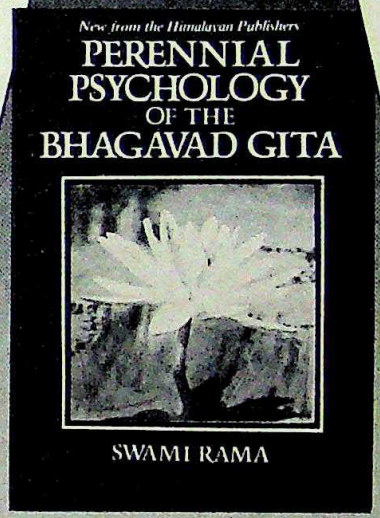

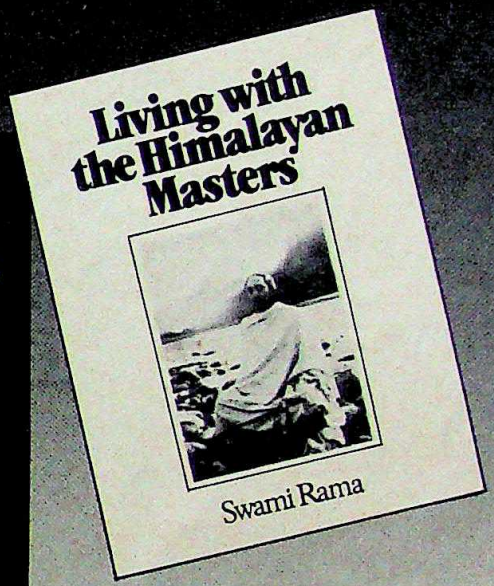

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SUPERCONDUCTORS

New Energy

ON the surface, any attempt to electrify a material to conduct current with virtually no loss of energy would seem a pipe-dream. There are plenty of materials around to carry current with minimum energy loss. But what excites scientists is the esoteric search for materials that act as superconductors—to perform the trick of carrying current with no loss, which all known existing materials cannot—while at the same time costing little and weighing even less.

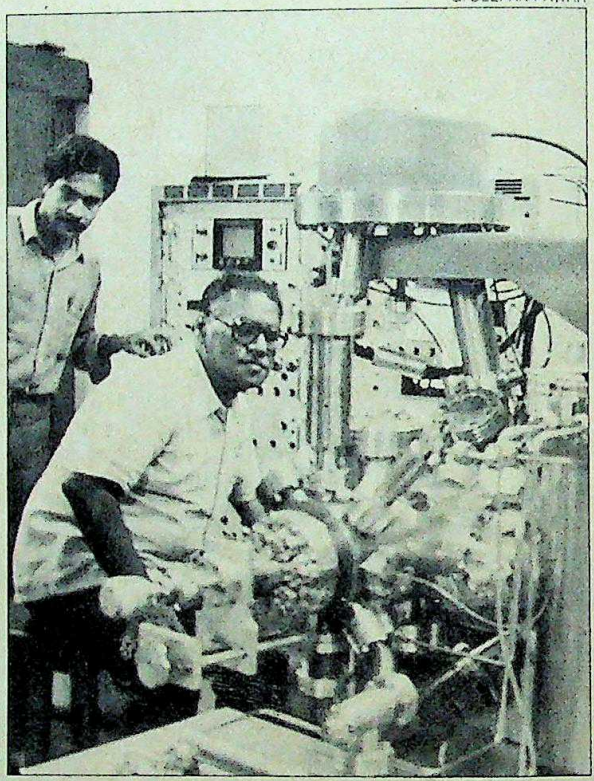
For more than 70 years, scientists believed such materials which superconduct exist only at extremely low temperatures of minus 250°C. But finally, last year the first stirrings of a major breakthrough came when Dr George Bendorz and Dr Alex Muller at IBM's research laboratories in Zurich saw some strange signs of superconductivity in a compound of lanthanum, barium and copper oxide. Soon, physicists across three continents—America, Europe and Asia—discovered materials that superconduct at higher temperatures. And the latest claim by American scientists is of a material superconducting at minus 48°C.

The discovery has energised Indian scientists working on superconductors. Existing groups on superconductivity research got together in seven laboratories across the country soon after the startling finds were reported. And the Department of Science and Technology funding piece-meal research on superconductors, asked Professor C.N.R. Rao, director and leader of the group at the Indian Institute of Science (IISC), Bangalore, to coordinate the work.

Researchers met for the first time in Bangalore on April 14 and concluded that their work was in the stages of infancy. As a sequel, last month, the prime minister's science adviser Professor M.G.K. Menon went around for a first-hand review of the existing state of research work. And on May 28, Rajiv Gandhi sat in a discussion to work out plans to step up research on superconductors in areas where it might be useful in the country.

However, existing programmes on superconductor research in India are small and the total number of researchers are about 50 compared to Japan, where there are about 500 teams working on superconductor research projects. "The worldwide hysteria," as Dr R. Vijayaraghavan of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) calls the new wave of interest, rejuvenated the teams in Indian laboratories to concoct more materials that become superconductors at higher temperatures and be part of the international race. Scientists of the TIFR and the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Trombay, jointly hold the newest Indian record of synthesising material which superconducts at minus 166°C.

G. DEEPAK PAWAR



C.N. Rao researching superconductors

The TIFR-BARC team used samples of a crystalline complex of yttrium, strontium, barium and copper oxide. The National Physical Laboratory and the National Chemical Laboratory which got into the game later are yet to announce their findings. But in Madras, the Material Sciences Research Centre of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) headed by Dr G.V. Subba Rao has developed more than 50 new materials based on the rare earth-barium-copper-oxygen system for testing at the institute's low temperature laboratory and at the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research at nearby Kalpakkam. "We have been producing samples at a much faster pace than they can be tested," said an exultant Subba Rao.

Other superconductor researchers at the IISC, Bangalore, are on a different track. They are looking at the stoichiometry—the numerical proportion of the various elements in the materials—to find out what kind of chemical structure is most conducive to produce superconducting qualities in materials. The presence of copper oxide appears to be vital for their superconducting quality. And in keeping with competitive research, Indian scientists have prepared and despatched scientific papers. Says Dr R.M. Iyer, head of the chemical division of BARC: "We are the first Indians to send out a scientific paper and the prestigious journal *Physical Review* accepted it." Others at IIT, Madras, are preparing papers to be presented at conferences in Japan in August and the US in October this year.

Clearly 1987 is a watershed for superconductor research and Professor C.N.R. Rao says a plan giving the research priority will be ready in June. BARC is to work on the making of thin films, for it believes one of the best uses of superconductors in India is in microelectronics.

What is perhaps most striking about this esoteric search is that scientists still do not know how superconductivity occurs and how the process takes place, though there are many theories afloat to explain the phenomenon. It is for this reason that all groups, including the Indians, are cagey about revealing the composition of the superconducting materials developed by them till it is recorded as their contribution in a research journal.

But to make research meaningful, it will have to be tied up with industry. Cautioned Dr S. Ramseshan, director, Raman Research Institute, Bangalore: "Indian industry has to be organised to receive new technology developed in the country, otherwise superconductors will meet the same fate as semi-conductors. There will be few takers." Unless the interface with industry improves, scientists will have only pensions and no credits to take home as reminders of their work.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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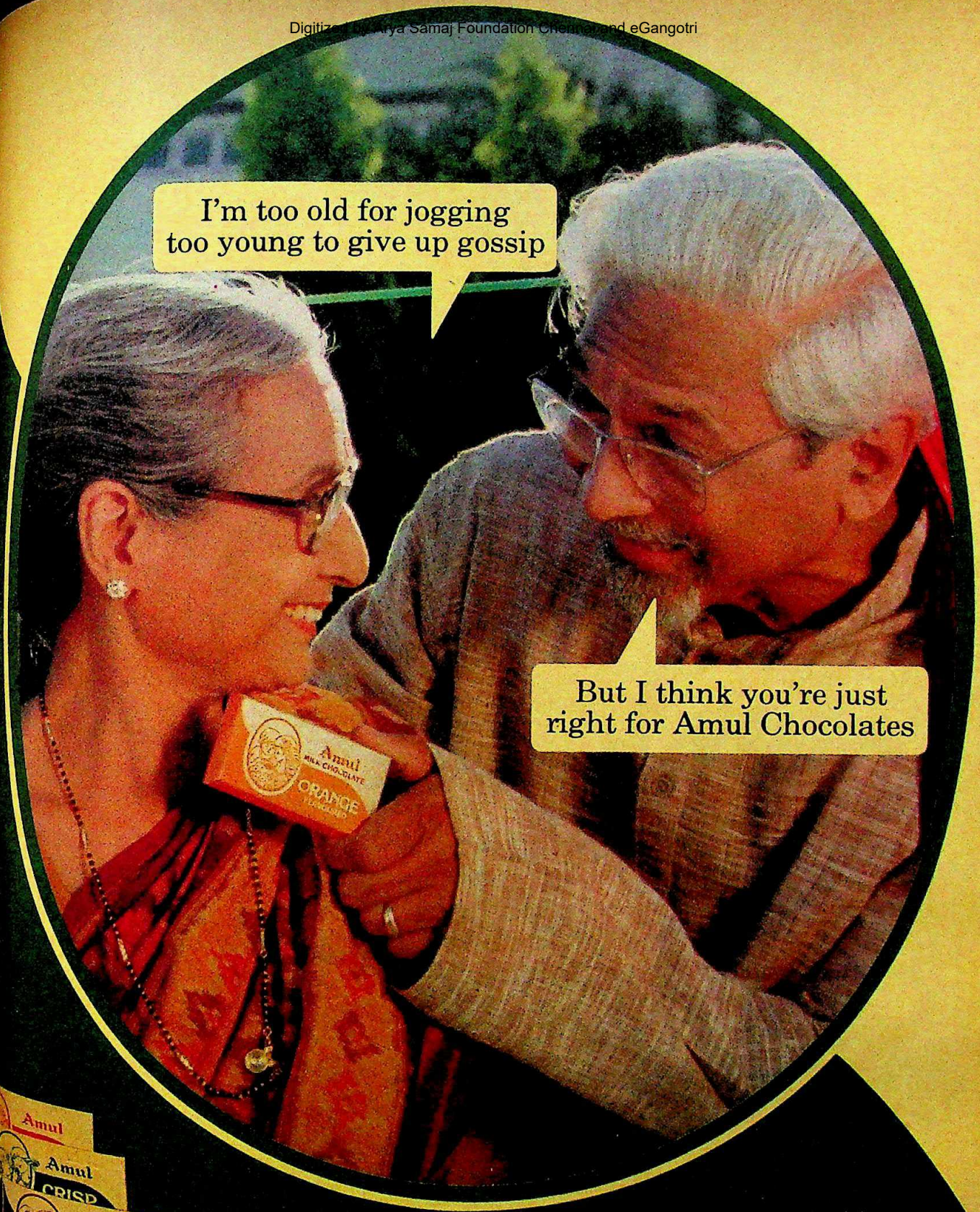

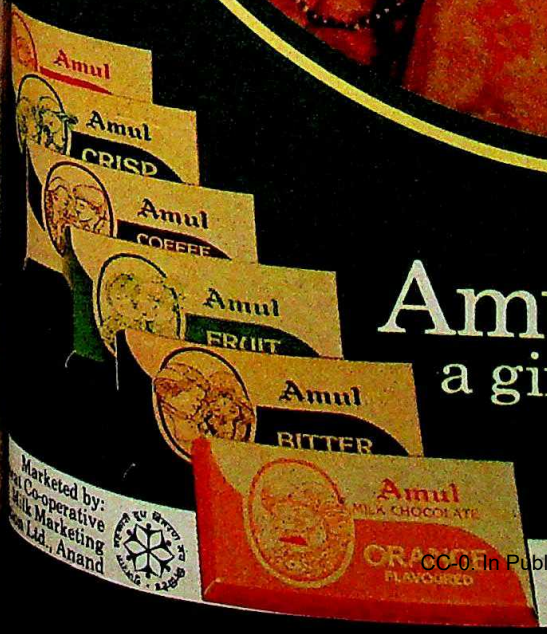

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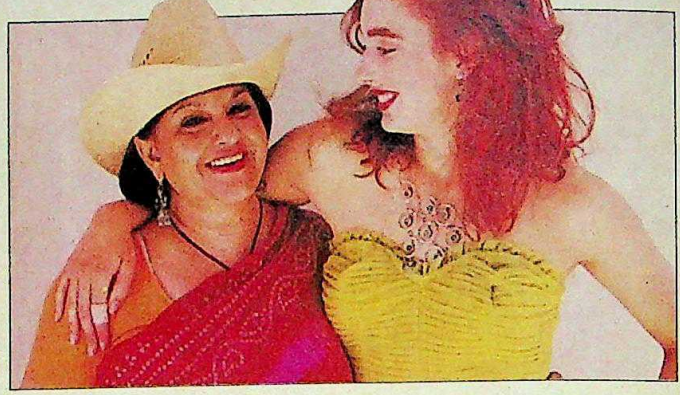
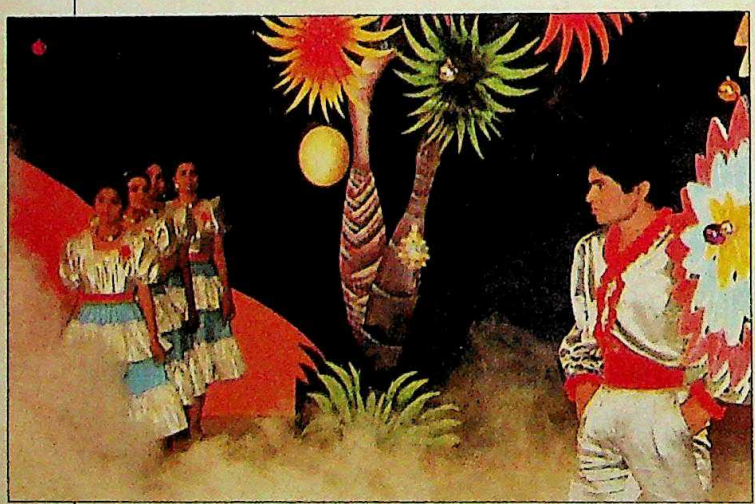
◆ The east-west encounter does not only take place in beautiful laundrettes: it's now hotel time—as Bombay's veteran actress **Pearl Padamsee** heads for Hollywood to play Mrs Shah, a tough Gujarati lady who runs a flea-bag hotel in San Francisco. For **David Rathod**'s (son of film maker Kantilal Rathod) American film *West is West*, Padamsee—for whom the maiden experience of working with an American crew was "terrific" and the role a real challenge—spent several months researching the famous Gujarati Midas touch in San Francisco. Says the gregarious actress: "The character I play fights against people who use diabolical methods to try to take over the hotel."



Padamsee with co-star



Yadav: sweet dreams

◆ Imagine the small, meek-looking man who played Massey Sahib to perfection—and won a prestigious award—switching to a Mithun Chakravarty disco dancer number to the tune of *Tum kahan ho* (his own voice too) in a gaudily luminescent outfit. Exploiting the chameleon quality of actor **Raghuvir Yadav**, director **Prakash Jha** has confected a perfect *desi* Walter Mitty for a new television serial called *Mungeri Lal Ka Haseen Sapna* (Mungeri Lal's beautiful dream). A henpecked clerk and a total misfit in the real world despite—or because of—his double M.A. in Philosophy and Sanskrit, Mungheri Lal's fantasy life puffs him into a super star, a super cop who chases down a dangerous escaped convict, a surgeon who works miracles, or a godman come to save the world. Will the real Raghubir Yadav ever stand up?

Aziz: dulcet videos

◆ Ghazal videos? Yes. Well, finally, it had to happen. Pop videos, with their amazing special effects, didn't quite xerox onto Indian culture. But those belting, love-sick croonings do. They will now come with slicked-up, beauty-parloured ghazal singers who will now have to look good as well as sound good while they inspire customers to buy up their offerings.

For a start, the dulcet tones of **Talat Aziz** have now been "picturised" in a 90-minute video cassette to go with his new cassette, *Tasavvur*. He also has a co-star, new find Jharna. And Sarita Sethi, fresh off the sets from *Buniyaad*, strings the two 'ghazlings' together.

◆ "Like Eleanor Roosevelt, I've come to learn." With daughter Donna in tow, **Geraldine Ferraro's** first passage to India is a reconnaissance mission, relieved by an exotic three-week holiday on the side. Or, maybe, the other way around. The former American vice-presidential candidate—who finally had to bow out, following relentless press reports about allegedly dubious real estate connections—is looking for a "corresponding body" for the National Democratic Institute, where she is on the board of directors. The Institute extends a friendly hand to Third World democracies. Ferraro, who is more than amply qualified, delivered a lecture at Delhi's India International Centre on "The American Political Scene: Prospects for 1988"—before setting off to survey the Indian tourist scene.

RAGHU RAI

Ferraro and Donna: a quest

◆ The leopard does not change its spots; nor the fox its hunting ground. But for the celluloid incarnation of Tariq Ali's trilogy *The Leopard and the Fox*, on the rise and fall of Zulfiqar Bhutto and the rise and rise of Zia-ul-Haq, the protagonists will move out of local habitats. **Roshan Seth** as Bhutto and **Shabana Azmi** as Benazir will shift to Cyprus—permission in Pakistan or India being unlikely. The BBC was to have made the controversial film for Britain's Channel Four—but they got cold feet. Says Ali: "There were three meetings, and they reached casting stage...but the lawyers said no."

HARI OM GUJRAT

Azmi and Seth: for posterity

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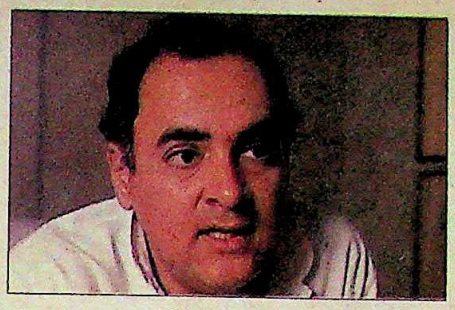
IN FOCUS THIS FORTNIGHT

Tackling the Tigers

India's decision last fortnight, to airdrop supplies over Jaffna has opened up a diplomatic Pandora's box. New Delhi justifies its act as a humanitarian necessity. But it is now entangled directly in the ethnic crisis dividing the island.

COVER STORY 24



"I am much the wiser"

Despite the crises exploding around him, the country's youngest prime minister remains unfazed. Rajiv Gandhi's boyish spontaneity broke through as he dealt confidently with a wide range of questions in an exclusive interview.

INTERVIEW OF THE FORTNIGHT. 36

The Smoking Gun

The much-awaited Swedish Audit Bureau report on Bofors pay-offs, though incomplete, has demolished the Rajiv Gandhi Government's claims on middlemen and commissions. It has confirmed that Rs 35 crore to Rs 50 crore was paid to an agent.

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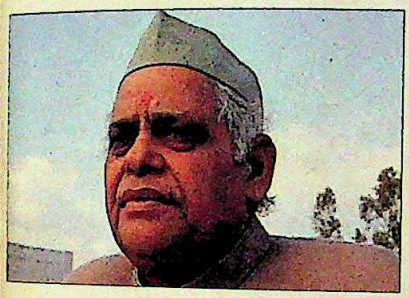

The Lawless State

The massacre of 41 Rajputs in Baghaura and Dalelchak villages of Aurangabad district was unprecedented in its scale of brutality, even by Bihar's horrifying standards of caste carnages. A report and interview with state Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey:

SPECIAL REPORT 86

A Ritzy Revolution

The market-place has been overtaken by a packaging revolution. Tins and poly jars have suddenly become outdated. They are fast being replaced by tetrabricks, pouches and aerosol cans which have moved in, jostling for space on shop shelves.

BUSINESS 104

The New Box Office Goddess

With the stupendous success of *Nagina*, Sridevi has emerged as the undisputed empress of tinsel town. She is now the highest paid Indian actress in the glitzy world of Indian films. A profile and an interview of the new screen dream girl.

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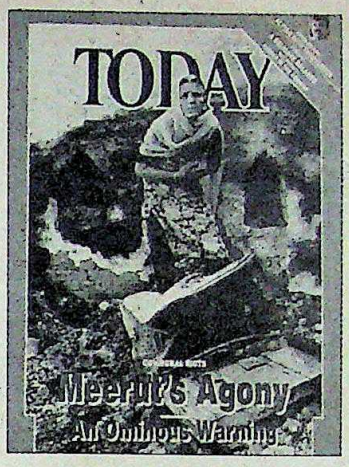

CURBING COMMUNALISM

Communal violence seems to be spreading through the country like wildfire ("The Agony of Meerut", June 15). The Government must come out with stern long-term measures, not only to control such incidents when they do occur, but also to prevent such outbreaks from happening at all. Special attention should be paid to prevent such riots from spreading to newer areas. This is important. Otherwise, the situation will get out of control.

Ahmedabad KAMLESH G. VARYANI

■ The criminal incompetence of the administration in failing to maintain the peace in Meerut and Delhi should be punished by at least divesting it of the authority that it wielded so ineffectively.

Bangalore G.S. CHANDY

■ Your plaintive cover photograph and hard-hitting cover story were indicative of the sinking of the nation's psyche. Human lives seem mere trifles for the 'religious', and the police seem fit to join the Nazis in history's cess-pool.

Bangalore B. VINOD KUMAR

■ It is a sorry state when a government that boasts of being secular and tries to solve the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka has its own house on fire—in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat. An inefficient Home Ministry is given a clean chit, the law and order machinery is not taken to task for killing innocents.

Riyadh ABDUL RASHEED KHAN

GOVERNMENT FAILURE

Your editorial ("A Deadly Confrontation", June 15) rightly points out the Uttar Pradesh administration's failure to effectively deal with the Meerut riot, a failure which scarred the nation's psyche. The suggestions in your editorial appeal to a secular mind and should be put into practice.

Marunthancode G. DAVID MILTON

■ Congratulations for writing a well-argued comment on communalism. But it was not exhaustive. The media should have exhaustive discussions on the role, function and scope of religion. And in order to decrease the differences between people, there should be one civil code for all Indians, just as there is one criminal code.

Delhi PARJAN KUMAR JAIN

BIASED OBITUARY

Your story on Charan Singh ("Death of a Rural Voice", June 15) is a complete hatchet job. You have concentrated entirely on the negative aspects of his personality—showering him with epithets like power-hungry, petty, self-destructive—but have virtually nothing positive to say about a man, rare among Indian politicians, who articulated a clear, alternative economic framework to the prevailing one, who won the undying adulation of North India's intermediate peasantry for his role in zamindari abolition and for voicing their cause, and whom even his opponents referred to as simple, honest and dedicated. Surely this man deserved a more balanced obituary.

Delhi VINOD CHOWDHURY

UNEQUAL SHARING

Apropos your write-up about the Eradi Commission award ("Muddying the Waters", June 15), in view of the contradictions in the tribunal's report viv-a-vis the Punjab accord, it wouldn't be improper to dismiss the award as "Radi Report". Besides, once the Haryana elections are over, there is every likelihood of the report being dumped into the dustbin by the Central Government.

Amritsar KAMALJIT SINGH AHLUWALIA

TIME FOR NEGOTIATIONS

The imposition of President's rule in Punjab ("A Risky Gambit", May 31) at this juncture is an intelligent exercise in the governance of the crisis-ridden state. It will certainly help in reducing the escalating terrorist activity. The present regime should stop the migration of the minority communities and, more important, start a dialogue with the moderate

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and extremist groups to solve the problem once and for all.

S. Paravur — V. JAYAPRAKASH

■ Your cover story fails to look sympathetically at the decision of the Congress Party to impose President's rule in Punjab. It had become very clear to all of us concerned that the law enforcing agencies of the Barnala regime had become totally defunct. Hindu residents of Punjab had to migrate, terrorists killed innocent civilians with impunity, external forces had become predominant, and the state was in total disarray. And with ministers like Chandumajra and others involved in slanging matches with the unimpeachable Director-General of Police Ribeiro, the Congress and Rajiv Gandhi had little choice.

Ahmedabad — ARCHAN MEHTA

■ Commonsense seems to have been sacrificed at the altar of political expediency. The release of the Eradi Commission report and description of imposition of President's rule as temporary clearly indicate that Rajiv is no more interested in the implementation of the accord, but only in retaining the Hindi belt in order to stop the Congress(I) from becoming a regional party.

Bombay — S.A. SRINIVASA SHARMA

OBFUSCATING ISSUES

Your special report on business ("Heading for Trouble", May 31) attempts to obfuscate the real issues behind the poor showing of Indian industry—inefficiency and mismanagement—by raising the bogey of demand recession and blaming the Government's policies for it.

The "Bombay-based financially crippled man-made fibre unit" (Nirlon) and "the moped company of Bangalore with French collaboration" (Chamundi Mopeds) are not victims of looming industrial recession. The real reason is, in the first case, a running feud between its two managing directors and amateurish handling of a labour dispute, and in the second, a laughable attempt to sell its product at a 50 per cent higher price than the competition without offering significant justifying features. The reason for poor showing in light commercial vehicles is not poor offtake but misjudgement and lethargy in response to the yen's appreciation.

It is heartening, therefore, to note that IDBI Chairman S.S. Nadkarni and other government officials have correctly diagnosed the current shake-out as a weeding out process for inefficient units and refuse to be alarmed.

Bombay — N.M. KARANDIKAR & A. AGRAWAL

CRUMBLING SYSTEM

It has been rightly pointed out in your Comment ("Disintegrated Circuits," May 31) that the present political system is not acting in unison. It is no longer an organism with all its limbs functioning in coordination; it has been slaughtered and its limbs are ready for sale.

Gulbarga — TIRUMAL MUNDARGI

■ Your comment candidly depicts the circumstances we are in. While the brute majority is having its sway, the intellectuals, perforce, are keeping their mouths shut. The future is dark, except for those who matter at the Centre.

Jamshedpur — DR SAROJ MOHANTY

UNFAIR COMMENT

In your article on Jamini Roy ("An Indian Sensibility", May 31), you have, through the comment of Dr Kejriwal of Chitrakoot Art Gallery, Calcutta, accused Jamini Roy's son Amiya Roy of painting "fake Jamini Roys" till his death. This is objectionable. Amiya Roy was a mosaic painter of his own style. He had been a life-long assistant to his father and since 1977, had been suffering from Parkinson's disease. It is an impossible task for a paralytic patient to continue painting.

In April 1987, to commemorate the birth centenary of Jamini Roy several galleries in Calcutta held exhibitions of his paintings. An English daily accused one of the galleries of exhibiting fake Jamini Roy paintings. According to newsmen, the exhibits came from two individuals and of course, I am sure, Amiya Roy was not one of them.

Calcutta — ASHOKE ROY

YUPPY CULTURE

Your article about Marutis and their owners ("A Brash New Culture", May 31) was informative and enjoyable. But there was one small mistake. The movie mentioned in the article as *Night Rider* is not quite correct. It is *Knight Rider* and it is a serial, not a movie. It gets its name from the man who drives the car, Michael Knight.

Trinidad — DEEPAK PANDEY

■ I was amused and shocked by the story. Amused that there are car owners who waste so much money in dressing their cars; shocked that they get away with it. Here it is illegal to add anything, not even tinted glasses, without the approval of the Registrar of Vehicles. Laws must be the same in India, except that there is no rule of law.

Singapore — S.L. BUDHRANI

PEOPLE'S MANDATE

The Haryana elections ("The Besieged Fortress", May 31) can predict the future of the Rajiv Gandhi Government. Bofors and Fairfax are all laid on Haryana soil. The judgement of the people will be seen in the ballot box and we can be sure that it will be more than Justice Thakkar and Justice Natrajan's report on the issue.

Moradabad — Jr VIJAY SIROHI

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

With reference to your report ("Kickback Row", April 30), S.K. Bhatnagar, defence secretary, had nothing to do with the selection of German submarines. Bhatnagar has also not been appointed to head the inquiry committee which is probing the deal. The committee which he heads has been asked to check into the modus operandi of agents in connection with the defence deals.

Delhi — A.K. ROY
director, Directorate of Public Relations, Defence Ministry

HOUSE GROUSE

I refer to your article about the house purchased by me in August 1986 ("Undervalued Officials", March 31) in the name of my wife (for purely sentimental reasons). The notice issued by the Income Tax Department does mention Rs 10.08 lakh (not Rs 10.8 lakh as mentioned in your report), but, on February 25, a few days after your correspondent met me, when our representative went up to the department as required, we were given a valuation report in which the value estimated was found to be Rs 7.66 lakh.

We requested the department to let us know the basis for the notice figure of Rs 10.08 lakh; in response, a brief report drawn up by another official was given to us which contains this figure of Rs 10.08 lakh. The appropriate submissions are being made in this regard to the income tax authorities.

Bhopal — G. JAGATHPATHI

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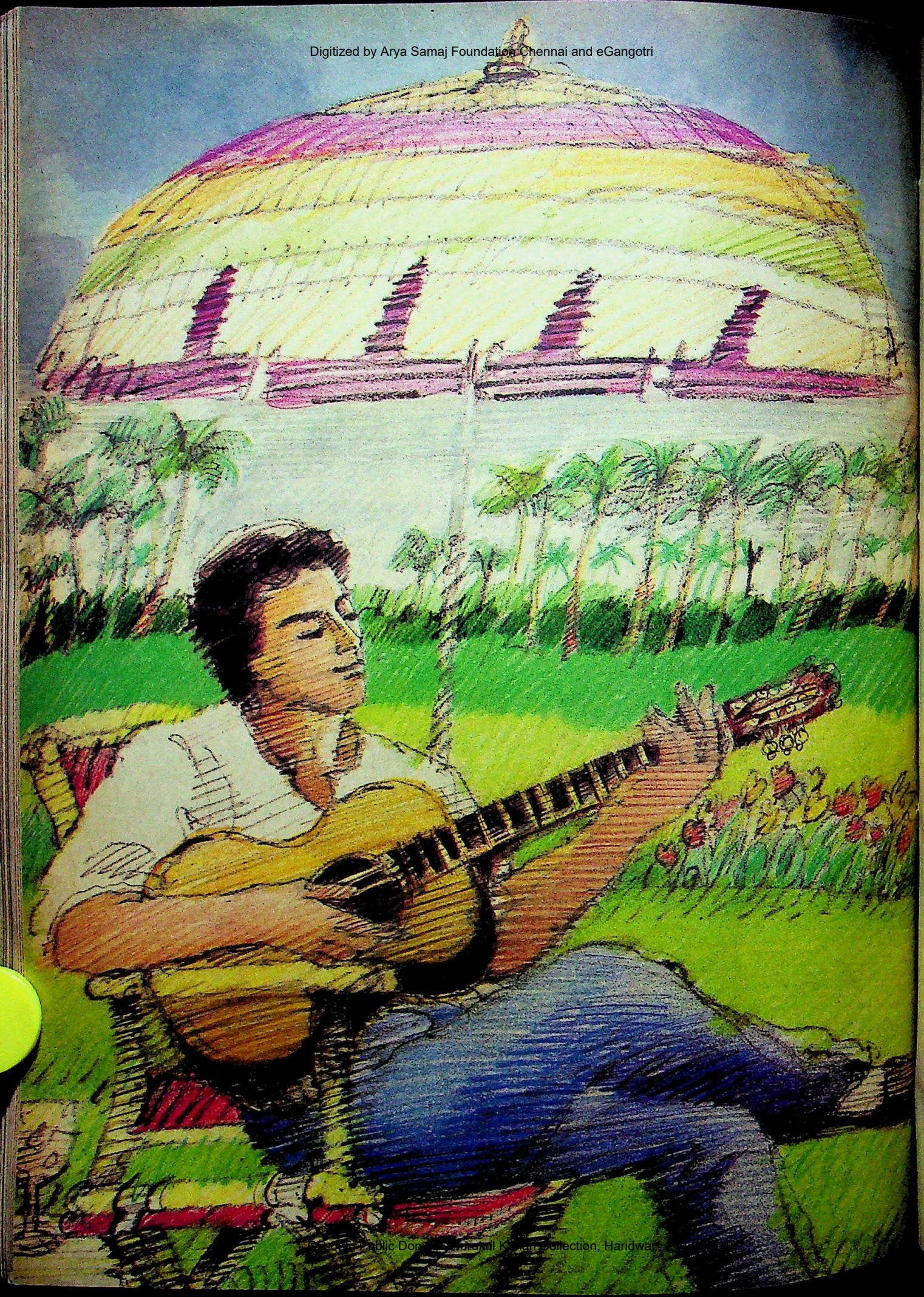

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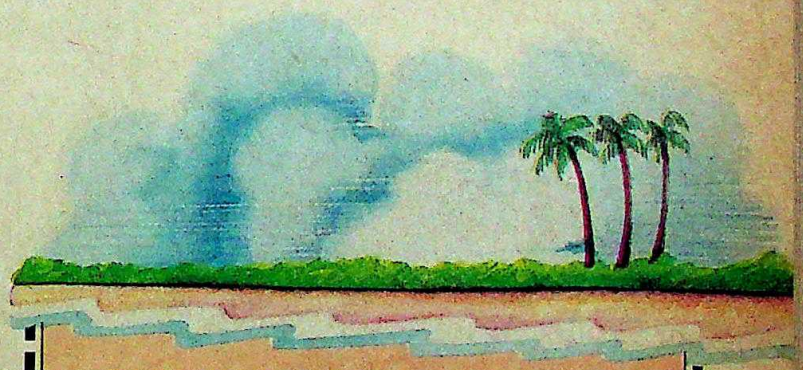
In Goa during the rains, the earth reaches out to wind and water. Emerald discovers the land. The soil is scented with life, green, flowering, newly risen. Turn where you will, the images of a rich, fresh land celebrate the eye.

It is a time for good company, a lively bottle, song, great food, the fellowship of friends. Visitors vow they will return with the next rains. And even honeymooners have been known to rise, go forth, and make happy new discoveries. Small wonder then that Goans would rather be in Goa in the monsoon than anywhere else.

So will you.



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1987 good reasons to see Thailand this year.

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Among the kaleidoscope of festivities planned for 1987 you should try to catch some of these:

Feb. 13-15. Chiang Mai Flower Festival. A million blooms, a thousand smiles. One of the unforgettable moments of your life.

April 13. Songkran Festival. A nationwide water festival celebrating the Thai Lunar New Year.

May 9-10. Bun Bang Fai Festival. "Bang!" indeed. Held in northeast Thailand, a fireworks show like no other you've ever seen.

Oct. 16. Royal Barge Procession. An armada of brilliant colours, pageantry and rare splendour not to be missed.

Nov. 5. Loy Krathong. Celebrated nationwide, this is Thailand's loveliest festival.

Nov. 14-15. The Elephant Round-Up. Come to Surin in northeast Thailand for this extraordinary display.

Nov. 22. Bangkok Marathon. A major sporting event commemorating His Majesty the King's 60th Birthday Anniversary.

Dec. 15. Light and Sound Presentation. A glittering occasion to be held at the Royal Grand Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

These are only a small selection of the truly stunning special events that mark 1987 as Visit Thailand Year.

Make your holiday plans now. And make sure you fly on Thailand's own airline, Thai International. Where the exotic sensations that are Thailand start from the moment you step on board.

Thai

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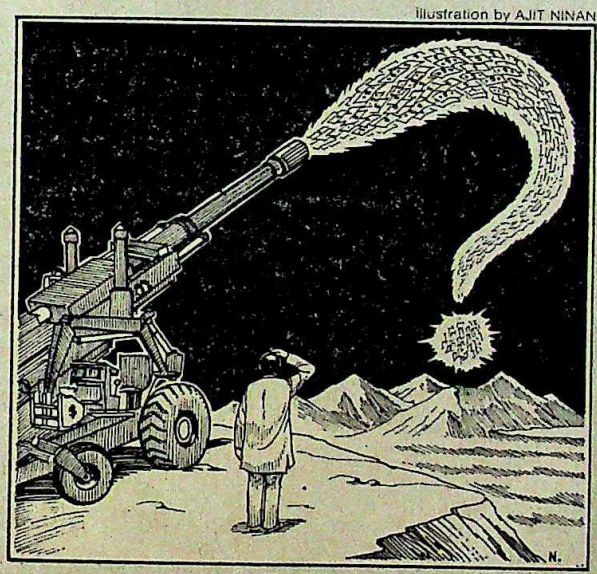
Explosive Questions

THE findings of the inquiry conducted by the National Audit Bureau of Sweden, into the commissions paid by howitzer-manufacturer Bofors in connection with its Rs 1,400-crore deal with India, have served as an eye-opener. The findings have clarified issues that had been sought to be obfuscated, silenced the orchestrated drum-beat about destabilisation, and raised several questions about the Government's credibility and precise intentions. There is little doubt that this is now one scandal that cannot be wished away.

The essential facts stand out clearly. Bofors did pay money to an Indian agent; the payment was in connection with the controversial deal; it was made into Swiss bank accounts; and the sums involved (up to Rs 50 crore) seem much too big to be related to general support services like booking airline tickets (as had once been claimed). The Bofors explanation—that these were payments connected with winding up the arrangement with its Indian agent—may or may not be technically correct, but only the enduringly gullible will believe that it is the whole truth. For there can be little doubt that the commission was meant to be used as bribes.

Illustration by AJIT NINAN



Swedish Radio (which first lifted the lid on the whole affair) now stands vindicated, and the Government's and the Congress(I) Working Committee's somewhat tired war cry about the foreign hand and destabilisation stands exposed as nothing but cynical slogan-mongering designed to pull the wool over people's eyes. The issues are real, the bribes have been paid, and the stench of corruption will not go away.

The agent's identity is as yet unknown, but he is probably the man who denied such payments in the past and who has now flown the country with his family. But more important than this is another question: for whom was the money ultimately meant?

That answer can come only when more information is released, because what is known so far is only a fraction of the whole truth. Vital details have been held back by both Bofors and the Swedish Government. But on this aspect too, the Indian Government's response has once again been thoroughly unsatisfactory. When the heat was on in Parliament, it declined to have an inquiry conducted by a parliamentary committee, arguing that the Swedish Government had been asked to investigate. The two need not have been mutually exclusive. Now when the situation calls for urgent follow-up measures, the sudden eagerness for a parliamentary inquiry can only be interpreted as a flanking manoeuvre.

Quite apart from the fact that a parliamentary committee will have no powers to seek information abroad—either from Bofors, or from the Swedish authorities, or from Switzerland—the Government seems to be dragging its feet on the first step: the actual setting up of the committee. Besides all this, there is the obvious question of what is being done about the illegal commission of Rs 30 crore paid on the deal with a German company for submarines.

The Government, of course, still claims complete innocence, and the prime minister continues to maintain that he is as interested in getting to know the culprits, and to catch them, as anyone else. But its actions so far do not measure up to this public stance. Indeed, the Government has to explain how it maintained complete silence for so long on a Bofors communication in April, admitting that payments had been made. On this account alone, the Government's credibility in the whole affair wears dangerously thin.

If the Bofors gun is to point anywhere other than at the Government itself, Rajiv Gandhi must straightaway take a series of obvious steps. He must ask the Swedish authorities for all the information they have withheld. He must ask Bofors to return the money that has been paid into Swiss bank accounts, or reduce by a like amount the sum that India has to pay to it for equipment supplied. This should be demanded on pain of cancelling the contract for breach of its conditions. Bofors clearly has more to lose than India if the contract is cancelled, and the Government of India holds the whip. Similarly, Bofors must be asked to provide all the information that it has so far withheld from the Swedish authorities.

The Bofors agent in India should not have been allowed to leave the country when it was known that the audit bureau's findings were due any day. He should now be forced to return, by withdrawing his passport if necessary, and by registering a case and seeking Interpol's help if there is no other option. Also, the Government must follow up the matter with the Swiss authorities, and enter into an agreement for tackling economic criminals in either country.

Without these steps, the Government will stand indicted in the public mind, if not in any court of law, in a case of proven corruption concerning a massive defence contract abroad. The importance of this should not be underestimated, else the Government will find itself swallowed up by a fresh political crisis, and further storms in Parliament. The issue will snowball in a manner that no one can control. And there could be still more disclosures from abroad. If Rajiv Gandhi is to get on top of this explosive situation, and win public trust on the issue, he must demonstrate that his government's hands are clean, and go after the culprits in a manner that leaves no doubt about his commitment to get to the bottom of the whole affair. His government's future could depend on it.

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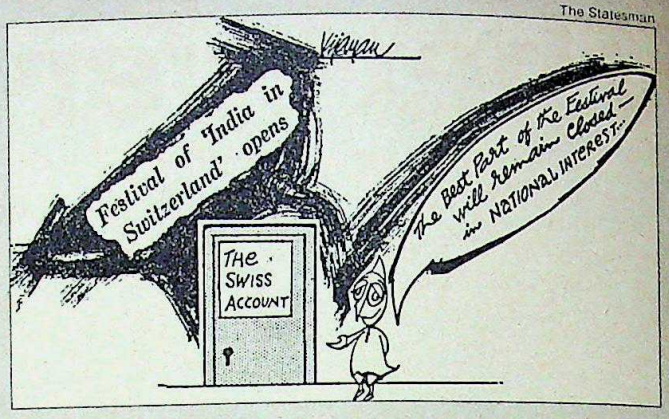

- *India is fast on the road to creating another Bangladesh.*

■ R. PREMADASA, Sri Lanka's prime minister, commenting on the relief supplies offered by India, quoted in *The Hindu*

- *Mr Gandhi may win an immediate victory by letting Colombo know in no uncertain terms as to who is the region's Big Brother, but the shock waves in the neighbourhood are bound to affect India's future standing and credibility.*

■ EDITORIAL in *The Statesman*

- *Behind every dagger is a person and behind every person is a purse.*

■ V.P. SINGH, on communal violence, in *Sunday Mail*

- *(Rajiv Gandhi) was not quite clear about the dimensions of the problems. He was in a confused state of mind with regard to their solutions.*

■ N. SANJEEVA REDDY, former President, summing up his talks with Rajiv in *Indian Express*

- *No campaign should be run against V.P. Singh....It may damage the Congress Party.*

■ KAMALAPATI TRIPATHI in *Sunday Mail*

- *Rajiv Gandhi is a prime minister in flux. He lives from moment to moment.*

■ MADHU DANDAVATE in *Probe*

- *I owe my and our group's reputation to the Indian people.*

■ MICHAEL HERSHMAN in *Indian Express*

- *The people of Haryana are sick and tired of the rule of the Lals, and their dirty and unprincipled politics.*

■ AJIT SINGH in *Onlooker*

- *People of Haryana are not naive....You cannot cheat them. We will win.*

■ BHAJAN LAL in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

- *The prime ministership may belong to him (Rajiv Gandhi) but the nation belongs to all of us.*

■ A.P. VENKATESWARAN in *The Week*

- *I am happy to be considered an intellectual. I don't think others would consider me one.*

■ JYOTI BASU in *Imprint*

- *But he (Amitabh Bachchan) would not understand a truth about India: here life may imitate art, but it almost never imitates bad art.*

■ M.J. AKBAR in *Sunday*

- *It (virginity) is a woman's most precious possession which she can present to the most important guy in her life.*

■ POONAM DHILLON quoted in *Sunday Observer*

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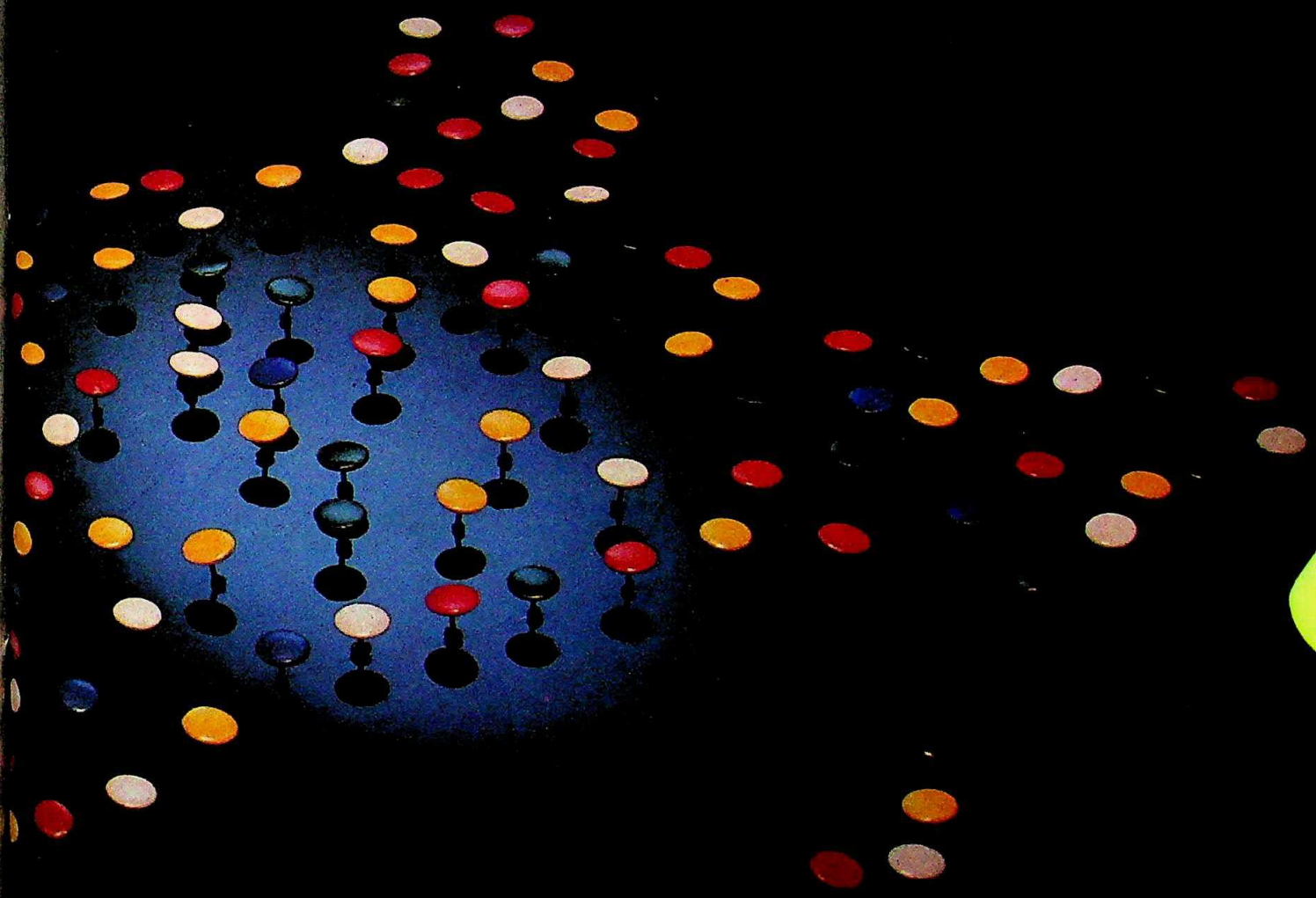

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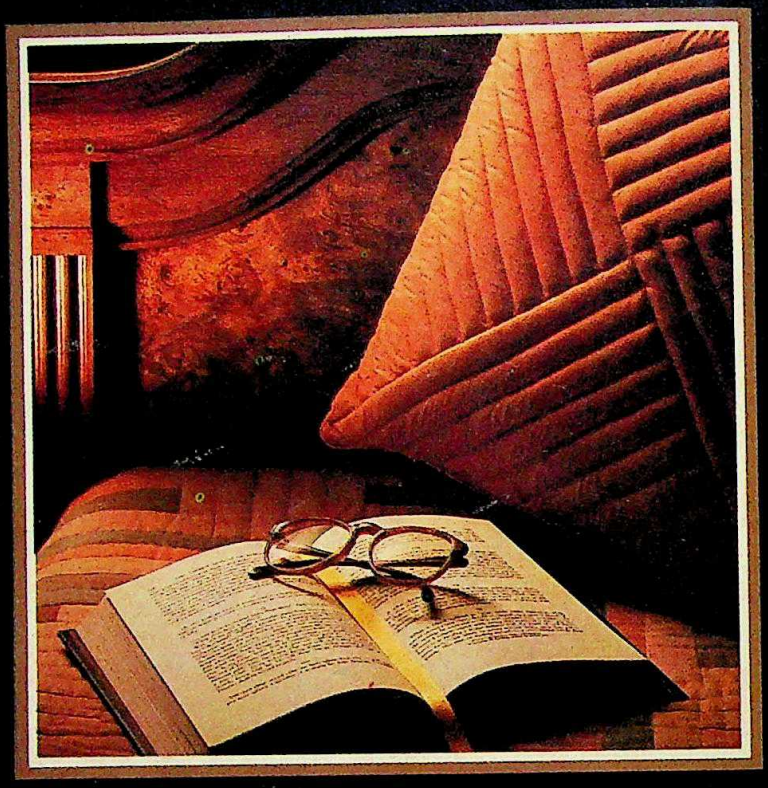
The Oberoi, Bombay



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Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

LIQUOR ON TAP

■ The residents of Vidisha town in Madhya Pradesh woke up one morning to discover an unexpected—but very welcome—bonus as they prepared for their daily ablutions. Turning on their water taps, they found a somewhat familiar smelling liquid that had a decidedly inebriating effect!

The source of the flowing liquor was traced to a seemingly innocuous excise department warehouse, where, the evening before, officials had decided to collect water in a liquor storage tank by fixing a pipe connecting the tank to a water tap. But, perhaps affected by the intoxicating fumes surrounding them, the excise officials forgot to remove the pipe. And as a result, when the tank overflowed, the alcohol and water mixture was suctioned back into the pipelines of the main water supply system—and by the next morning, it had travelled around the whole town.

By the time the public health officials of the engineering department got around to tracing the snag, however, the town residents had already taken unusually merry baths and quenched their thirst for the day—not to mention stocking up bucketfuls of country liquor to last them a long while.

UNSETTLING ACCOUNT

■ Most banks pride themselves on employing the most loyal and trustworthy as their officials. But some managers can turn out to be uncomfortably over-zealous in their protective instincts towards the organisation, especially when the dreaded period of retirement nears.

The manager of the Sharda Rural Bank's Inchahul branch in Satna district, Vinod Tripathi, was one such loyalist, apprehensive at the thought of leaving his iron-hand ruled money-changers.

But there was nothing he could do to halt the inevitable, and on the appointed day, he acceded to taking the new incumbent Rakesh Singhai around his hallowed ex-premises. And soon enough, in the process of handing over charge to the new incumbent, there developed a sharp spat between the two.

Then, with a ungentlemanly shove, Tripathi locked up his unsuspecting successor in the bank vault and pocketing the keys, walked merrily home. It was fully five hours before the police rescued the terror-stricken man. Needless to say, Tripathi now has a different kind of account to settle.

STREAKY IDEA

■ In many universities, student union leaders are notoriously famed as campus mafia dons—willing to protect their reputations at knife-point. But a certain student leader in Baroda University tried to enact a considerably less violent 'encounter' to gain redress—though with as much shock-value.

When Devendra Surti was caught red-handed copying from his neighbour's answer sheet while giving his MA exams, he was barred from taking any future tests. He then used the time-tested method of threatening the supervisor who had nabbed him. But he soon realised he couldn't get away so easily, as police charges were hurriedly brought against him.

That's when the irate student leader decided drastic action was required—and announced that he would streak through the campus protesting the 'false charges' against him. When the fateful day arrived and Surti emerged, wearing only a strategically slung towel, he encountered cops surrounding him on all sides. It seems his closest followers-turned-informers could not see their boss stripping himself of his dignity any further. To date, the foiled streaker-leader is still conjuring up ways to redress the damage.

A STEP TOO FAR

■ One reviving perk that government servants enjoy—to mitigate their tensions of conducting affairs of state—is to go on all available junkets. So it was no surprise to officials at Guwahati airport when Nimal Nag Chowdhury landed up, flashing a letter in the name of the West Bengal finance minister requesting all assistance be given to him and his family.

With the maintenance of inter-state relations being a high priority, officials decided to lay out the red carpet for the Chowdhurys. Official cars whisked them away to Guwahati's most luxurious hotel, and detailed sight-seeing plans were made.

But soon, Chowdhury expressed the desire to charter a plane to the more remote Meghalaya. A tall order, by any standards. That's when the Assamese decided to check out his credentials post-haste.

A phone call revealed that the high-flying imposter, after getting his hands on the West Bengal finance minister's official letter-head pad, wrote the meal-ticket to a holiday himself. The revelations landed Chowdhury in the jug, but it does go to show, ingenuity has its reward.

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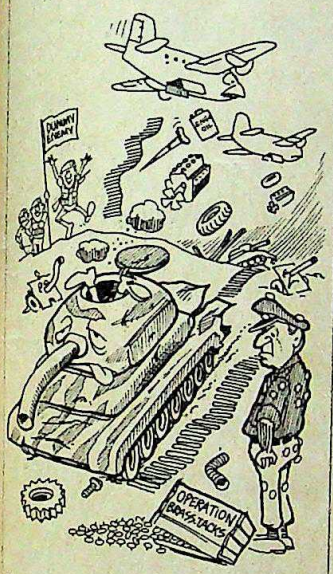
Taking Stock

● OPERATION Brasstacks—India's controversial multi-corps level defence exercise near the Rajasthan border area that came near to sparking off a conflagration with Pakistan—is now being subjected to intensive post-mortems in South Block, as also in military confabs. The consensus so far is that although the operation and the crisis it created with Pakistan gave India somewhat of a bloody nose in diplomatic terms, it was useful in pinpointing some gaping



holes in both alertness and defence preparedness. Several times, the side playing the role of the enemy—and aggressor—easily outmanoeuvred and dealt crushing "defeats" to the side playing the defender. But the exercise, reported to have cost hundreds of crores, also took a severe toll of tanks, vehicles, and armoured personnel carriers. A huge amount of them were put out of commission because of worn-out treads, shortage of engine grease and the failure of entire engines—with no ready replacements—after the gruelling four-month programme. Also, the air force, particularly the western air command, was not too happy about flying endless sorties for so prolonged a period at the behest of the army, which seemed to be in total control of the entire operation and its logistics. Since then, relations between top air force and army brass have been edgy at best.

In Relapse

● EVER since the departure of V.P. Singh from the Finance Ministry, the Government has faced the charge that it has wound up its offensive against economic offenders and that the Enforcement Directorate has now become a paper tiger. The ministry, however, refutes this as hogwash and says that the sun has not yet set over the raid raj. Whatever the emerging scenario, one post-V.P. Singh development is quite apparent. During the raja's tenure, he went after corrupt officials in his own ministry with a zeal and ferocity equal to that displayed by his enforcement boys against erring industrialists. But all that has now changed. The internal vigilance department of the ministry is back to its pre-V.P. Singh days of bureaucratic paralysis. Officials there don't even dream of making cases against the corrupt in their own ranks because they

are unsure of what support they will receive. And in the bargain, even the graft cases already filed against officials within the ministry are now simply languishing in dusty desk drawers.

Miffed Minister

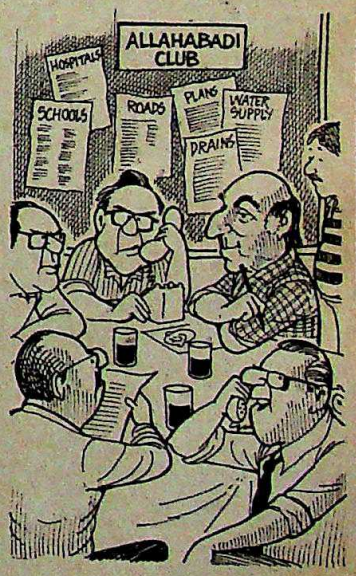
● RAILWAYS Minister Madhav Rao Scindia is said to be stewing at the gills over the treatment recently meted out to him by the Prime Minister's Secretariat. The erstwhile prince was all set to embark on an official trip to Japan and Australia at the end of May when, at the last moment—a day before he was to leave—he received a terse note from the secretariat instructing him to stay put on Indian soil. Scindia was more than a little miffed because a couple of

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

weeks earlier, when he had broached the idea of his proposed trip to Rajiv Gandhi, he had been told to go ahead. As is the formality, Scindia put the proposal in writing, but received no written response. Then for five days he sought, in vain, to get an appointment with Rajiv. Nonetheless, believing the prime minister to be busy with other things, Scindia continued preparations for the trip on the basis of the oral okay. But plans were stymied at the last minute. One of the explanations being given is that Scindia was required to stay on for the Haryana election campaign. According to another, Scindia's family was to accompany him and the cancellation was an example of Rajiv's disapproval of foreign junketing by ministers. Whatever the real reasons, Scindia has not been able to learn of them as he is still waiting for his long-sought appointment with the prime minister.

Active Allahabadis

● THERE's the arms lobby, the industrial lobby, the debentures lobby. But who would have thought that there would be an Allahabad lobby? Sure enough, it exists, and in the nation's capital at that. Its membership is urbane, patrician, selective, and distinguished, consisting of, among others, a top representative from the Prime Minister's Secretariat, a senior journalist, three senior secretaries from key ministries, and even a member of the railway board. What they have in common is that they are all Allahabadis. And they meet regularly for quiet, but elegant and sumptuous dinners—sometimes at each other's residences, and other times at a leading five-star hotel—to discuss strategies for the resuscitation and rejuvenation of their native town. The circle of participants is expanded only after very careful scrutiny of



the prospective entrant, much in the fashion of the secretive Freemasons. Just being from Allahabad is not enough of a qualification. Even Amitabh Bachchan has so far failed to make the grade.

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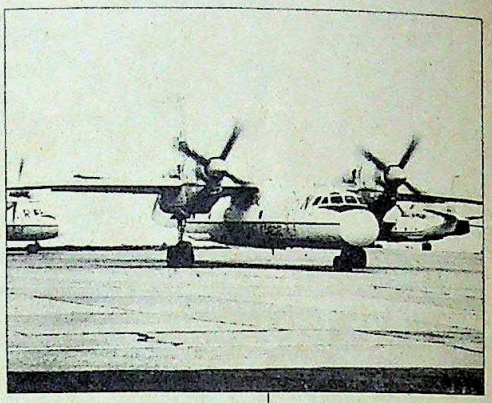
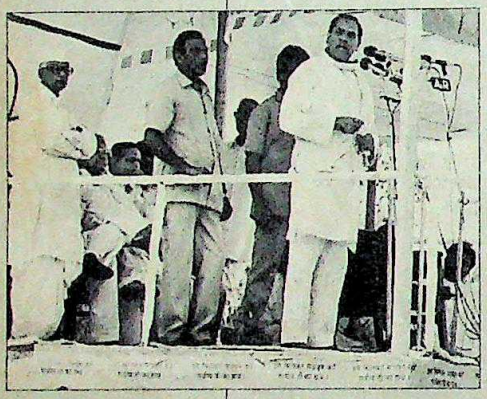
Contours of Conflict

CONFLICT shaped the fortnight that was in provocative profile. The sabre being rattled by New Delhi at the Sri Lankan Government's offensive in the Jaffna peninsula suddenly turned into a double-edged sword. India's gunboat diplomacy in its southern waters floundered on its own inept helmsmanship. The subsequent face-saving air-drop may have salvaged domestic pride but gained New Delhi a dubious diplomatic value in the regional and international context.

It was clearly the heat in the domestic kitchen that forced New Delhi to jump the gun in its clumsy handling of the Sri Lankan situation—in full view of a boatload of foreign correspondents ferried there at government expense. The flotilla of failure caused considerable damage to India's diplomatic credibility, as did the subsequent show of symbolic force in the skies over Jaffna. New Delhi held all the cards in terms of being able to exploit the Tamil situation in northern Sri Lanka, but by playing them badly it lost the hand. In the regional context, it has branded India as the neighbourhood bully, caused irreparable damage to Indo-Sri Lankan relations, posed a serious threat to the fledgling South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and gives the organisation's members further cause to gang up against New Delhi.



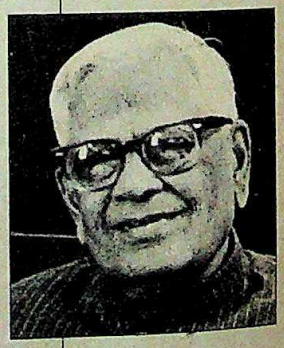
The air-drop saved face but its gains were domestic and dubious.



The outcome of the Haryana elections could write the future script of Indian politics.

The contours of conflict were even more dangerously defined in the north, where China appears determined to flex its military muscle in support of its stand on the border issue. And, even if the war in the north is purely psychological, China's overt military build-up on the border indicated that the climate of conflict hovered at dangerous temperature levels.

Other guns were booming as well, as the Swedish Audit Bureau released its report confirming the payment of inordinately large sums of money as commissions on the Bofors purchase even as the Indian Government continued to insist—not very convincingly—that it had been vindicated. The fact that Bofors' Indian agent, Win Chadha, had quietly slipped out of the country before the report was released only added spice to the scandal.



Venkataraman seems the favourite for the presidential nomination.

Elsewhere, another juicy drama was drawing to a close as the race for the next President of India entered its final lap. With the ruling party and the Opposition unable to agree on a common candidate to succeed Giani Zail Singh, the field was narrowed down to the trio of southerners being groomed by the ruling party—Vice-President R. Venkataraman, and Union ministers B. Shankaranand and P.V. Narasimha Rao, with Margatham Chandrashekhar being the darkest of horses. Political bookies, however, were backing Venkataraman as firm favourite in the presidential stakes.

Chadha's departure added spice to the Bofors gun scandal.

But the battle of the fortnight was obviously the one being fought in neighbouring Haryana, the outcome of which could write the future script for the Indian political scene. With Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi personally spearheading his party's campaign and Lok Dal chieftain Devi Lal launching a highly effective and all-out offensive, it promises to be an epic electoral encounter.

In that sense, the fortnight that was appeared to be a powerful aperitif for an unknown feast—the next moves in the war of nerves between New Delhi and Colombo or, for that matter, between New Delhi and Beijing; the outcome of the presidential and Haryana elections and all that it portends, the possible fall-out of the latest episode in the Bofors drama, all issues that could have unpalatable and far-reaching consequences for a country confined to an uncertain limbo.

—DILIP BOBB

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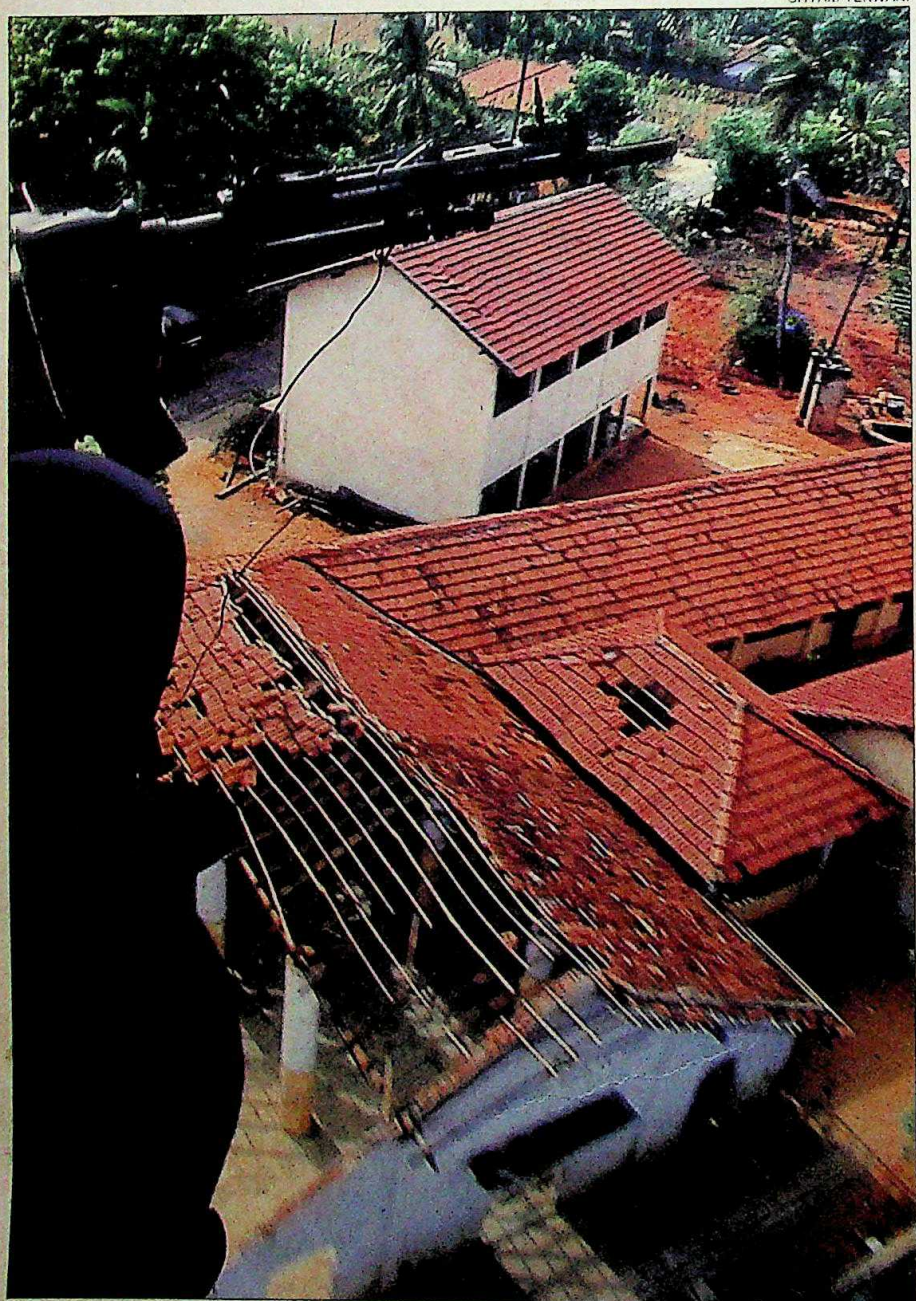
SRI LANKA

Tackling the Tigers

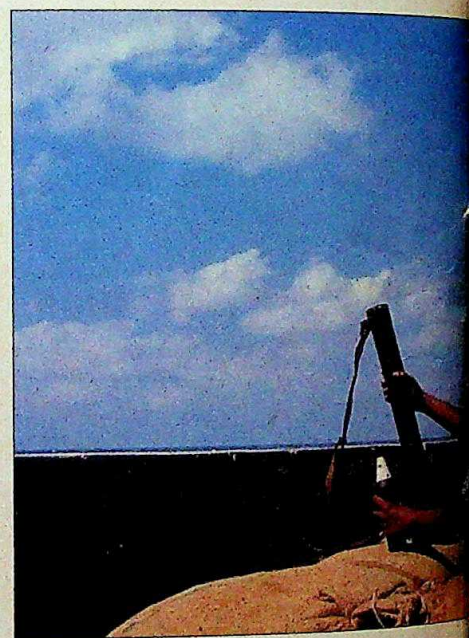
THE ingredients were all there, a political and diplomatic witches' brew that had finally bubbled to a boil. Across the Palk Straits, Sri Lankan security forces had launched their most concerted and coordinated offensive to date, in what Colombo described as a "fight to the finish" against Tamil guerilla redoubts in the north. In Tamil Nadu, pressure mounted remorselessly as Tamil militant spokesmen painted horrific pictures of Sri Lanka's "genocide" against their Tamil cousins and the bombing of civilian targets and killing of innocent people in the Jaffna peninsula. In New Delhi, a government increasingly accused of indecision and indifference to the ethnic war in Sri Lanka and faced with domestic unrest and a sharp sag in its popularity ratings, was stung into dubious action.

Suddenly, and without warning, the ethnic war in Sri Lanka escalated into a major regional and international crisis as the Indian Government opted to alter its role from that of a mediator to an active participant. The flurry of diplomatic exchanges between Colombo and New Delhi

SHYAM TEKWANI



■ View of damaged buildings in Point Pedro from army helicopter



■ Jaffna hospital after shelling and

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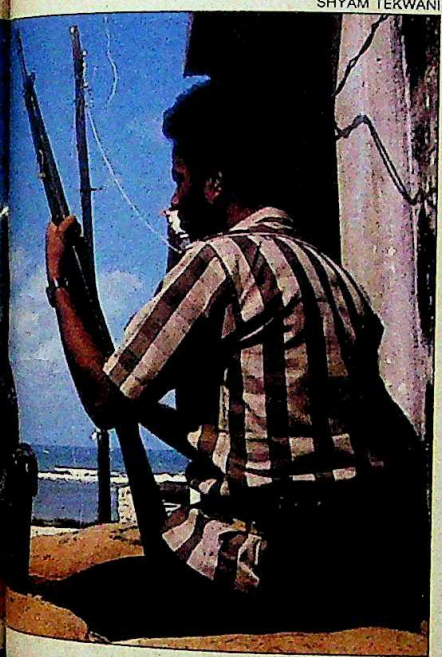
that had started in late May following the Jaffna offensive, quickly acquired a combative edge as India announced on June 1, its intention, "motivated by humanitarian considerations", to dispatch a flotilla of unarmed ships carrying relief supplies for the people of Jaffna under the flag of the Indian Red Cross on June 3-with representatives of the Indian and international media on board.

However, New Delhi's attempts to high-profile its aid efforts sank in the seas off the Jaffna coast as Sri Lankan naval vessels refused to allow the flotilla to enter the island's territorial waters *(see box)*. In Colombo, the reaction was characteristically high-strung. "Lanka stands firm. Flotilla goes home" screamed a banner headline in the *Sun*, a pro-government newspaper. Crackers were burst as Sri Lankans celebrated their 'victory' against what one commentator derisively described as India's "bumboat diplomacy".

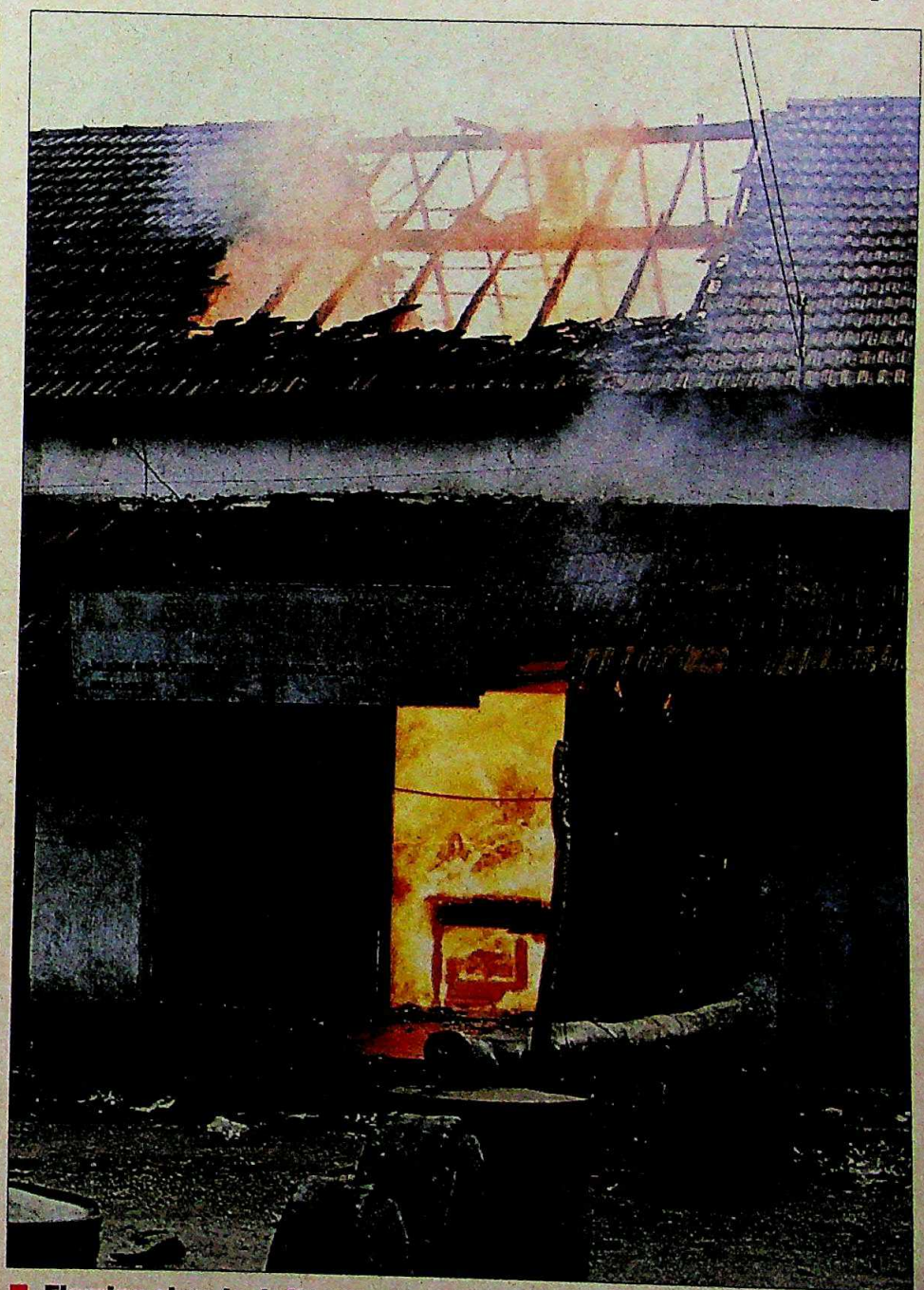
That India had bumbled, and bumbled badly, was all too evident in the gloom that descended on South Block and in Tamil Nadu. For New Delhi the loss of face and prestige was far too serious to be dismissed lightly. Even in Colombo, the chauvinistic high was tinged with uncertainty and concern about what India's next move would be. Key people in the Sri Lankan Government tried frantically to get in touch with the three men they consider friends of Colombo—Romesh Bhandari, Dinesh Singh and N.K.P. Salve—but without success. Meanwhile, in an elegant bungalow in a normally quiet Colombo street, the man who would be the first to know India's next move was already making contingency plans.

Jyotindra Nath Dixit, popularly known as Mani Dixit, is an unflappable man who, in his two-year tenure as India's high commissioner in Sri Lanka, has handled his increasingly prickly assignment with considerable tact and equanimity. But on June 4, Dixit was mangling the stem of his ever-present pipe as all confidential files and documents were removed to a safe place pending the

SHYAM TEKWANI



Tigers in Jaffna bunker



Flaming shop in Jaffna town after mortar attack

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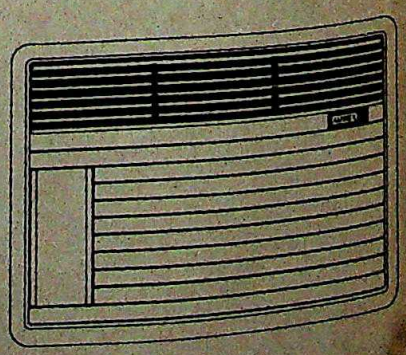

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■ **Sri Lankan soldiers taking Tamil youth for questioning in Point Pedro on June 2: explosive issue**

all-important message from New Delhi. The message came just after noon, conveyed by Natwar Singh, minister of state for external affairs. India, he told Dixit, was planning to air drop relief supplies over the Jaffna peninsula that evening.

IN New Delhi, the decision had been late in the making. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was away on a tour of Gujarat and Goa, and Foreign Minister N.D. Tiwari was in Moscow on a scheduled visit. In their absence, the Sri Lankan crisis was being handled by Natwar Singh and Minister for Human Resources Development P.V. Narasimha Rao. While Singh was closeted with senior officials in the defence and foreign ministries, Rao met opposition leaders who urged the Government to "act decisively to salvage India's prestige." But it was only after Rajiv's return from Goa at around 1 a.m. on June 4 that the Political Affairs Committee of the Union Cabinet met. The meeting, which lasted till 4 a.m., was reconvened later that morning after Rajiv held discussions with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran who was specially flown in from Madras bearing a brief-case full of telegrams from citizens of his state pleading with him to "save" the Jaffna Tamils.

From then on, events snowballed with uncontrollable haste. At 3.25 p.m., Sri Lankan High Commissioner in India Bernard Tilakaratne was summoned to Natwar Singh's office and informed that India had decided to air drop emergency food supplies and medicine over the Jaffna peninsula, that the aircraft would be taking off at 4 p.m. and would be escorted by Mirage 2000 fighters. He also added that "any resistance would be met by force". Indian sources say that the Indian action was not an outright declaration of war but two stages short of that act. Tilakaratne, realising that by the time he returned to his office on Kautilya Marg in New Delhi's diplomatic enclave, the aircraft would be airborne, asked Singh to allow him to use his phone to inform Colombo.

But even without the minimal notice, Colombo could do little, nor was it inclined to. Despite the tough talk and India-baiting by people like Prime Minister R. Premadasa, Sri Lankan Joint Operations Commander in the north General Cyril Ranatunge's original orders to protect Sri Lanka's territorial integrity with every means at his command were cancelled. His new orders were to keep his air force on the ground and not to engage the Indian aircraft in any way. Said Brigadier Jerry Silva, commander of the Palaly air force base in Jaffna: "We were given strict instructions from Colombo not to fire at the Indian aircraft." In any event, the Sri Lankan air force with its six SIAI- Marchetti light fighter aircraft and around 20 Bell helicopters was no match for the IAF Mirages.

But the price for New Delhi's decision seemed excessively high. Colombo charged India with "naked violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity" while Premadasa, the most rabid India-baiter in the Cabinet, characterised the air drop as "dogs that had shat on the Jaffna peninsula", terming it a dress rehearsal for an Indian invasion. The international reaction—barring Pakistan and China—was guarded but nonetheless critical of India's move. Even the Soviets maintained a pregnant silence.

Though the Indians maintain that the air-dropping was part of the initial plan and was conceived with the knowledge that the Sri Lankans would refuse to allow the flotilla into their waters, in diplomatic terms, the Indian Government seems to have lost more than it has

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INDIAN RELIEF MISSION

Journey to Jaffna

ON May 27, the All India Radio, in its morning broadcast, carried a strong statement by External Affairs Minister N.D. Tiwari, condemning the Sri Lankan offensive in Jaffna. Tiwari's statement signalled the beginning of a government plan which ended in the air drop over Jaffna. By end-May, the details had already been worked out. R. Rajamani, additional secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, in coordination with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), was to see to its nuts and bolts.

When on June 2 about 100 Delhi-based newsmen and photographers, Indian and foreign, boarded the Government-chartered Madurai-bound Indian Airlines 737 however, most seemed to treat the exercise as an official joke.

The choice of a launching pad for an operation that would hog international headlines was an unlikely one—Rameswaram is a small fishing town 165 km from Madurai. The fact that the operation had been hurriedly launched was soon evident. Although newsmen were told that the loading of boats would begin on June 2, that didn't happen. For one, fishermen at Rameswaram, whose boats were to carry the supplies, were edgy at the thought of being part of an unarmed flotilla. The enduring practice of haggling over what they should be paid was the second reason for delay.

Next morning, the loading proceeded slowly on to the 19 (down from the original 25) fragile 32-foot-long, 96 horse power fishing boats, wearing Red Cross flags. Each boat carried two tonnes of cargo—pulses, kerosene, bread, matchsticks, tamarind, vegetables, milk powder and salt. But the main article was rice, 27 tonnes in all.

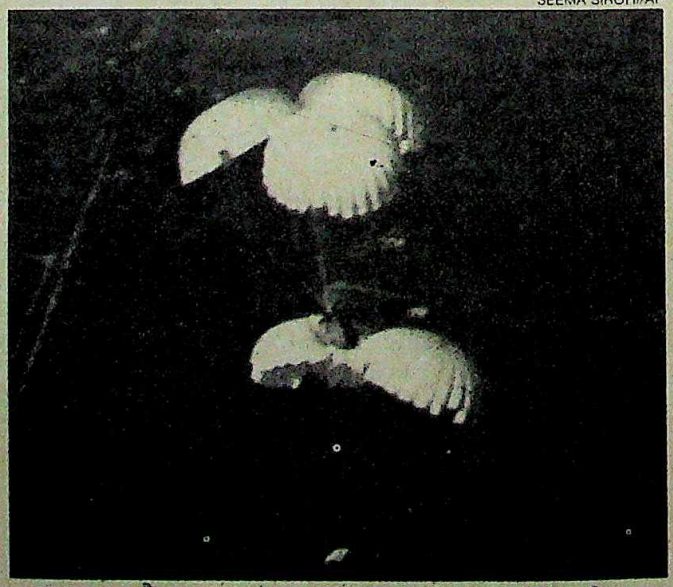
Finally, at around 2 p.m., newsmen were taken to the *Vikram*, a 1,100-tonne, 74-metre-long ship of the offshore patrol vessel class, the escort for the fishing boats. Its heavy gun and Chetak helicopter had been removed overnight at Madras.

Around 4.15 p.m. the *Vikram* began moving at a gentle 4 knots to enable the fishing boats to keep up with it. The convoy was soon joined by the *O.P. Srivastava*, a search and rescue vessel with the Oil and Natural Gas Commission. At 4.45 p.m., the flotilla was on the edge of the international boundary that divides the waters of the two countries, as two Indian Coast Guard planes and a navy helicopter circled overhead. On the hazy horizon two ships appeared, one of them clearly a Sri Lankan gunboat.

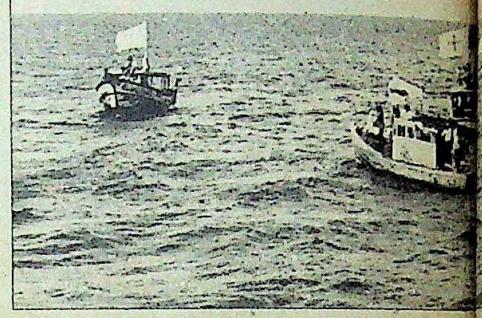
Just after five o'clock, the captain of the Sri Lankan vessel established radio contact, and asked the *Vikram* to identify itself. Answering him was Deb Kumar Maitra, director of external publicity, a diplomat with 25 years' experience, and a surprise choice as Indian spokesman. With Maitra's statement of intent to carry relief to "the people of Jaffna", began a nearly four-hour discussion on whether the convoy could proceed.

It would seem that Maitra's brief was three-fold. One, internationalise the issue of the Tamil plight by seeking permission to proceed to Jaffna in the presence of newsmen. Two, seem reasonable by demonstrating that every possible attempt had been made to convince little Sri Lanka. But, three, at no cost endanger human lives. It was an important act that had to be gone through to establish that India had tested every avenue.

SEEMA SIROHI/AP



■ Supplies being air dropped: mission of mercy



■ The Indian flotilla in the Palk Straits: mission de

But few newsmen on board the *Vikram* realised this. Besides, they had other more immediate preoccupations: with strong winds stirring the waters, many of them were violently sea sick. At about 9 p.m. came the final answer from the gunboat commander: "I have been directed to inform you to remain where you are and not to enter the territory of Sri Lanka. I have been charged with the responsibility of protecting our territorial sovereignty to the best of my ability." The flotilla turned back soon afterwards.

On June 4, on the flight from Madurai back to New Delhi, the overriding feeling on board was of having witnessed an anti-climax. Then came the announcement that the flight was being diverted to Bangalore.

Unknown to them, in the early hours of June 4, the IAF had been told that it too would be playing a part in the drama. According to Vice-Chief of Air Staff Air Marshal S. Raghavendran, 57, in charge of the operation, armymen worked through the night to load five tonnes of supplies on to each of the five Soviet-made transport aircraft, AN 32, at a north-Indian air base. The pilots to be used in Operation Poomalai (Garland) were flown to Bangalore immediately so

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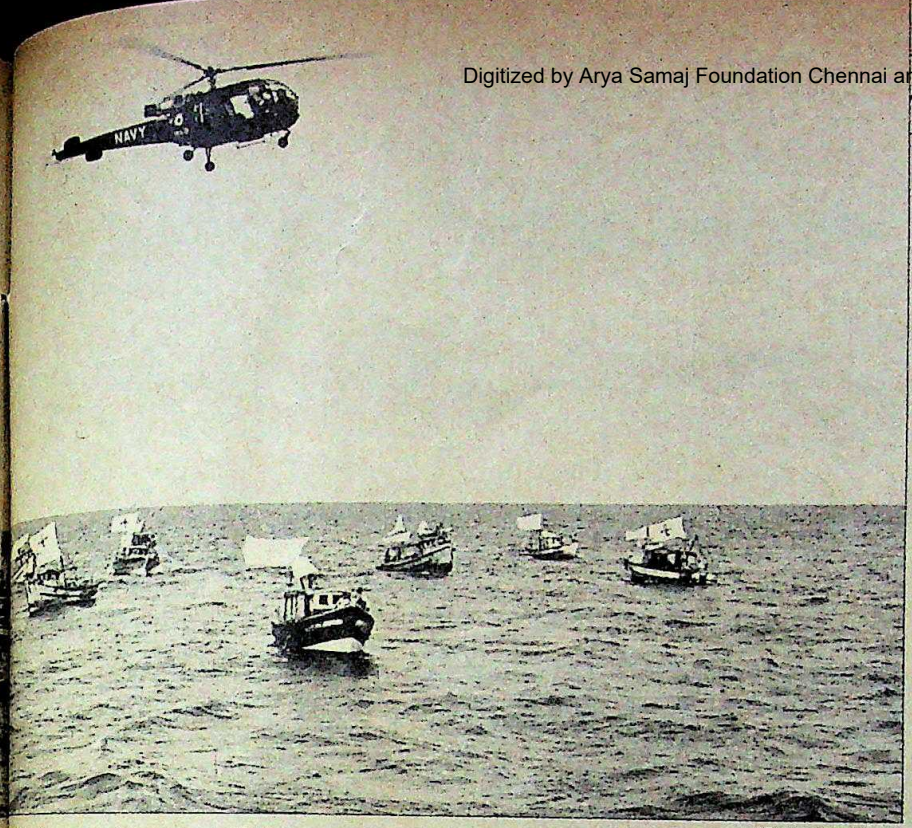

Straits: ission designed to fail from the start?

PRASHANT PANJIAR

that they could catch up on their sleep. Between six and ten on the morning of June 4, the large AN 32s were already winging their way towards Bangalore just as, from a nearby air base, sleek French-built Mirage 2000s took off for the same destination. The choice fell on the Mirages as escorts because of their range and their effective air-to-air radar.

After some bitter argument at Bangalore over which newsmen should accompany the mission, 35 correspondents—half Indians and half foreigners—were finally chosen. As the first AN 32 took off at precisely 3.55 p.m., heading straight for Jaffna, 450 km away, there was restrained excitement among the seven journalists on board the lead aircraft. If they experienced some nervousness, it was quickly stilled by the calm of Group Captain B.K. Sunder and co-pilot Flight Lieutenant S.R. Swarup.

Soon, the aircraft—packed with dry rations and vegetables in brown cartons and green canvas packages—were cruising at a height of about 12,000 ft. The four Mirages circled 500 to 1,000 ft above the slow-flying transport aircraft. A fifth was in reserve, over the Indian coast. Because the normal radio range is about 200 km, two AN 32s hovered between Jaffna and Bangalore, and acted as relay stations to keep the convoy in touch with Bangalore where Air Vice-Marshal D. Keelor was in command.

How would Sri Lanka respond? This was the question on many people's mind as the AN 32s headed for their target. The Mirages were certain to deter the few outdated Italian SIAI-Marchettis in Sri Lanka's tiny air force. Some limited danger, however, lay from ground fire, since there was a real possibility that orders to hold fire had not reached Sri Lankan field troops around Jaffna.

By ten minutes to five, the AN 32s were over Sri Lanka. There was some tension in the lead aircraft now as it began to rapidly lose height until it was only 1,500 ft above ground level over the drop zone. At the point of the drop, it slowed down considerably below its normal cruising speed of 400 km per hour, making the plane susceptible to even machine-gun fire. As Sunder said: "If somebody opens fire from the ground, there is not much one can do about it."

Minutes after five, as the town of Jaffna appeared in sight, the huge rear of the aircraft opened, and on the press of a button, the cargo slid quickly over the rollers on the floor of the aircraft and rushed out. The aircraft lurched after the sudden loss of weight. Through the open rear, the other four AN 32s, could be seen discharging their cargo one after the other, the white parachutes ballooning dramatically before the cargo began its gentle descent to earth about seven km north of Jaffna. As the planes banked after their unchallenged run and headed back to Bangalore, it was all over for the pilots, bar the congratulations.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR in Rameswaram

gained. The quantity of food dropped—25 tonnes—was hardly enough to feed the 8.33 lakh Tamils of the Jaffna peninsula for even a day. By not pressing the point further, India left itself vulnerable to the charge that the air drop was a purely face-saving gesture fuelled by domestic compulsions. And, considering Sri Lanka's tiny size, New Delhi was also being accused of employing bullying tactics. Colombo had said on June 1 that it was prepared to discuss modalities for accepting and distributing food supplies from India. Even if it was playing for time, New Delhi could have issued a deadline which, if not met, would have given India diplomatic justification for sending in supplies by sea or air. The fact that the International Red Cross has criticised the use of their offices for the flotilla is further embarrassment for New Delhi.

BUT in political terms, New Delhi was clearly starved of options. Despite the Sri Lankan Government's intransigence on the ethnic issue, South Block's handling of the problem has been marked by indecision, ad hocism and the involvement of too many cooks in the ethnic broth. The result: it has lost influence with both Colombo and the Tamil militants. But the Rajiv Gandhi Government is no longer in a position where it can ignore the strong emotional bonds between the 55 million people of Tamil Nadu and their ethnic kin in Sri Lanka. Not only does the Congress(I) need the support of Tamil Nadu legislators in the presidential election, it is the only state south of the Vindhyas where the Congress(I) has some indirect foothold through its informal alliance with the AIADMK. The crucial elections in Haryana could have set the seal on New Delhi's decision.

Predictably, the reaction in Tamil Nadu to India's air drop ranged from relief to rabid jingoism. While MGR himself pledged his government's support to the Centre for continuing help to the Sri Lankan Tamils, his DMK foe M. Karunanidhi urged New Delhi to go in for a "Cyprus-type solution". Tamil Nadu's Food Minister S. Ramachandran, whose views are largely considered representative of the state Government as well as the bulk of the Tamil Nadu public, says that "this (the air drop) was the minimum that the Indian Government could have done under the circumstances. It was not an aggressive but a humanitarian mission which will have to continue as long as the Sri Lankan Tamils are trapped and deprived of their food and livelihood." And V. Pirabhakaran, the head of the

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A.C.S. HAMEED

"India cannot threaten us"

SRI Lankan Foreign Minister A.C.S. Hameed has a reputation of being a moderate in the Jayewardene Cabinet, the voice of reason and restraint. A mild-mannered and cultured man, Hameed has a vast experience in the field of foreign affairs, having been foreign minister ever since he joined the Cabinet in 1977. But he now finds himself reluctantly enmeshed in the diplomatic row between Colombo and New Delhi following India's airdropping of food supplies over Jaffna. Hameed has been studiously avoiding the media but finally agreed to speak to Deputy Editor DILIP BOBB *and Senior Correspondent* S.H. VENKATRAMANI *in his elegant teak-panelled office in Colombo last week. Excerpts:*

Q. ***What is your reaction to India's air dropping of relief supplies?***

A. We have already said it was a naked violation of our independence and a most unwarranted assault on our sovereignty and integrity. I find it difficult to understand why they should have done this. When Delhi expressed its desire to send relief supplies to the people of Jaffna we said we were prepared to consider it and were willing to work out the modalities of such a supply. They said this aid had to be rushed. When the plan of sending the flotilla was announced, Jayewardene sent a message to Rajiv that we were prepared to sort this out, and to nominate somebody from both sides who could meet in Delhi or Colombo. Our approach has been one of accommodation to avoid misunderstanding.

Q. ***Then why did India have to intrude into your airspace?***

A. That was what surprised me also. We said let us work out the modalities of distribution of the intended relief supplies. All that was needed was that somebody from here should have received the supplies, and that some arrangement should have been worked out to satisfy the wishes of the donors in its distribution. It was not a serious problem. It could easily have been worked out. India shouldn't have rushed in like this and ruined the relations between the two countries. What was even more surprising was that there was enough food on the ground in Jaffna to last for four months. True, there were certain difficulties in distribution, because the environment wasn't normal. But there was no shortage of foodgrains.

Q. ***Why couldn't you convince Delhi that the supplies weren't needed?***

SHYAM TEKWANI

A. That was what we tried to. Foreign office officials in Delhi and Colombo could have sorted the matter out. But India rushed the flotilla. And if this matter could not have been sorted out between South Block and Colombo, it was hardly likely to be sorted out on the high seas. And ultimately what we got was a demarche of 35 minutes. Delhi did not give us any explanation while announcing its plan to intrude into our airspace. What added insult to the injury was that we were told that any resistance would be met with force. You cannot issue threats like that. You don't conduct bilateral relations like that. Not a country like India. Nobody has to teach India the tenets of diplomacy.

Q. ***But New Delhi has justified its stand on humanitarian grounds?***

A. I don't agree at all with the charges that India has made. But even if we accept that what Delhi says was true you still cannot conduct diplomatic relations in this fashion.

Q. ***What has been the result of the Indian action?***

A. India's actions have disturbed the age-old traditional ties of friendship and goodwill between the two countries. One can only hope now for an early return to normalcy. Subsequently Delhi has told us that they wanted to discuss through diplomatic channels the modalities for distribution of the remaining foodgrains. And we have responded positively. So now I think wiser counsel is prevailing in Delhi.

Q. ***Will you boycott the forthcoming SAARC meeting?***

A. We have still not taken a decision. We are happy that SAARC has been born, and it is not the intention of Sri Lanka to wreck SAARC in any way. It is only the boycott of the ministerial meeting of SAARC that is being considered.

Q. ***How does your government's reportedly intended acquisition of anti-aircraft weaponry from Pakistan help matters?***

A. Every country is entitled to build its defence capabilities. But even a child would not accept the theory that Sri Lanka can be a threat to India.

Q. ***How do the recent developments augur for future Indian mediation on the Sri Lankan ethnic problem?***

A. We first want this present problem with India out of the way. The clouds will have to be cleared. But this ethnic conflict cannot be resolved without India's participation. The issue has a certain emotional value in south India. There is state patronage for Tamil terrorists in Tamil Nadu. India has a federal system and that makes it difficult for Delhi to police the actions of the Government in Tamil Nadu. We have become an important factor in south Indian politics. Since the DMK split we have been witnessing the tragedy of being caught in the whirlpool of south Indian politics. It is no longer just an ethnic problem in Sri Lanka.

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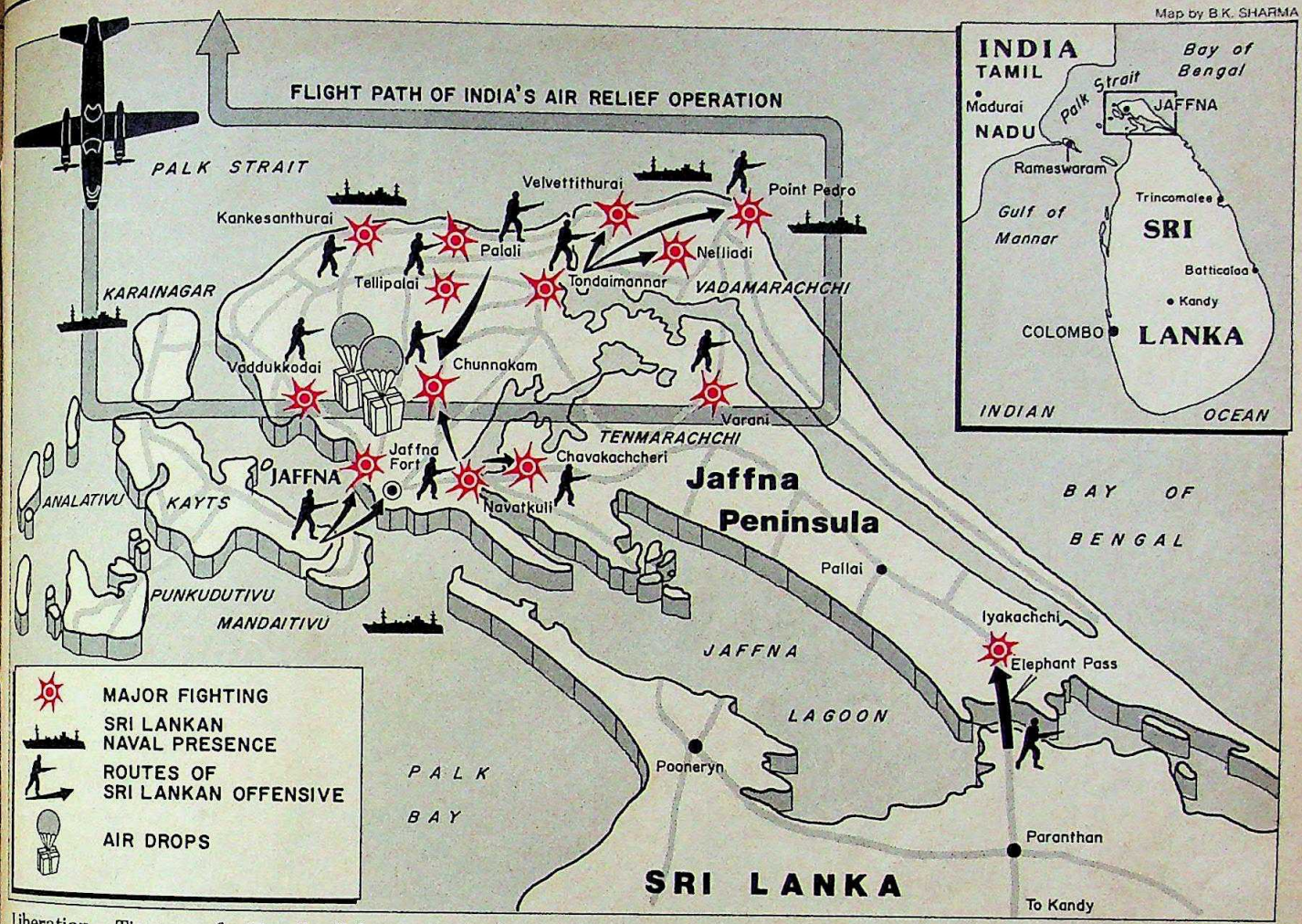

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the man most wanted by the Sri Lankan security forces stated: "We are certain the civilised community will appreciate this humanitarian gesture towards the people who are facing genocide from state terrorism."

Though the truth about the latest Sri Lankan army offensive—codenamed Operation Liberation—lies somewhere in between Colombo's claims and the propaganda of the Tigers, Colombo must clearly shoulder the blame for the situation having reached the present pass. In January, the Government decided to impose an economic blockade, including that of fuel, on the Jaffna peninsula. Colombo's reaction to New Delhi's requests to lift the blockade has been typical. On at least six occasions, Colombo announced that it was lifting the blockade, but in reality what this meant was asking Jaffna inhabitants to lift petrol and kerosene from the army camps—akin to inviting the Tamils into the lion's den. K. Gnanasigamani, 40, a farmer of Valvettithurai which is in the centre of the latest offensive, said in an interview last fortnight that "after the blockage we have been totally dependent on black market supplies of food and fuel".

In Vadamarachi, lorry driver Chinnathambi Arunachalam, 39, said on June 6 that "we have barely managed a meal or two after May 26 (when the offensive was launched)".

That Operation Liberation was intended to be the final all-out offensive was clear from Colombo's statements that it would be a "fight to the finish" and the fact that all three service chiefs under General Cyril Ranatunga, the joint operations commander, assembled in the north on May 21. The original plan, according to informed sources in Colombo, was to take Jaffna in one concerted sweep under a three-pronged attack (*see map*) with coastal shelling from naval ships and strafing and bombing from the air.

The military strategy was obviously to "liberate" the entire north and the north-eastern belt of the Jaffna peninsula. The Sri Lankan forces were already in control of Jaffna Fort, the Palaly air base and the Kanakesanthurai harbour in the south and south-west of the peninsula. The army was also strategically in control of Elephant Pass, the narrow neck connecting the peninsula to the rest of the island. Apart from the advantage of regaining control of most of the key strongholds of the LTTE, the operation meant that the Sri Lankan forces would be in control of most of the peninsula barring the thickly-populated Jaffna town (population: 80,000).

The offensive escalated on May 26, when curfew was declared in the area and leaflets were dropped from helicopters warning civilians to move to 18 designated buildings, mainly churches and temples. Whether by accident or design, bombs have been dropped on temples and churches in which a large number of civilians have obviously died. Housewife Muthumari of Valvettithurai who had taken refuge in the Alwai Anman temple in Karavetti says that the temple was badly damaged in shelling and she was lucky to escape with her life.

■ **Dixit: in the middle**

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LALITH ATHULATHMUDALI

"The army will stay on"

AS Minister for National Security, and the key man in Colombo as far as negotiations with the Tamil militants are concerned, the suave and articulate Lalith Athulathmudali has so far managed to walk the political tightrope with considerable dexterity. However, as the man responsible for the eventual success or failure of the latest offensive against the Tamil militants in the north, he currently occupies the hottest seat in Colombo. Perhaps realising that, Athulathmudali was uncharacteristically guarded in an interview with Deputy Editor DILIP BOBB *and Senior Correspondent* S.H. VENKATRAMANI *after the Indian air drop over Jaffna. Excerpts:*

Q. *What led you to launch your latest military offensive in Jaffna?*

A. You see, we offered cessation of hostilities in April. But the Liberation Tigers went ahead and massacred 120 innocent civilians, mostly Sinhalese, in Alutoya in Trincomalee. Then, they killed another 10 people in Trincomalee. Finally, came the Pettah bomb blast which killed 120 people in Colombo. Then, MGR gave this money to the militant groups that will only be used by them to acquire more weapons. Everybody told us, the Government, that you are doing nothing. So we had to launch a crackdown on the terrorists.

Q. *But this seems to be a final assault, aimed at eliminating the militants regardless of loss of civilian life or damage to property?*

A. We have been very careful of three things: dropping bombs from aircraft, killings of civilians and damage to the thickly-populated Jaffna town. All the aircraft were put under the command of the joint operations commander so there would be close coordination and no indiscriminate forays. We dropped pamphlets warning the civilian population to move to designated shelters. All this was done to minimise the loss of civilian life.

Q. *Why did you concentrate on Vadamarachi?*

A. That was the target farthest away from Jaffna. And it was just seven miles long and five miles wide. And three of the LTTE ordnance factories, turning out grenades, mortars, and artillery pieces were located in Vadamarachi. Vadamarachi was the strategic link to Vedaranyam and the weapon supply points of the Tigers. In fact, even while readying our strategy, we sent signals to the boys asking them why they didn't come for talks. The LTTE sent desperate messages to MGR about our military crackdown and MGR went rushing to Delhi and then you know what happened. The sad point is that whatever we do, people accuse us of going for a military solution whereas the LTTE is able to get away with whatever it is doing. Even in Operation Liberation of Vadamarachi we have kept in mind that it wasn't gaining control of territory that was important. We had to win the stomachs, hearts, and minds of the people.

Q. *How would you assess the success of your military operation?*

A. We were reasonably successful in gaining military control of Vadamarachi. Civilian casualties were minimal. People are saying all kinds of exaggerated things, but our documented estimate of the civilian death toll in the whole operation is 47. Nobody will know the exact figures till we can document them. Dixit (Indian high commissioner in Colombo) says 200 killed, the LTTE says 600 dead. But the main thing is that the LTTE has got the message that it cannot impose a military solution on us.

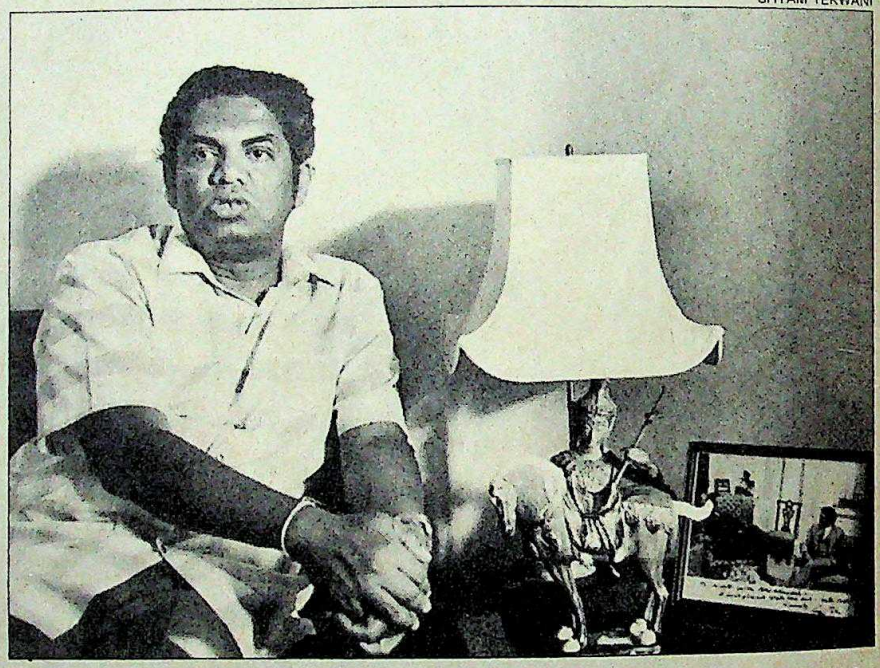
Q. *The Indian Government has accused you of resorting to carpet bombing. What do you have to say?*

A. I don't think Rajiv Gandhi's statement was correct. Our aircraft are just not capable of carpet bombing. They are light aircraft and not bombers.

Q. *Were you forced to shelve your plan of taking over Jaffna town?*

A. No. We never planned to take the town. We only planned to take the periphery and break the backbone of the movement.

SHYAM TEKWANI



Q. *Isn't there the danger of the Tigers retaliating once you relax army control in Vadamarachi?*

A. The army will not come out of Vadamarachi. We are following the oil slick method: The army will stay on wherever it gains control.

Q. *Where exactly is the hold-up in the negotiations now?*

A. The main problem is that of linkage. You can't dismiss the Muslims in the eastern province. They are unwilling to be under Tamil domination.

Q. *What are your immediate plans?*

A. I think the task to which I have to give the highest priority is to speedily screen all the Tamil youth who have been detained by the army on suspicion.

Q. *What do you see as the next step in the larger context of relations between Colombo and New Delhi?*

A. To defuse the India-Sri Lanka situation.

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KENNETH SOMANANDER/AFP

The dead bodies of the young monks massacred by Tamil militants: inviting outrage

The army assault on Vadamarachi, however, was intense and bloody. Entire buildings were razed to the ground and rockets and bombs from overhead fell on a number of churches and temples. Most people preferred to take shelter in the bunkers built by the Tigers. A clerk working in the Kandy Commercial Bank who had gone to Nelliadi in the heart of the Vadamarachi area to see his family says he was trapped in bunkers for three days while the shelling and bombardment went on. Requesting anonymity for fear of army reprisals, he says: "We were given two hours to move to a safe place before curfew was imposed. I took my wife, mother and children to a small church which seemed like hell. There was no food, the children were screaming and there were reports about people who ventured out to get food being shot. We went without food for three days before we could flee to a safer place." In Valvettithurai (population: 8,000) and Point Pedro (population: 35,000), residents have been cowering in terror in temples and churches since the offensive began on May 26.

Just how many civilians have died is impossible to say. Lalith Athulathmudali, minister for national security, claims that only 47 civilians have died. The Indian High Commission in Colombo puts the figure at between 200 and 300. The LTTE claims that over 600 have been killed. But as Athulathmudali admits: "The actual figure will be impossible to discover till some documentation is done."

WHAT caused considerable concern in New Delhi and Tamil Nadu, however, was the fate of 6,000-odd young Tamils who have been detained and taken away to army camps for interrogation. Most were students who had returned home for holidays. Athulathmudali says that they will be released after the screening process, which largely means identification by hooded informers. Last week, the first batch of detainees was released, indicating that Colombo has realised that their continued detention will lay them open to further charges of discrimination and terrorising of the Tamil population. The Indian High Commission had forwarded to New Delhi a long list of complaints by prominent Tamils in the north whose sons had been taken away. In Sri Lanka's surcharged atmosphere of suspicion and hostility, the fear that they might never be seen again is omnipresent.

Meanwhile, the domestic pressure on Colombo to sort out the ethnic problem was building up to fever pitch. On April 17, the Good Friday massacre by Tamil militants resulted in the death of 120 Sinhalese civilians. Less than a week later came the tragic Pettah bomb blast in the busiest corner of Colombo during rush hour, in which over 100 people died. The final straw was the announcement of MGR's decision to donate Rs 4 crore to the militants. In Colombo's jaundiced eyes, that could only mean more arms for the militants. "The pressure on us to do something was building up. We just couldn't sit back any longer," says Athulathmudali.

New Delhi, however, holds the view that Colombo was increasingly frustrated by its inability to bring the Tamil militants to heel and stop the killings. Indian sources say the first warning across Colombo's bows was fired by Rajiv on May 27 when he sent a message to Jayewardene expressing his government's "distress" at the civilian deaths in the offensive and condemning the "genocide", the first time the Indian Government has officially used the word. The bottom line in the message was that he would be compelled to change his policy towards Sri Lanka if the situation deteriorated further.

Jayewardene's reply indicated that Sri Lanka was in no mood to listen. Dismissing Indian claims of genocide and civilian deaths, he advised Rajiv to worry about the deaths in Punjab and criticised his

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inability to influence the LTTE. The essential message was that if India wanted to change its policy on Sri Lanka, that was New Delhi's problem. That message was reinforced by the fact that the offensive in the north was actually intensified over the next three days as Colombo poured in around 8,000 troops into the peninsula, with another 18,000 as back-up in the four northern districts.

Indian sources claim that the Sri Lankans have been using far heavier artillery than ever before, including 75mm rockets fired from pods under the wings of the SIAI Marchettis and 50 lb bombs dropped from helicopters which explode on impact. The army also possesses newly acquired 120mm mortars. These weapons, sources say, have been arriving in recent months from Indonesia, Singapore and South Korea. Sri Lankan air force sources, including the former air force chief, however, flatly deny that their light fighter aircraft are incapable of carpet bombing as India has been claiming. But Sri Lanka has also claimed that there has only been selective bombing of militant targets which is belied by the fact that a number of churches and temples—designated safe buildings—have been destroyed.

New Delhi says that there are 37 foreign military advisors operating in the peninsula, including some from Pakistan, Israel and members of the notorious British Keany Meany Services (KMS). Pakistani advisors, according to sources, are training the Sri Lankan navy and army, the Israelis are providing training in anti-terrorist measures while KMS mercenaries are actually flying combat missions.

It was possibly the involvement of Israel and Pakistani advisors that annoyed New Delhi more than anything else and pushed India into making the air drop. But by its action, New Delhi may have helped the Tigers but certainly not the ordinary Tamils. Said M. Jesudasan, 50, of Point Pedro: "Why does India do a half-way thing like this? The air drop leaves us neither here nor there." Adds Vincent D'paul, 49, a fish trader: "See the price I have had to pay for all this. My houses destroyed, I have lost millions. I have nothing to do with the Tigers. But by doing this in-between thing, Delhi has made the Sri Lankan soldiers with their wounded pride hate the Tamils even more than before. They will make our lives more miserable than they already are."

The situation has been exacerbated by the LTTE's massacre of 32 Buddhist monks who were going to be ordained on June 2. The massacre and the gruesome photographs splashed across Sri Lanka's newspapers only alienated the Tigers from the Tamil population and cast fresh doubts on India's intervention. Not surprisingly, the reaction in Colombo was even more intense and anti-Indian in character, culminating in the massive demonstration in front of India House, Dixit's official residence in which inflammatory anti-India and anti-Tamil posters were flaunted.

■ **Sri Lankan protesters outside the Indian High Commission in Colombo:**

IN that sense, the air drop has caused considerable consternation within the Indian community in Colombo (there are over 500 Indian families in the capital). India's actions have aggravated the already palpable anti-Indian feeling in Sri Lanka—Dixit says he gets an average of 20 hate calls a day since the air drop. All Indian citizens were advised by the high commission to move into hotels before 4 p.m. on June 4, the time of the air drop. But most Indians are upset by New Delhi's action and say that the effect has been to blur the distinction between Tamils and Indians. Indian businessmen and hoteliers also fear that the action will harm their commercial interests in Sri Lanka to a large degree. Says a political analyst in Colombo: "After the air drop, the distinction between Tamil Nadu and New Delhi has evaporated. Rajiv Gandhi is seen here as going out of his way to please MGR."

In the larger context, the direct result has been to convert what was a Sri Lankan ethnic problem into an Indo-Sri Lankan problem. Says Anandatissa De Alwis, a minister of state in the Jayewardene Government: "The problem will be over if the Tamil terrorists are not given refuge in Tamil Nadu. The Indian and Tamil Nadu governments accuse us of killing innocent Tamils but when innocent Sinhalese civilians and monks are massacred by Tamil terrorists in Sri Lanka there is no word of sympathy from Delhi or Madras." Adds the affable Foreign Minister A.C.S. Hameed: "We have become a pawn in Tamil Nadu politics."

The problem is that MGR's attitude towards the ethnic crisis has also undergone a crucial change. Till 1986, he was content to toe New Delhi's line while projecting himself as the great protector of Tamil interests. MGR, however, singled out the LTTE, particularly his blue-eyed boy, Pirabhakaran, and pledged to promote them provided they spurned his arch rival Karunanidhi. Pirabhakarn agreed and this decision polarised the militants into the AIADMK and the DMK camps. LTTE's main rival, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), aligned itself with Karunanidhi. The wedge between the LTTE and the DMK was driven further

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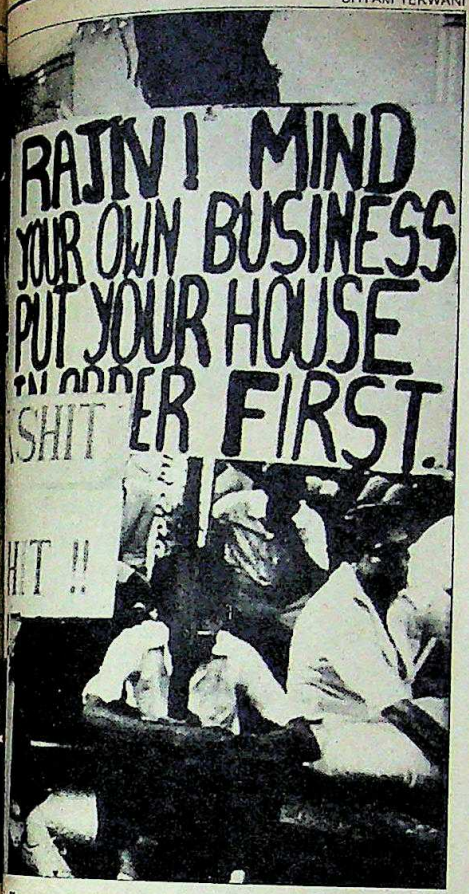
SHYAM TEKWANI



flammatory anti-Indian upsurge

with the LTTE virtually annihilating TELO as a military organisation in April-May, 1986.

But by November, 1986, relations between the LTTE and MGR had become strained. MGR, at New Delhi's behest, told the Tigers that if they were not agreeable to the basic formula worked out during the negotiations with Colombo, they should go back to Jaffna and carry on the fight from there. This was followed by Operation Tiger, in which the LTTE members—including Pirabhakaran—were disarmed; the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) conference where Pirabhakaran refused to agree to Jayewardene's suggestions, causing MGR some embarrassment; and the subsequent seizure of the LTTE's communication equipment, the vital link between Pirabhakaran and his commanders in the field. Pirabhakaran finally left for Jaffna on January 6 this year.

But Pirabhakaran's departure reinstated him in MGR's affections—on an even higher plane. Today MGR is not only more sympathetic to the LTTE, he is far more open about his support—witness his Rs 4 crore largesse—and is no longer willing to toe the Centre's line. That has put New Delhi in a tricky situation as far as the Sri Lankan problem is concerned.

ON the one hand, current domestic compulsions dictate that New Delhi cannot ignore MGR or Tamil Nadu. On the other, any further intervention in the Sri Lankan ethnic problem will be a diplomatic disaster. Already, Sri Lanka is reported to be acquiring an air defence system from Pakistan. Military help from other countries like Israel, China and South Africa is also a distinct possibility. In regional terms, India has isolated itself even further. Colombo's effective portrayal of India as the neighbourhood bully will find a receptive ear among SAARC countries, leading them to gang up against New Delhi.

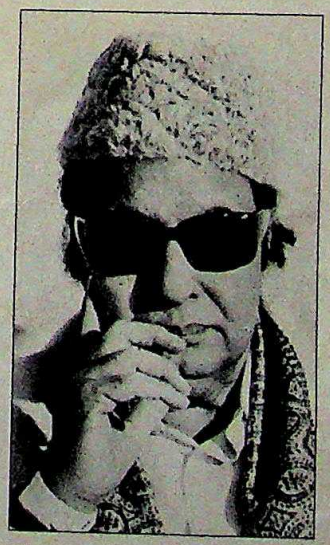
By last week, however, there were signs that the situation was cooling down and that recent events were a temporary aberration. Colombo announced a suspension of its offensive and modalities for the distribution of Indian supplies to Jaffna were being worked out. In Sri Lanka, most educated and liberal-minded Sinhalese and Tamils feel that the crisis should now be de-escalated and Indo-Sri Lankan relations brought back to a more even keel to reopen the way for renewed negotiations. Says Pieter Kenneman, chairman of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka: "The immediate task is for both governments to resolve this problem in bilateral relations." Adds Bernard Soysa, general secretary of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party: "There is intransigence on either side and we don't think such sparring is necessary for a solution."

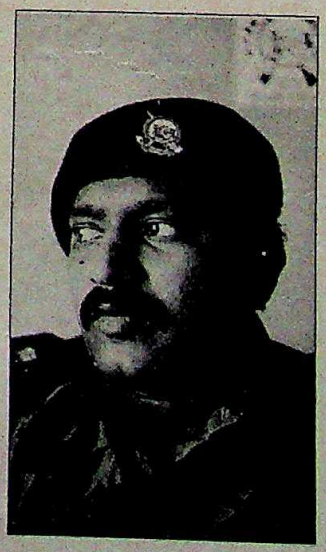
But the chances of a resumption of negotiations to settle the ethnic problem in the near future seem remote. Says Athulathmudali: "We will have to give the thing some time to cool off before the threads of the ethnic issue can be picked up again." Further, a badly-battered LTTE will take some time to recover from its military set-backs.

Thus, it appears that the impasse on the Tamil problem is likely to continue for some more time. The hitch in a negotiated settlement will be the issue of the merger of the northern and eastern provinces. The December 19, 1986 proposals are the best bet because they come very near a merger. In Sri Lanka's current heated domestic scene, no government in Colombo dare go further than the December 19 proposals. Anything more, in any event, would mean violating the island's Constitution and certain political suicide. In fact, the December proposals are reportedly acceptable to most Tamils except the LTTE leadership. Which is why Indian advisors on the Sri Lankan issue are now suggesting to South Block that the best strategy would be to erode the image of the LTTE as the sole spokesman of the Tamils and allow the more moderate groups to have a greater say in future negotiations. In an interview to INDIA TODAY last fortnight *(page 36)*, Rajiv made it clear that India "wants a settlement across the table which has to be within the constitutional framework of Sri Lanka. We will not support the Eelam concept".

But having involved itself directly in Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis, Delhi will have to do some hard thinking about its future role and relationship with Colombo and the militants. New Delhi's actions have fallen far short of Tamil militant expectations, while Colombo can now be counted upon to view India's role in any future negotiations with suspicion. Judging by the mood in Colombo, any further intervention on India's part could lead to an unstoppable backlash in Sri Lanka, not just against the Tamils but against all Indians living on the island. At the same time, South Block will have to regain its former influence with the militants, isolate the LTTE and give credence to the other groups that have been sidelined and convince them that a negotiated settlement is the only way out. Either way, South Block now finds itself lodged between a rock and a very hard place.

—DILIP BOBB in Colombo
with S.H. VENKATRAMANI in Jaffna
and ANITA PRATAP in Madras





■ **MGR (left) and Pirabhakaran: emotional hurdles**

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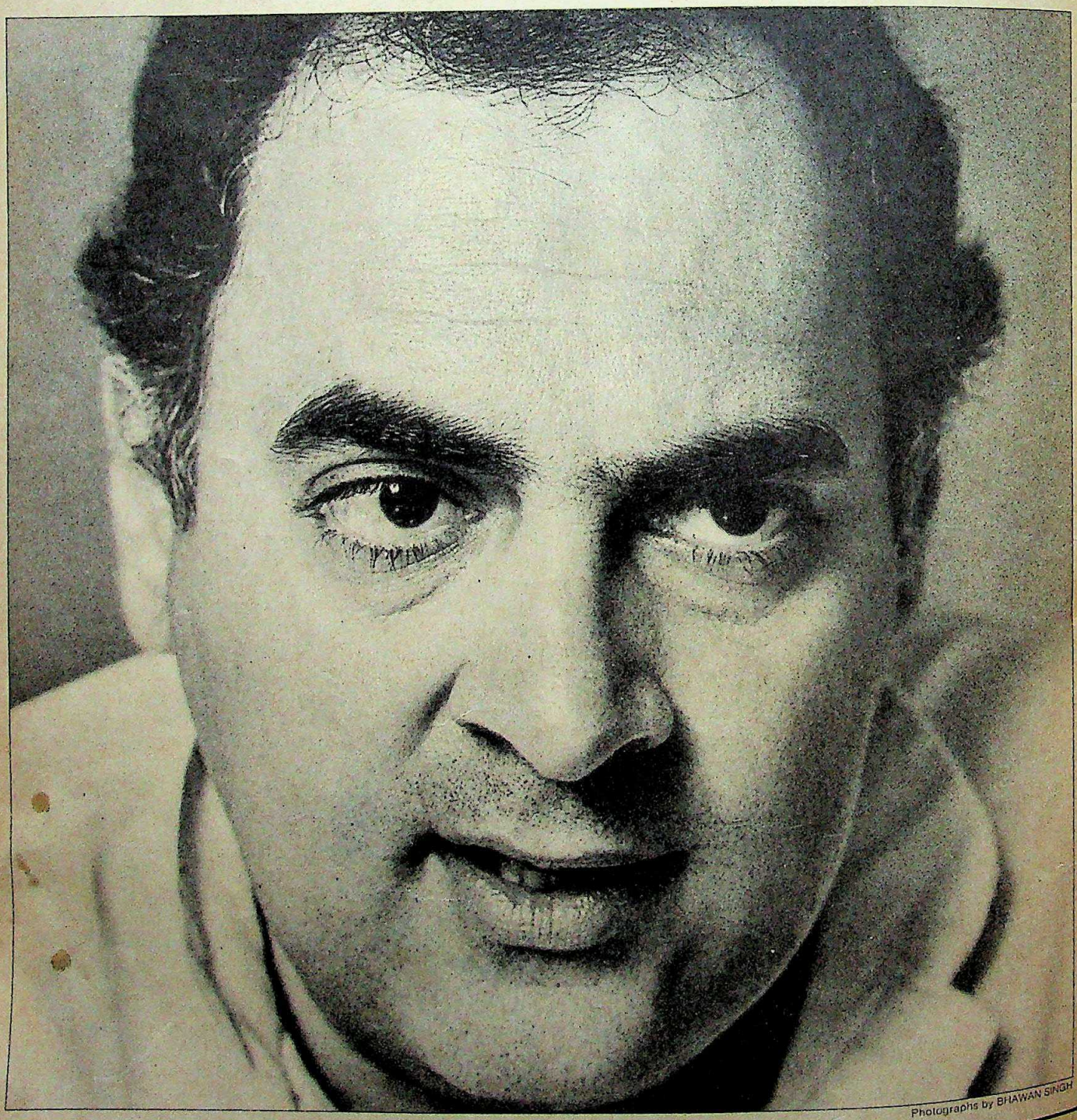
RAJIV GANDHI

"I am much the wiser"

BOFORS pay-offs, the Fairfax controversy, V.P. Singh's resignation, a confrontation with the President, the crisis in Punjab, electoral set-backs, rising communalism, intra-party feuding. Problems enough to break the best of political leaders. But the country's youngest Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, seems completely unfazed. He's calm, confident, almost unwarrantedly cocksure. He is neither burdened by his weighty office nor haunted by self-doubt. He seems to take the severest of criticism in his stride and handles the thorniest of issues with such ease as if nothing will go wrong—even when things are, in fact, going seriously wrong.



Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

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He talks with a friendly informality but compared to the past he is guarded in his comments and less prone to admitting mistakes. Despite the obvious crises exploding around him, he gives the impression of a cool pilot facing some turbulence although the passengers may be panic-stricken.

Now, as he approaches the mid-point of his term in office, he has not been able to accomplish any of the well-defined targets that were set in the heady days of his first year as prime minister. Yet he does not seem unduly frustrated or worried. He seems to have analysed, even rationalised, the reasons for his failures and is preoccupied with steps for the future. History holds no agonies for him. Most surprisingly, he dismisses his troubles with claims to a strange clairvoyance: "We were expecting them to come."

Also, belying the casual freshness that he exudes, he puts in a tough, 18-hour working day, often sleeping at dawn. Even when travelling outside Delhi, his IAF plane is converted into a flying secretariat. Taking time off from the pressing issues at hand, he met Editor AROON PURIE and Senior Editor PRABHU CHAWLA on two separate occasions aboard his IAF jet and at his residence. Excerpts from the interview:

Q. Now that the Audit Bureau report has confirmed that payments have been made by Bofors, how do you think it has affected the Government's credibility?

A. We feel that, to a great extent, the Swedish Government's report has vindicated what we have said. We had said that no middlemen were to be kept and it has been confirmed that there were no middlemen at the point of signing the contract. Now, unfortunately, they have paid 2 per cent to 3 per cent in the winding up of an earlier middleman appointed in 1977. We feel that we could have a 2 per cent to 3 per cent lower rate. The gun is a good weapon. There is no dispute about that.

The other basic question is how middlemen operate in any government. Although we were aware that a lot of things were going on, we were not able to put our hands on them. From 1980, we have taken a series of measures, especially in defence. As we take more steps, we find out more and we take further steps. The target is to eliminate them. Before this question came up in public, I had asked the Finance Ministry to do a full exercise on how to get to the root of all this. I received a note a couple of days ago on steps we should take and I have okayed them. Now we want to keep the actions we want to take quiet—otherwise somebody will try and thwart them.

Q. There is a feeling that the Government is dragging its feet in investigating the Bofors affair. What have you done personally on this score?

A. When we were replying on the issue in Parliament, we could have easily continued to take the stand that unless some hard information was available, we could do nothing. But we didn't wait. My office asked for an inquiry, spoke to Prime Minister Carlson's office, and then I spoke to Carlson. I thanked him for all that they had done. We didn't want to go into the sort of inquiry they would have because we did not want to complicate their system. Though we did feel a little upset that they have gone and deleted half the things in the inquiry. Well, not half, but the critical things which could have helped us. Now we are asking them for these, to find a starting point. It is no use going berserk and saying that we will do this and that. We will do it at a critical point after everything else has been sorted out. We cannot behave as a child does. We have to talk to the Swedish Government, to Bofors and try and get information out of them, from what is missing from the report.

BOFORS

"We feel that, to a great extent, the Swedish Government's report has vindicated what we have said. We had said that no middlemen were to be kept and it has been confirmed that there were no middlemen at the point of signing the contract."

Q. Don't you think that a payment of Rs 50 crore means that it is not purely an agent's commission, that there were other pay-offs?

A. Let me tell you what I feel has happened. Whoever signed the agent's contract in 1977 must have signed for some absurdly high figure. And that is why the winding up has cost 2 per cent.

Q. Don't you find it strange that the payments for the termination of the agent's contract were made in November-December '86, six months after the Bofors deal was signed?

A. No, I don't see that as a complication, because a part of the payment for cancellation would come as a part of their agent's contract. But the fact is that they have done it. There were no middlemen when we signed the contract.

Q. Do you have any ideas about where the Rs 50 crore could have gone?

A. We will chase it through the parliamentary committee. That doesn't mean that we are not acting on the hard facts we have. The agent was mentioned in the revenue intelligence report and action has been taken.

Q. Why was he allowed to leave the country?

A. He left earlier. What could we have done at that stage—arrest him? We must go through the full legal procedure. There must be no short-cuts. We will chase the matter with Bofors, the Swedish Government and the Swiss for information. Whatever information we have got has been at our instigation. We put it up to the parliamentary committee because it is the most open kind of forum. Opposition members will be involved.

Q. Wouldn't it have been more effective if the Government had found out the facts and taken the issue to its logical conclusion? The appointment of the parliamentary committee seems a side-step.

A. No, it is not a side-step. The question is not so much of what is being done. The Government must be seen not to be hiding something. What will, in fact, happen is that the parliamentary committee may not be able to carry out this investigation; it will ask the government agencies for help. Then we will be working with them.

Q. How hopeful are you of identifying the people who received the payments?

A. We will have to wait and watch over the next 10 to 15 days. We will study

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the report in terms of the law and on that basis we will ask the Swedish Government and Bofors for further information. When we get those answers we will know exactly how hard we will have to fight to get to the other end. We are determined to get to the other end.

Q. *Have you thought of cancelling the contract?*

A. The Defence Ministry categorically says no. Others will jack up the price and delay deliveries. We will have a serious problem. Pakistan has already got the weapons, it has people trained to handle them. The Defence Ministry is very clear that this would cause a serious flaw in our defence capability. You have seen how quickly the situation flared up within 10 to 15 days in January.

Q. *Will you ask Bofors to return the Rs 50 crore?*

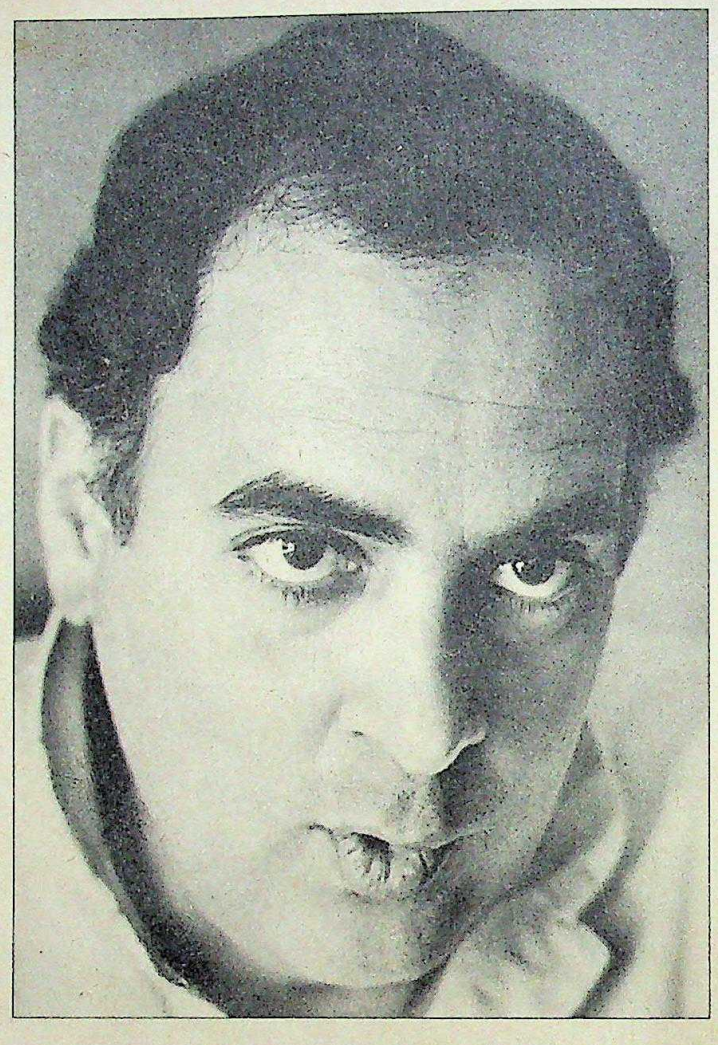
A. We can take this up with Bofors.

Q. *Since the Bofors payoffs have gone into Swiss accounts, what steps does the Government propose to take to detect accounts held by Indians abroad?*

A. This is a problem area. But we are working out the details so that we can have some arrangement to get details about illegal accounts in Swiss banks or anywhere else. A group in the Finance Ministry will go into it. Whenever we have evidence, we shall take the sternest possible action.

Q. *When you became prime minister you had declared that the Government would come down heavily on economic offenders. After the shifting of V.P. Singh from the Finance Ministry, the impression is that your Government is rather slow on this front. Do you agree?*

A. I really do not know. Even before V.P. Singh was shifted, the media was creating an impression that he was facing difficulties. This was totally incorrect. But the impression was being deliberately created. V.P. Singh is aware that I needed him in defence. I had a talk with him about why I wanted him shifted and I think there is no doubt in his mind that it was not a case of removing V.P. Singh from finance, but one of putting V.P. Singh in defence.



V.P. SINGH

"The party reacted because of certain things that happened in the Lok Sabha. The reaction was so violent that I don't think I could have controlled it."

Q. *But what went wrong? Why was your relationship strained?*

A. It is wrong to say that relations between us were strained. He was carrying out our policies and I had full trust in him.

Q. *Was he a good finance minister?*

A. On the whole, the economy did well, but there were areas where a lot more attention was needed.

Q. *Do you think that his resignation from the Cabinet was a loss to you?*

A. Losing any senior minister like V.P. Singh is definitely a loss. But I didn't drop him. He resigned.

Q. *Why didn't you stop the party MPs who were making personal attacks on him?*

A. There is a limit to which you can control the party. The party does have a mind of its own. I can give instructions but the party will react only if it agrees with what I think. If tomorrow I decide that we totally reverse our foreign policy the party is not going to agree with me. The party reacted because of certain things that had happened in the Lok Sabha. And the party's reaction was so violent that I don't think I could have controlled it.

Q. *But why was he virtually forced to resign?*

A. We did not force him to resign. He resigned himself.

Q. *Do you feel that he committed a mistake in hiring Fairfax and in giving complete authority to his officials?*

A. Now, this question is before a commission. Let it carry out its job.

Q. *But the commission is working in secrecy which was not the idea.*

A. Let the commission decide its course of action.

Q. *Would you like an open inquiry?*

A. That is why we set up the commission, to make it absolutely clear that we have nothing to hide from the public. I must add that some statements coming from people belonging to that company are highly questionable.

Q. *On the domestic front, are you more comfortable with the President now?*

A. I won't discuss that relationship in public.

Q. *Do you believe that the President doesn't have the right to seek information from the Government?*

A. The Government has never denied that the President has a right to seek information. The question is how much, when and the kind of information. On that, the Government has a definite point of view. And it is not Rajiv Gandhi's point

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of view. It is the Government of India's point of view, which has been formed during the last 36 years. It has been formed on the basis of what Panditji said and did, on what the Supreme Court has done and what our attorneys have advised. It is a historical fact.

Q. *The question is whether you concede that the President has the right to information or not.*

A. Kindly look at Article 78. It is not a question of conceding any right. It is the Government's obligation under the Constitution to inform the President of decisions. We are doing that. If the President needs any other information with regard to Government decisions and legislation, we are giving that also. But all these issues have to be looked at within the broad framework of our Constitution.

Q. *It looks though that the problem between you and the President is a personal one and has nothing to do with principles.*

A. There is no problem between Giani Zail Singh and Rajiv Gandhi.

Q. *You continue to have problems in other areas. Do you think the dismissal of the Akali government will solve the Punjab problem?*

A. As I said, President's rule there is meant for taking hard action against those extremists who are beyond retrieval.

Q. *But will you be able to contain them with a show of force? Don't you think that it is a political problem also?*

A. The House is not dissolved. I agree there is a political problem—the problem of dealing with a communal and theocratic conception of society and state. That has to be dealt with at the ideological level. We shall carry on that campaign in cooperation with other parties. But the problem of violence is equally important. Violence has to be put down. President's rule has to show firmness in action.

Q. *Isn't the Barnala group now likely to join the other side?*

A. They were good in the beginning. They are out now. They had become part of the other groups. We supported them till the last moment. But they failed to contain terrorism.

Q. *With the ouster of Barnala government isn't the Punjab accord dead?*

A. No, it's not dead. Eleven points of the Punjab accord have already been implemented. Only three—Chandigarh, water and the All India Gurudwara Act remain. The Eradi Commission has given a report which gives more water to Punjab.

Q. *But the terrorism today is no longer related to these disputes.*

A. That is right. I think what Punjab needs today is vigorous economic development and rebuilding of trust and social cohesion. We need to reach out and find out the problem of those groups which have not crossed the boundary yet.

Q. *Shouldn't the Government try to end the violence by talking to the boys who command a following?*

A. We haven't spoken to any of these groups yet.

Q. *But do you intend to?*

A. Let's see how the President's rule fares.

Q. *Was the timing of President's rule linked to the Haryana elections?*

A. Not at all. If we did not want President's rule we could have avoided it. But two things happened which forced Central intervention. The first was that the fundamentalists had *prachar sabhas*. They forced the closure of liquor shops, haircutting saloons, and even banned dresses, among other things. And it started in new areas. Then, we had an open attack by a senior member of the government on the police chief. That was not acceptable. We felt that something had to be done to restore confidence in the police and enough was not being done by the local government.

Q. *So it was purely a law and order problem which compelled you?*

A. Bad law and order situation is one thing but breakdown of the police system was a serious matter. We could not ignore it.

Q. *Are you satisfied with the performance of the police and administration?*

A. We believe it has improved but it is too early to say anything—we must watch for a longer time.

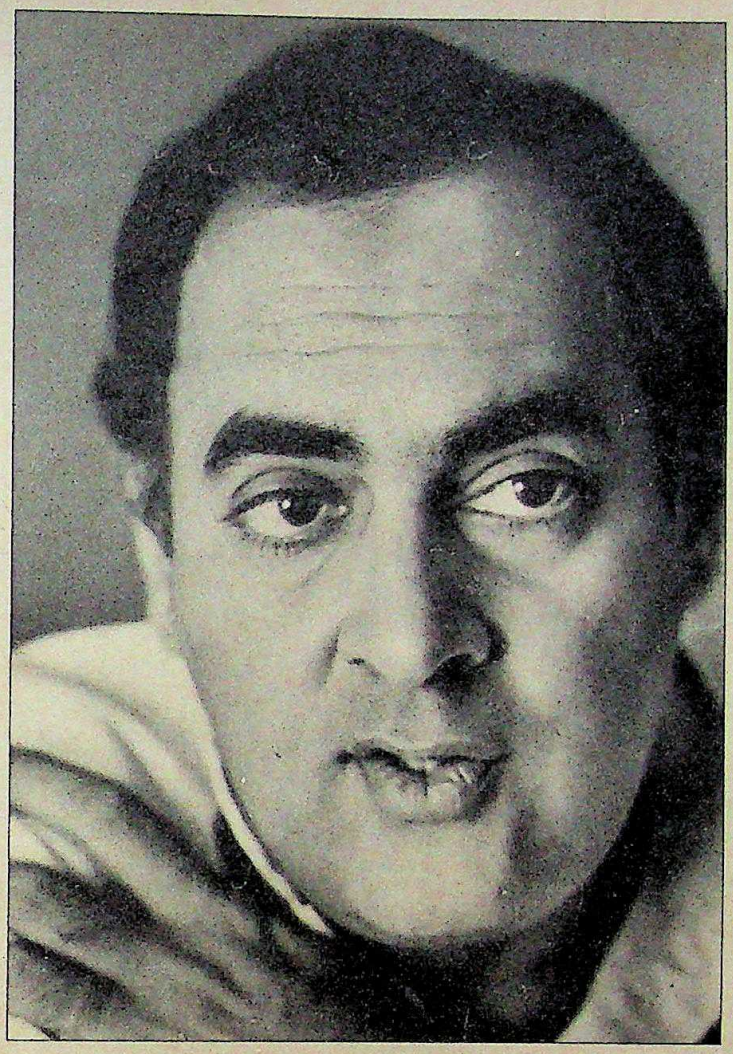
Q. *Can you name the foreign forces which you say are active in Punjab.*

A. I am not going to name them. But they are definitely active there. It is known all over the country now.

Q. *Is trouble in Punjab also part of the destabilisation design?*

A. Punjab has been part of that for a long time.

Q. *You always refer to America as*



THE PRESIDENT

"The question is how much, when and the kind of information. On that, the Government has a definite point of view. And it is not Rajiv Gandhi's point of view."

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part of the destabilisation conspiracy.

A. I never referred to America.

Q. *But why are you on a bash America binge?*

A. It is not an anti-America binge but it is a question of where we think our problems are coming from.

Q. *You are not getting enough support from the USSR on many issues.*

A. We are an independent country. We don't look for support like that. We do get support on international issues.

Q. *No one has come out in our support on Sri Lanka.*

A. I think by and large the international community has understood that we were interested only in humanitarian relief. The problem in Sri Lanka has to be settled through negotiations. India is involved and India is concerned because what happens with regard to the ethnic problem affects us in a very important way. Therefore, we have dealt with it bilaterally and that is the way in which we shall continue.

Q. *In Sri Lanka, the situation has drastically changed—to our disadvantage. Do you agree?*

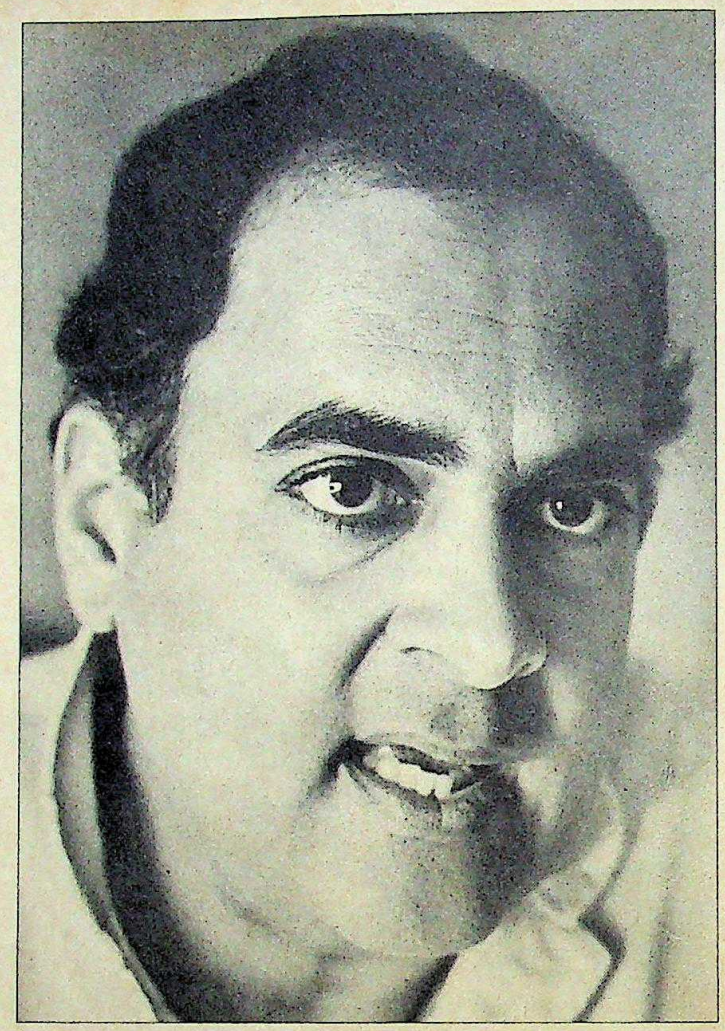
A. No, it has not changed. The basic policy which we had with Sri Lanka is still the same. We want a settlement across the table. And the settlement has to be within the constitutional framework of Sri Lanka. We will not support the Eelam concept.

Q. *But in spite of all our efforts, the situation has deteriorated to a point where we have violated Sri Lankan airspace. Was this justified?*

A. The situation deteriorated because Sri Lanka thought they could work on the military option. Sometimes we wonder whether this whole exercise of getting the parties together across the table was not used by Sri Lanka to buy time for the military solution. This has caused the problem. They agree to something, then they go back on that. They again agree partially, but again change their mind. It is the Sri Lankan flippant attitude which has caused all these tensions. There is a lot of vacillation on their part. But we hope they will see the futility of the military option and return to the dialogue.

Q. *How can we support the Tamil Nadu Government giving financial support to Tamil separatists?*

A. MGR has given aid on humanitarian considerations for running relief camps. There are over a lakh Tamil refugees in India. But we are confident that Tamils in Sri Lanka are fully competent to look after themselves. The shutting of food supplies and the economic blockade is causing them serious problems. That is why we are sending some humanitarian relief.



PUNJAB

"We had an open attack by a senior member of the government on the police chief. That was not acceptable. We felt that something had to be done to restore confidence in the police."

Q. *If a similar thing happened in Punjab, then?*

A. There is really no parallel. The Sikhs are not against the Government. We are not fighting with them. A small group is perpetrating violence and we are dealing with it. But we are not bombing a whole people. We are not shutting off their food supplies, we are not denying them medicines. Sri Lanka is doing all these things to its own people. This is why we had to decide to help the long-suffering people. In our relief there was nothing hidden. It was open for anybody's inspection.

Q. *Coming to communalism, the general belief is that it is due to the Government's appeasement policy.*

A. We are not appeasing these forces. I have called for a national movement to fight communalism which has assumed serious dimensions now. The National Integration Council should have a good look and suggest what should be done. Violence has to be controlled and put down firmly. But the problem is deeper. It has to do with education, with politics and with the pattern of economic development. It is complex, but I am determined to tackle it. I cannot allow the hard-won legacy of communal unity to be undermined.

Q. *But why can't we ban communal parties and stop selecting candidates according to religion and caste?*

A. You will recall we had put this in the President's Address in February 1987. There has to be a national consensus. We cannot legislate without overwhelming national consensus that religious and communal groups should be totally banned from politics.

Q. *Even in the economic field you seem to be defensive on liberalisation. The Government is returning to its old policy of controls.*

A. Some sections of the media have got it wrong. Our strategic policy of planning—and planning envisages controls of one sort or another—remains unchanged. Within that we have to make

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adjustments to deal with new circumstances and new situations. That is what we have done. It is wrong to label it as this or that. The basic thrust is on modernisation, technology upgradation, efficiency and improving the competitive ability of Indian industry. This does not mean that we shall jettison our fundamental policy of self-reliance and safeguarding economic independence.

Above all, in everything we do, our fundamental concern is the alleviation of poverty. This means we have to step up the rate of growth. Growth of agriculture, growth of mass consumption goods, spread of the public distribution system, land reforms, special programmes for the landless and for small and marginal farmers, have priority in my thinking. All this has nothing to do with the so-called liberalisation. This is a matter of planning our investment in the right direction. You cannot leave this to the market forces, because the market forces can only accentuate poverty, not alleviate it. We have a resource constraint. With these priorities in the plan we need to enlarge our resource base. This is where liberalisation comes in.

Q. *But the capital market has collapsed and profits of major industries have been plummeting during the last few months.*

A. Temporary ups and downs in the capital market should not be taken as a major trend. The economy is sound and the policies we are pursuing will lead to healthy industrial growth. The stock-market will reflect, sooner than later, the underlying health of the economy.

Q. *What happened to your slogan of moving into the 21st century?*

A. It was not a slogan. We have to move doggedly, persistently towards modernising our agriculture and industry. We are working in that direction. This is a historical trend, not a slogan.

Q. *Another problem for you seems to be your party which is in a shambles and in which you have been unable to conduct organisational elections. When do you propose to do that?*

A. It is not correct that the party is in a shambles: it is active and vigorous. But we have problems and we shall solve them. Elections will be held as soon as Dikshitji reports on the corrective steps to be taken.

Q. *You promised some degree of decentralisation in the party and the Government but there seems to be a growing concentration of power.*

A. All this talk of concentration of power is so much nonsense. There is the widest degree of participation both in the party and in the Government in decision-making. There is more autonomy in decision-making at the level of ministries than ever before.

Q. *How do you cope with so many departments with you? When do you propose to expand the Cabinet?*

A. There will be cabinet reorganisation. But you can't expect me to tell you when.

Q. *Or are you holding it up because you don't want to disturb the political balance in the party till the presidential elections?*

A. I will do it at the right time.

Q. *How are you going to select your nominee for the presidential elections?*

A. I am consulting political parties and others. I do not know whether there will be consensus on our candidate but I will consult all those who have to be consulted.

Q. *What were the problems with Arun Nehru? Were they personal or political?*

A. I have no problems with him.

Q. *Do you agree with your partymen who say V.P. Singh was trying to emerge as an alternative leader?*

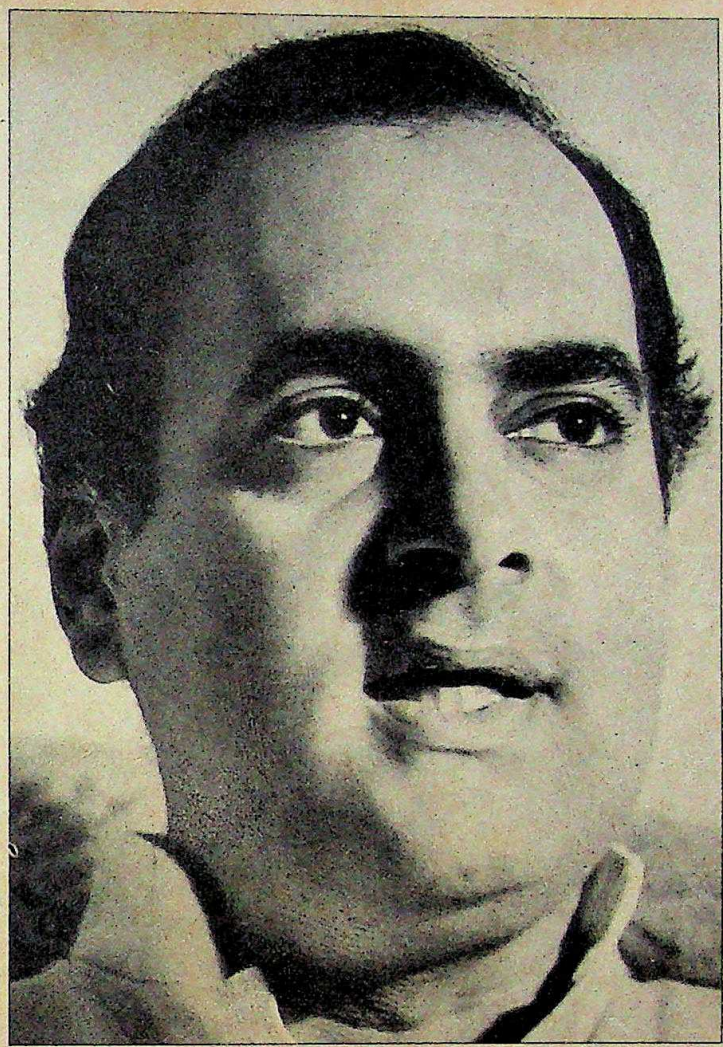
A. It is for the party to choose who shall lead it.

Q. *Do you feel that the worst is over and the party is fully behind you?*

A. The party is united. It is a great privilege to lead a party as rich in history and tradition as the Congress is. It has a tradition of rising to every crisis. I have no doubt that the party will back me in carrying out its policies.

Q. *But the impression persists that you only trust your close friends.*

A. I trust everybody in the party. And, in fact, there is a total misconception—presumably caused by the media—that I rely on certain people for decisions. In fact, those are not the people whom I trust for decisions at all. When I have to take a political decision, I consult the party set-up, the AICC, Working Committee members, chief ministers and PCC presidents. When it is a question of governmental policy-making, it is the Cabinet or the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs as the case may be. There are no small



SRI LANKA

"Sometimes we wonder whether this whole exercise of getting the parties together across the table was not used by Sri Lanka to buy time for the military solution."

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groups or coteries. On almost no political matter have I ever consulted my personal friends, meaning the friends now involved in politics and who have not come through the Youth Congress or the organisation.

Q. *Then, what is their role? They are seen with you quite often.*

A. Each one of them has a specific role. I am not going to discuss each role here.

Q. *So each one of them is doing some job.*

A. Yes, as assigned by me.

Q. *Are you satisfied with their performance?*

A. One is never satisfied fully with performances. If one was fully satisfied then, in a way, your mind is dead. To a great degree, yes. But to a certain extent there are shortcomings.

Q. *Have they helped you improve your image?*

A. Image as opposed to work?

Q. *Image as a leader and a prime minister.*

A. In some areas yes, in some areas no.

Q. *In which areas has it been bad?*

A. For this I will have to discuss individuals which I don't want to do here.

Q. *Have your friends proved to be a liability or an asset?*

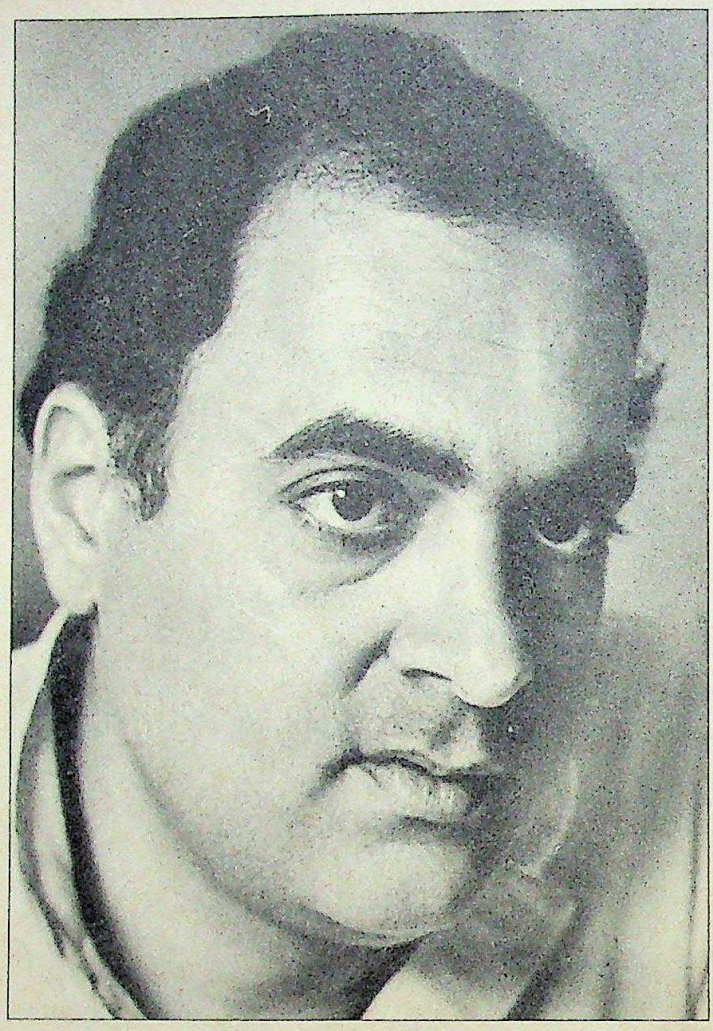
A. In some ways assets, in some ways liabilities.

Q. *Among your friends, Satish Sharma and Amitabh Bachchan have been involved in a lot of controversies. What is your opinion?*

A. I don't read what appears in the press. Much of what appears in the press is not based on correct information.

Q. *But what is your personal opinion about their conduct? Do you agree with what has appeared about their life-styles and business activities abroad?*

A. My attitude is very clear. Neither of them is handling any political task. Satish looks after Amethi only, and that is a very limited exercise. But if they have done anything wrong now or in the past, they are absolutely accountable and I want to assert that law of the land is the law of the land. It will not be waived, bent or softened for anybody in the country.



ADVISORS

"When I have to take a political decision, I consult the party set-up....There are no small groups or coteries. On almost no political matter have I consulted my friends."

Q. *Don't you agree that Ajitabh Bachchan's shifting of residence or business to Switzerland should be looked into? Has he taken the Reserve Bank's permission?*

A. If anything is brought to our notice we must treat him like any other citizen. But he is much more visible than any ordinary citizen and must get his rights like any other citizen. However, if any specific information is given to us that he has done something wrong we will act on it. In fact, when a senior official from the Finance Ministry came to me and told me that he was looking into the economic activities of certain individuals. I told him to go ahead without fear.

Q. *But have you sought Ajitabh's explanation for his business activities abroad?*

A. I have not discussed this with him but I am sure that the Finance Ministry will look into the matter if anything is wrong.

Q. *You are in the middle of your term now. What are your successes and failures?*

A. I think we have made tremendous gains on almost every front. On foreign policy, India has seldom had a problem in international forums. It is not something I have done. It is only because I have been able to stand on the shoulders of others before me and have been able to go further. On the economic front, our economy is moving very well. Yes, there are some negative indicators. But I think they are under control and we can cope with them.

Q. *You now seem to be deliberately adopting a leftist posture. What is the reason?*

A. There is no reversal. In '85 I spoke more about imperialism than I have done at any time after that. If you see in all my international speeches, even in my speech to the US Congress, it has always been there. What has happened is that the media here has picked up only one aspect of it. Right from the beginning I was saying the public sector is important—it is a key to our development and will continue to be the key. What we are looking for is a change in its role. While the media was talking only about the private sector, we were investing more in the public sector than any other government.

Q. *What have you learnt during your tenure as prime minister?*

A. I am much the wiser.

Q. *The general feeling is that you have changed from being a person who relied on his instincts and commonsense to one who is getting into the usual politician's mould.*

A. No, I am not getting into any old

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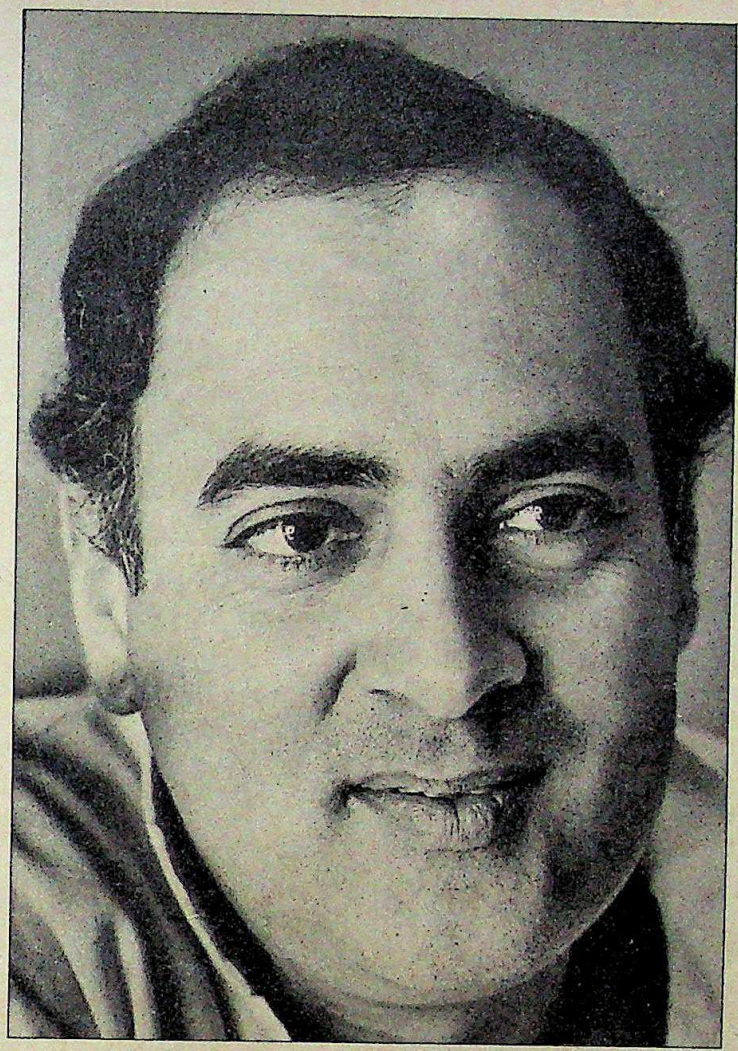
mould. I am very much in the same mould as I was. I still function very much on what I think is right.

But then, as now, I take in a lot of input from a lot of people. What has changed is that I have changed a lot of the people I used to get inputs from. I mostly get inputs from ministers, from the party, and for economic issues from many people outside. We started a lot of things but they got bogged down in the bureaucracy. It went down to a certain level, perhaps the joint secretary level. By the time the policies went down, they were not what we had started off with. They were so diluted, that they were neither here nor there and had little effect. So we started a major exercise of revitalising the bureaucracy. I think it is having a tremendous effect. It is not a question of indoctrination but of getting them to have a little more vitality, of being more active. Each individual has it in him but somehow the system does not allow them to function.



RAJIV GANDHI

"I am very much in the same mould as I was....I still function very much on what I think is right...but I have changed a lot of the people I used to get inputs from."

Q. *But a lot of them should not even be doing even the things that they are doing. Perhaps the system requires surgery.*

A. In any such thing I think too sharp an action can destroy everything. We must look around and see how many countries have been destroyed. They have lost their democracy and freedom because they did things too fast and did not balance them. I don't think a harsh change is going to work. It should be a change in which we can carry the people with us.

Q. *Are you as trusting as before? Do you work with the same enthusiasm?*

A. I am less trusting because I found major shortcomings in many areas where I had placed trust; not personal things but relating to work. But I do not feel let down because I don't see a person as letting me down; I see myself as having misjudged him. But yes, I work with the same enthusiasm. I feel that I have only been elected because I have certain ideas, and I must put them through. What has been happening in the last two to three years is that the methods of implementing these ideas have had to be modified slightly. Because when you start doing something you hit a wall. Either you break down the wall or you achieve the same thing in a different way.

Q. *How do you perceive your public popularity now? You were on a high two-and-a-half years ago. Do you see yourself lower down in the graph today?*

A. We were expecting this right from '85. In mid-election you are always at the lowest. What we started in '85 was not just a question of liberalisation or rationalisation. What we really attacked was all the vested interests in the system—whether in politics, bureaucracy or industry. So we opened out all the fronts. One can say why did you open up all the fronts, you should have chosen one at a time. We looked at it but the fact is that one led to the other. When we took this on it was very clear that the vested interests would hit back at some time. We had started calculating in '85 when this would be and our assessment was that it would be somewhere in the beginning of '87—during the budget session because it is the hot part as Parliament is in session. We were a little surprised when one volley came in middle and late '86.

Q. *What was this volley?*

A. I am not telling you; you find out. But then it all died down and it all started coming in January. That was a bit earlier than we had expected. I mean, if you ask me whether it was Fairfax or anything else was going to come, I had no idea, but we knew that some major onslaught would come roughly during this time—and it has come.

Q. *Since what and how it has come about could not possibly have been foreseen, how could you have expected it?*

A. If you go back and look at history, during Panditji's period and during Indiraji's period—the early years—they have been through very similar things.

Q. *Is the worst over?*

A. I think we will be through all this once the President's election is over.

Q. **Are you relating it to the election?**

A. No, I am not saying it is related but we had a vote in Bengal and other places. And we have a vote now. A vote is always a high tension point and the presidential election will be the last vote for some time.

Q. *Besides all these weighty problems, there seems to be some concern about your driving habits. Why do you drive so fast ?*

A. Because I drive better than all the drivers.

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Ennore Foundries Limited

Ennore, Madras-600 057

Speech delivered by Chairman, Shri MANTOSH SONDHI at Twenty Seventh Annual General Meeting of the Company held on Monday, the May 18, 1987 at Ennore, Madras-600 057.

Shri MANTOSH SONDHI

Dear Shareholders,

It gives me great pleasure to extend to you all, on behalf of the Board of Directors and on my own behalf, a very warm and cordial welcome to the Twentyseventh Annual General Meeting of your Company.

The notice convening this meeting, the Directors' Report and the audited Annual Accounts for the year ended December 31, 1986 together with the Report of the Auditors, have been with you for sometime now; with your permission, I shall take them as read.

Performance

When I spoke to you last year, I had stated that I looked at the prospects for your Company during 1986 with cautious optimism, in the belief that the Government will in the near future initiate policy measures to stimulate demand for commercial vehicles and tractors - two important sectors of our industrial activity - which had been passing through a phase of extreme sluggishness. Unfortunately, our hopes have not been fully realised, but despite this and a higher power cut, your Company has done well during the year under review.

The sales volume has been marginally higher at 23,956 tonnes as against 23,319 tonnes in 1985. The turnover was, however, at an all time high of Rs.36 crores compared to Rs.34 crores in the previous year. Profit After Tax declined slightly from Rs.146 lakhs in 1985 to Rs.141 lakhs in 1986. The squeeze in the margins was mainly due to increase in input costs. Though this cost escalation was to some extent neutralised by better utilisation of materials and men, the Company was not able to get the required price increase from customers in view of the prevailing market conditions.

Prospects for 1987

You are aware that in order to guard against sectoral slackness in demand, the Company has been making strenuous efforts to broaden the product-mix in the last few years. As a result, there has been a perceptible change in the sectoral share of the products of your Company. In keeping with this policy many new products have been introduced during the year and some more are under development. This strategy is bound to pay dividends during 1987 and in the years to come.

During the first quarter of 1987, production, sales and turnover were 7,012 tonnes, 6,606 tonnes and Rs. 1,020 lakhs respectively, compared to the corresponding previous year figures of 4,719 tonnes, 5,271 tonnes and Rs.780 lakhs respectively. The value added per man also increased from Rs.54,000 to Rs.59,000. Thus there has been a marked improvement in the performance of your Company in the first quarter of 1987 in terms of turnover, productivity and profitability. Prospects for this year are, therefore, good.

Modernisation - Key for stability and growth

Modernisation and upgradation of technology, is a sine-qua-non for survival of any industrial enterprise in the present highly competitive market place. This has been a continuous process in your Company and the production in the High Pressure Moulding Line is firmly established. Your Company has now decided to immediately take up the modernisation of the old moulding lines with an Automatic Shoot Squeeze Moulding Plant.

The thrust in the next few years will be on improving company's competitive performance with focus on waste management, quality improvement, development of complex aluminium castings, exports and intensive training programmes. Adoption of Computer Aided Design and Drafting is another key thrust area. In fact, Designs and Drawings for the development of new Cylinder Blocks and Heads is now being done successfully on CAD workstation. This is the only way if the design and production capabilities at Ennore Foundries are to be kept in line with the state-of-the art.

As some of you may be aware, the Government had recently constituted an expert group to review the total policy framework for the foundry industry and to suggest changes in order to achieve the objectives of modernisation and growth. This was in pursuance of the Prime Minister's Budget speech in which he had made a reference to a special programme to be launched by the IDBI with the above objective in view.

The report of the expert group on the foundry industry has recently been submitted to the Government and it is my fervent hope that action on some of the main recommendations made by this expert group will be initiated at an early date. This is necessary so that the foundry industry can meet the challenge imposed on it as a result of the liberalisation of Government policies - a trend which must continue.

Long term prospects

Your Company is now reasonably capitalised, it has a sound technological and management base, and its future seems to be quite secure. The 5 Year Rolling Plan to which I had made a reference in my statement last year and which is being updated every year gives a fair indication of where your Company would like to be in the course of the next five years. There is no reason why the objectives set out in the Rolling Plan should not be achieved. Then only would the full potential of your Company be realised.

National Scene

Since we last met, the Government has continued with its major policy initiatives to encourage investments and expansion of existing units. The average annual growth rate of the Gross National Product has been maintained at a steady 5% during the last few years. Despite three successive weak monsoons, there had been no setback in agricultural output, showing a high degree of self-reliance we have achieved in this sector. The growth rate of industrial production in 1985-86 of around 8% has also been quite satisfactory, the increase in the manufacturing sector being particularly encouraging. This augurs well for the country and for your Company.

However, I am quite concerned at the growth rate of specified capital machinery based industries which showed a meagre growth of 2% in 1985-86 and a decline of 9% in first half of 1986-87. Import of capital machinery has affected the capacity utilisation of industrial machinery manufacturers. While import of capital machinery may sometimes be necessary in certain core sectors of the industry for meeting specific technological requirements, a review has to be necessarily done to protect the capacity of the indigenous industry by ensuring its quick modernisation and by taking such other measures as may be required. Here again the recommendations of an expert group are under the consideration of the Government. One must re-iterate that under-utilisation of capacity in the capital goods is bound to have far reaching implications so far as self-reliance is concerned. Our capital goods industry was doing well sometime ago; it is in doldrums now.

Power situation

The power situation prevailing in the Southern States continues to be alarming. Even traditionally surplus states like Andhra Pradesh and Kerala have had to impose severe power cuts. Talking of the country as a whole, while there has been a significant growth of about 14% in thermal power generation, hydel power generation has not shown any worthwhile growth. Although the weak monsoon, particularly in the western parts of the country, was a contributing factor, there have been serious slippages in the implementation of hydel power projects aggrevating the situation. Besides power generation, greater attention needs to be given to power transmission systems, reduction of losses, creation of a national grid and improvement in power stability. It is also high time that action to abrogate or atleast to suitably update that archaic piece of legislation - The Electricity (Supply) Act of 1948 - is initiated in order to bring it in line with the present day requirements. This obviously has political overtones but this is a situation which has to be faced if a significant impact on the power situation in the country has to be made.

Recent pronouncements that private sector may also be allowed to enter the power generation sector shows a pragmatic approach to a perennial problem, where in spite of increased generation, the overall power deficit in the country continues to increase - by as much as 7% last year.

Coal linkages to the Southern States for operation of thermal power plants have not been very successful. It is for consideration whether import of coal under bilateral trade agreements would provide a more cost- effective solution.

Industrial Relations

Industrial Relations remained cordial throughout the year. The Ennore Foundries Employees Union under the able leadership of Shri S C C Anthoni Pillai completes 25 years of useful service to the employees, this year. As you are aware, this is the only union in the company since its inception. Over the years this union has built an unique tradition of industrial relations based on mutual trust and confidence between management and employees. I extend my hearty congratulations to the Ennore Foundries Employees Union on this happy occasion and express the hope that this tradition of industrial relations will continue and the bond between employees and management will be further strengthened in the years to come to their mutual advantage.

Directors

Mr D R G Andrews, Mr R A Fryars, Mr H A Rose and Mr L L Narayan have resigned from the Board. I would like to place on record our deep appreciation of the contributions made by them as Directors of this Company. Mr D J Balaji Rao was nominated Director by The Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India Limited in place of Mr P Sabanayagam. Mr J P Gilchrist and Mr P Sabanayagam were appointed as Directors in the casual vacancy caused by the resignation of Mr R A Fryars and Mr L L Narayan respectively. They would hold office upto the date of this Annual General Meeting. Mr N J Penn, who was appointed as Additional Director on October 23, 1986 would hold office upto the date of this Annual General Meeting. The Company has received due notices from Members proposing the names of Mr J P Gilchrist, Mr P Sabanayagam and Mr N J Penn as Directors of the Company. Necessary resolutions are before you for appointing them as Directors of the Company at this Annual General Meeting.

Acknowledgement

May I conclude by conveying our thanks to our collaborators Ms Land Rover-Leyland International Holdings Ltd., and all our friends at the erstwhile Leyland Trucks, U.K., who have always provided unstinted support and advise whenever required by your company.

I would like to convey our deep gratitude to all our valued customers and suppliers as well as to our Bankers for their assistance and support.

Despite the severe environmental constraints, your Company has done well during this year because of the unstinted co-operation extended by all employees of your Company under the able guidance of your Managing Director. I thank them all on this occasion.

I would also like to take this opportunity to convey our sincere thanks to The Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India, Industrial Development Bank of India, Industrial Finance Corporation of India, Unit Trust of India, Life Insurance Corporation of India and General Insurance Corporation of India for their assistance for our modernisation and replacement programmes.

Our thanks are also due to the Central and State Governments and to The Tamil Nadu Electricity Board for the assistance they have rendered to us. I shall be failing in my duty if I do not place on record my deep appreciation of the assistance that I have received from my colleagues on the Board. Lastly, may I say how grateful I am to you all for your presence in such large numbers at this Twentyseventh Annual General Meeting of your Company and for your confidence in and continued support to us.

Note: This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

Imageads 2444

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Through years of rugged service in war and peacetime, the C-130 Hercules aircraft has earned the admiration of pilots and mechanics all over the world. It's simply one of the most dependable planes in the air.

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As a tanker, the Hercules aircraft carries 56,000 pounds of fuel on a typical mission — fast enough for mid air delivery to jets, or slow enough for helicopter refueling.

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Best of all, the C-130's impressive performance comes with surprising cost efficiency. That's why you'll find it serving more than 55 governments on every continent, day in and day out, year after year. Getting the job done, no matter what the job may be.

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HARYANA

The Devi Lal Offensive

THE expectations are high, and so are the stakes. What Bhajan Lal, the quick-change artiste of Haryana politics, describes as "a question of life and death for the Congress(I)", is, in Devi Lal's eyes, "the beginning of the *baghawat* (revolt) in the Hindi heartland". And last fortnight, the 19-month campaign of Devi Lal's Haryana Sangharsh Samiti to oust the Congress(I) from power in the state began to look achievable. Even the two hectic swings through the state by Rajiv Gandhi, in the final days of the campaign, hardly seemed to slow the Devi Lal juggernaut in the state's rural areas. Anticipating victory, an opposition leader gloated: "Today Haryana, tomorrow the country."

Devi Lal, 75, considers the result of the June 17 poll for 90 seats in the Haryana legislature a forgone conclusion. The craggy-faced, gravelly-voiced patriarch of the Jats exudes confidence. He has rural audiences eating out of his hands with his promise to write off all loans under Rs 15,000. "On June 19," he says, "you will put in my hand the *kalam* (pen) of power. With this pen, I can appoint someone finance minister and someone else irrigation minister. I will call the finance minister and ask him: 'What is the amount of loans outstanding for this district?' He will reply: 'So many lakhs and so many thousands.' I will say: '*Maaf kar do*.' He will draw up the order and put the file before me. Then, I will take this pen and sign on the file: De-vi-Lal."

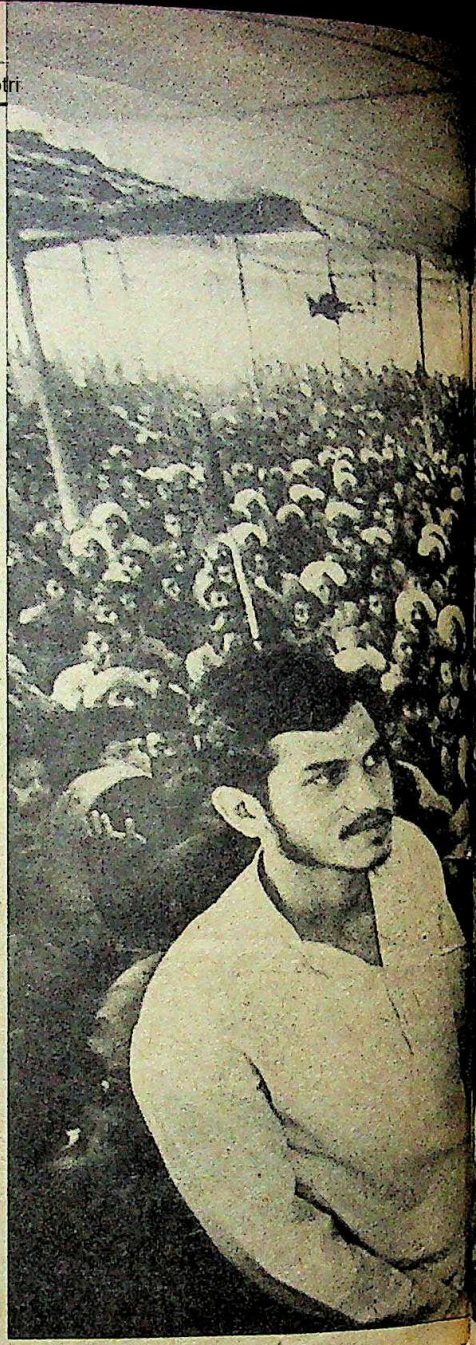
In Haryana's rustic setting, Devi Lal is proving to be a superb communicator; his rapport with the rural audience is complete. They believe what he tells them. He turns to the elders sitting in the crowd and says: "Don't die on me. Stick around till June 19 and I will get you an old age pension." These are only two points in Devi Lal's cleverly crafted rural platform which has captured the imagination of villagers. He promises an unemployment allowance to all youth till they get a job, medical expenses to all Harijan women delivering their first child, and a share to landowners in the profits from all trees adjoining their land. This, maintains Devi Lal, will give farmers a vested interest in looking after the trees planted by the state Government along their fields, rather than being tempted to uproot the trees to conserve sub-soil moisture.

The enthusiasm generated by these promises has put the Congress(I) on the defensive. Chief Minister Bansi Lal and his predecessor Bhajan Lal spend all their time trying to counter Devi Lal's promise to write off loans. There is no law under which he can do so, they argue. Replies Devi Lal: "The Lok Dal (B) and Sangharsh Samiti members are going to the Assembly to make such laws. We don't have to go to Rajiv Gandhi for approval."

Devi Lal's charge that Bansi Lal and Bhajan Lal are mere creatures of the Centre was illustrated by their behaviour in Rajiv Gandhi's presence during the prime minister's recent Haryana tour. While Rajiv sat centre-stage, surrounded by three commandos, Bansi Lal and Bhajan Lal sat huddled in a corner of the stage with AICC(I) General Secretary Nawal Kishore Sharma and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K.L. Bhagat. And when their turn to speak came both Bhajan Lal and Bansi Lal spent half their time dispelling talk of rampant factionalism in the party. These disclaimers carried little weight in the light of Bhajan Lal's earlier remark that the decision on leadership of the state Congress(I) after the elections was an open question.

For Devi Lal, on the other hand, there is no looking back. He collects about Rs 2 lakh every day at election meetings, and thanks the villagers for adding "*dhan shakti*" (money power) to their display of "*jana shakti*" (people power), "*Jiski dehari do lakh ho, woh* Birla, Rajiv *say kya darrey ga*" (Why would the man, whose daily earning is Rs 2 lakh, fear either Birla or Rajiv), he announces, to applause from the audience. He collects green turbans too, by the dozen. Green is the colour of the Lok Dal flag, and where ever Devi Lal goes, villagers tie a new green turban around his head as a mark of respect. The bundle of green turbans has been growing larger and larger every day, and now occupies half the kitchenette in his multi-purpose minibus 'Vijay Rath'.

The money donated enables Devi Lal to travel in style. He motors from village to village in a hired Mercedes, accompanied by four other cars. When the day's work is done, he moves to the Vijay Rath, an air-conditioned caravan similar to the one popularised by NTR in Andhra Pradesh.



The vehicle draws big crowds; village urchins and elders cluster around, trying to peer into its darkened interior which has a large bed, toilet, kitchenette, a television set and a VCR. Outside, in a floodlit area, blares a public address system and a large movie screen showing a film about Devi Lal's 19-month-long "*nyaya yatra*" for Haryana's rights. The Vijay Rath was gifted to Devi Lal by friends in Sonepat. Another friend, Dr J.K. Jain of Delhi, has loaned him a van with 18 television monitors, which now screens video films of speeches by Devi Lal and other leaders of the Haryana Sangharsh Samiti. This 'Video Rath' has been touring the state extensively, taking the message of the Samiti where its leaders cannot reach. Hi-tech campaigns, once the preserve of the well-heeled ruling party, have been adopted by regional parties too, thanks to the path shown by NTR. For the

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Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Devi Lal being weighed in coins at Narnaund: rural rapport

final two days of campaigning, the Lok Dal (B) leader plans to hire a helicopter.

The adulation and public support have not burgeoned overnight; they are the culmination of a 19-month agitation during which all Lok Dal and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLAs resigned their assembly seats in protest against the "injustice" meted out to Haryana. "June 17 *key baad, hum nyaya maangney vaaley nahin, nyaya dayney vaale hongey*" (after June 17, we will be dispensing justice, not seeking it), says Devi Lal vehemently. And he makes full use of the commission scandals surrounding defence deals. He patiently explains how politicians and big businessmen keep crores abroad in foreign banks. "The old British rulers used to take money out of the country, now our own government does it. I don't say this, Rajiv's own finance minister says it."

In Haryana, people vote their caste rather than cast their vote. All parties make it a point to announce how many tickets they give to candidates from the different castes and communities. Devi Lal also narrates a long list of the number of Brahmin, Scheduled Caste, Ahir and Kamboh candidates of his party. But the biggest chunk of votes is of the Jats, the community to which both Devi Lal and Bansi Lal belong. And as the peasantry in the five Jat dominated districts is galvanised behind Devi Lal, the Congress(I)'s salvation can only come from the towns. But there is another complication—the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) which has, with an eye on the Harijan vote, fielded a candidate from every constituency. It made a dramatic entry: overnight, BSP workers plastered the party's blue elephant symbol on the walls of almost every house in towns and villages. BSP candidates are expected to draw away the Harijan votes, which will ultimately hurt the candidates of the Congress(I). The Lok Dal (B)'s main worry, on the other hand, is the prospect of low polling due to the heat. Pointing to the danger of compiacericy by voters, Chaudury Jagannath, the Lok Dal (B) candidate in Bhawani Khera, warned that if people stayed home, polling may be as low as 35 per cent. Only 50 per cent of the voters cast their vote in a by-election last November.

For the Congress(I), nothing seems to have gone right in Haryana. With intense faction fighting between the dominant Bansi Lal and Bhajan Lal groups, the party presents a fractured picture. Many rebel partymen, who have been denied tickets, are also in the fray as independents. The

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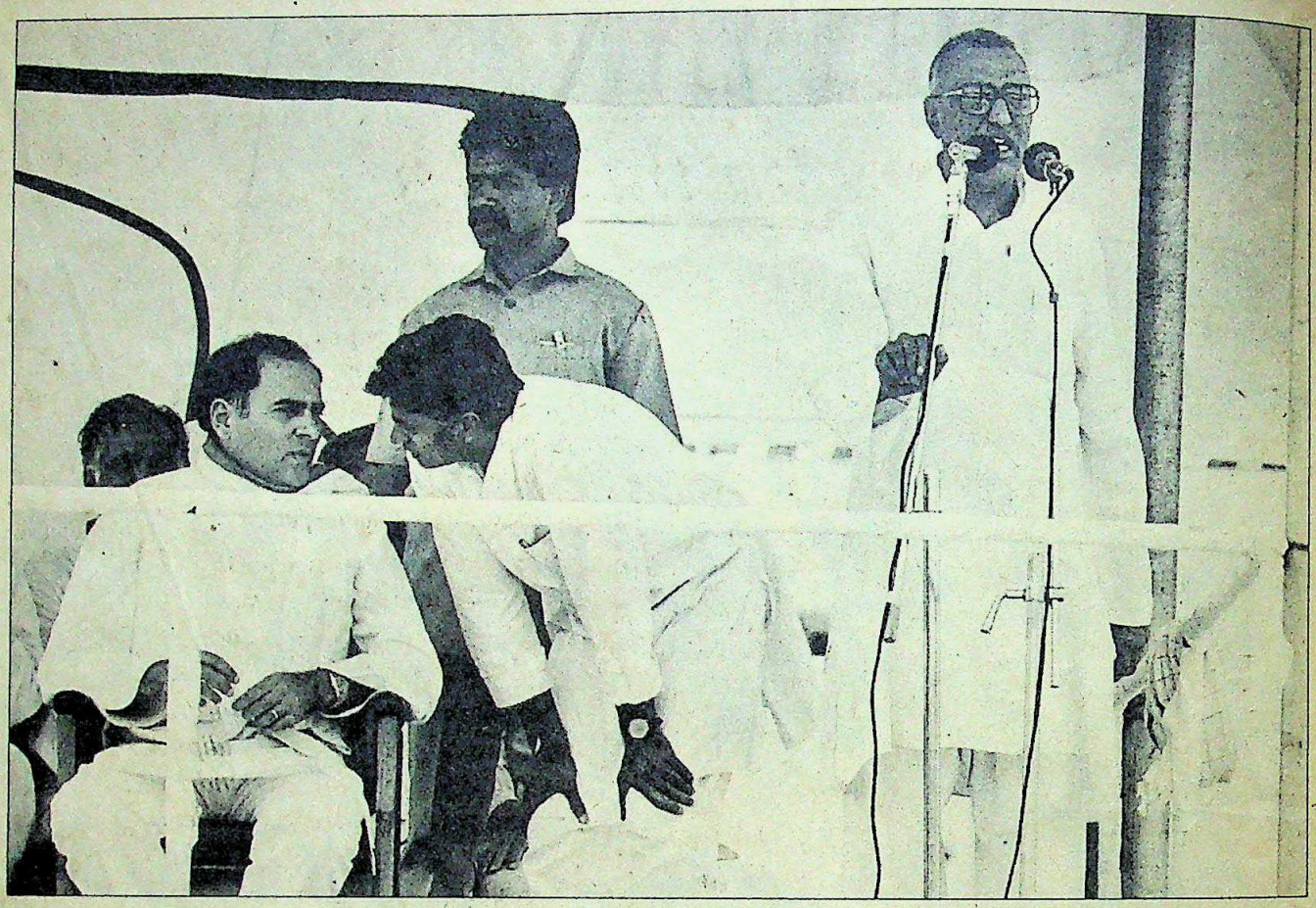

Bansi Lal with Rajiv at an election meeting in Bhiwani: fractured stand

Congress(I) election effort appears dispirited and few Congress(I) vehicles can be seen plying on village roads. Only in the major towns like Hissar, does it look as if the main contenders face each other in a real contest. But the desire for change seems very transparent. The public response at Bhiwani and some other meetings addressed by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in the state was tepid. Rajiv made an extremely brave and valiant effort to convince the electorate that he has been doing his best to protect Haryana's interests vis-a-vis Punjab. He said he "had secured" (from the Eradi Commission) more river water for Haryana that even Devi Lal had demanded when he was chief minister in 1977.

REGARDING Chandigarh, Rajiv categorically announced: "*Jab tak* Haryana *key hak poore nahin hote, hum* Chandigarh *ko nahin jaaney dengey*" (until Haryana's rights are fully secured, we will not let Chandigarh go). Even in the immediate context, these announcements may not dramatically improve his party's electoral prospects in Haryana; in the long run, they could affect the prime minister's credibility in Punjab. As Jaswant Singh of Beer Hissar confided, the prime minister's speech would lose his party a sizeable part of the Sikh vote.

"*Paani aur vikaas*" (water and progress) have been the two key issues in the Congress(I) campaign. Party workers labour the point that the Eradi Commission allocated more water to Haryana than was previously allotted. But the Lok Dal (B) tells the people that water will arrive only when the Sutlej Yamuna link canal is completed, and that can be ensured only by the pressuring of a government unafraid of Rajiv Gandhi. Despite the Congress(I) reminder to villagers that Bansi Lal is the builder of modern Haryana, the people now largely take for granted the progress made by the state in the mid-'70s when he was the chief minister. And as the Lok Dal (B) reminds them, he sullied his record with excesses during the Emergency. The Lok Dal (B) and the BJP enjoy a more favourable martyr image ever since their MLAs resigned their assembly seats to protest against the raw deal given to Haryana in the Punjab accord.

Even the death of the Lok Dal leader Charan Singh has not hampered the bright prospects of Devi Lal's party. "Candidates of the Ajit faction of the Lok Dal and the Janata Party will all lose their deposits," bragged Devi Lal. Sympathy votes for the dead Charan Singh can only help his widow Gayatri Devi who is involved in a tough three-way contest against Hardwari Lal (Lok Dal-B) and former Central minister Professor Sher Singh (Congress-I). So strong are expectations of a Lok Dal (B) victory that traders in the busy town of Jind are placing Rs 10,000 bets on Bansi Lal's defeat at Tosham, at the hands of a Lok Dal (B) maverick Dharam Bir. Bir himself is equally confident. "I will defeat Bansi Lal by 10,000 votes," he declares. Nevertheless, this will prove to be an extremely difficult task and the air is electric with tension in Tosham. According to Sudhir Jain, a Jind petrol pump owner, villages like Barsola on the Jind-Narwana road have put up banners warning Congress(I) candidates not to try to enter the area.

Even police and intelligence officials shadowing Devi Lal are extremely deferential towards him. Chuckles Devi Lal: "Trucks flying the Lok Dal's green flag are no longer being challaned." This, feels Devi Lal, is the strongest indication of the direction in which the wind is blowing.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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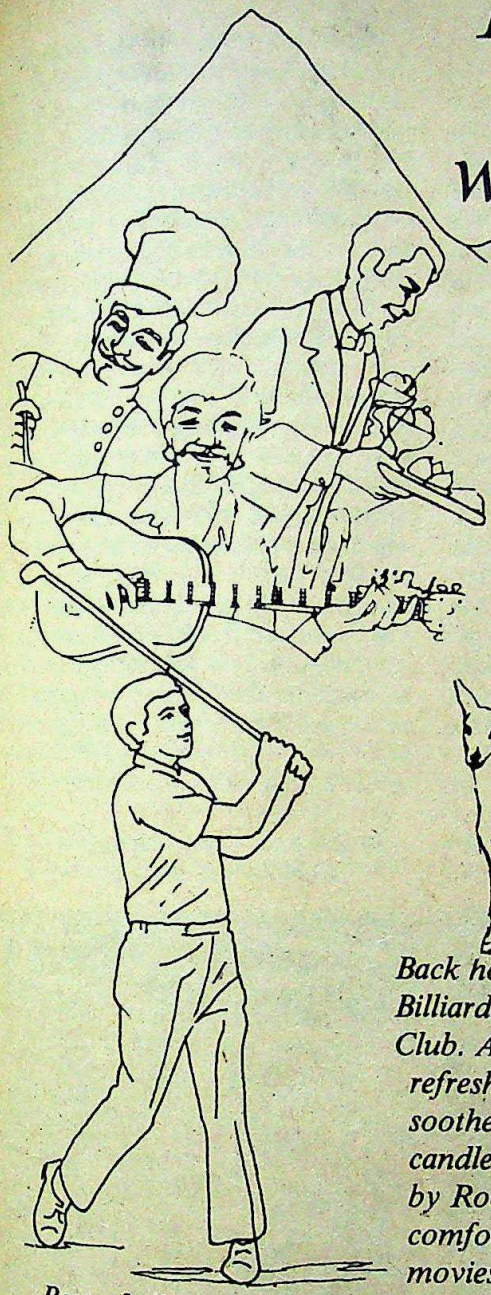

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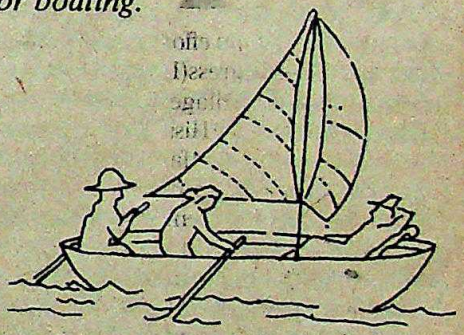

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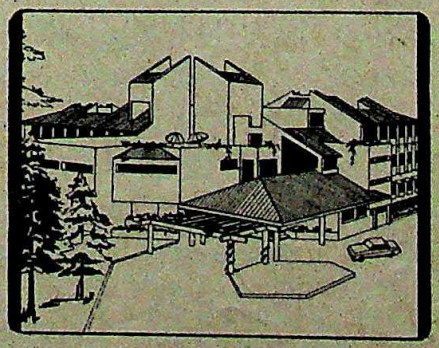

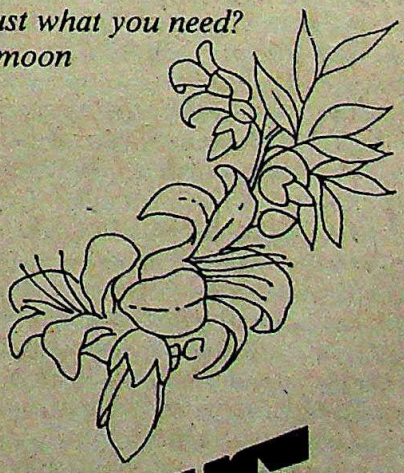

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BOFORS

The Smoking Gun

"Let me just reiterate. We are waiting for information from the Swedish Government. The minute we get information we will take action and we will show that we have taken action." —Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in the Lok Sabha on April 28, 1987.

WHEN the information obtained by the independent Swedish Audit Bureau on the Bofors pay-off finally landed on the prime minister's desk on June 4, 1987, the Government made a show of taking action by outlining a series of steps that seemed designed to accomplish everything short of nabbing the real, but unknown, culprits. There was little doubt that the scandal had seriously undermined and eroded the credibility of Rajiv Gandhi's Government and that he knew it. And so he appeared to move with alacrity. The prime minister summoned an emergency meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, rushed to President Zail Singh with a copy of the report, and then instructed the Finance Ministry to conduct raids on both the official and residential premises of Win Chadha, Bofor's former agent in India. But Chadha had already flown the coop to some destination abroad. And the raid turned out to be no more than a cursory formality. The Government also requested the presiding officers of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha to appoint a parliamentary committee to inquire into the various payments made by Bofors.

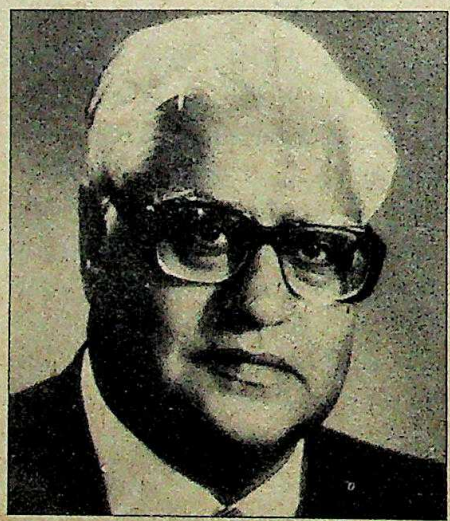
But as far as the Opposition and the critics of the Government were concerned this action was yet another damp squib—too little and too late—in the continuing and bumbling government campaign to deal with the Bofors issue. And it looked suspiciously like another cover-up. Even though the four-page Swedish report, released simultaneously in New Delhi and Stockholm, was not a complete one—names and other details were missing—it came as a devastating hammer blow to the Government. It demolished its claims—like denials of middle-men and secret payments—and confirmed that between Rs 35 crore to Rs 50 crore was indeed paid "among others to a previous agent of Bofors in India".

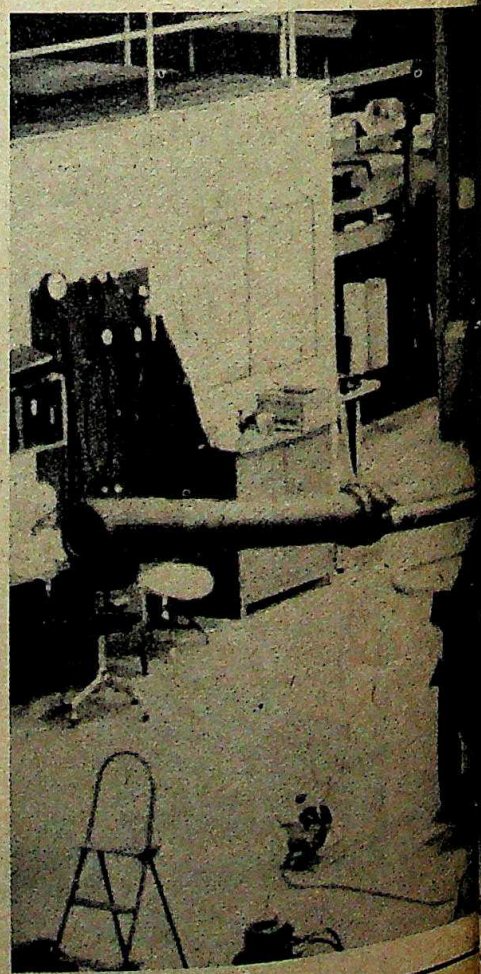
In Sweden, however, the report was viewed as a let-down. The major part of the report, which was released to the press, neither contained any incriminating names of the recipients of Bofors payments nor any new evidence except the widely anticipated confirmation that payments of approximately £ 28 million were made in the Indian deal. Swedish Government officials at various levels told INDIA TODAY in telephonic interviews that since there was now "no suspicion of violation of any Swedish law" by Bofors, they would have to stop investigations. They stated that they had no legal grounds now to put any further pressure on the firm. One senior Swedish journalist noted that the Government's bland assertions had "taken the Mickey out of what was otherwise an absorbing, investigative story". Journalists at the 'Dagens Eko' programme newsroom in the Swedish National Radio said, perhaps with a touch of indignation: "Well, there is no more controversy here: no parliamentary debates, no commissions of inquiry since Bofors has apparently done nothing illegal. The Audit Bureau's report is no more an issue here."

But if at all the Bureau's investigations proved a point, it was the confirmation of the Swedish National Radio's tenacious stance and the precision and accuracy of their investigation. The radio, under considerable fire both in India and Sweden for not providing documentary evidence to back up its charges, came out with its journalistic reputation enhanced.

In India, the person who finally scored against his adversaries in the Government and his own party, was Rajiv's former finance minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh. Hounded out of the cabinet after he ordered a probe into defence contracts Singh's stand seemed vindicated by the Bofors report. His position was further strengthened when the Government sent a four-member team of banking and legal experts, headed by the Deputy Governor of Reserve Bank of India Amitabh Ghosh, to Switzerland to obtain information about secret accounts held by Indians. Said Singh: "The report that Bofors did indeed pay upto Rs 50 crore comes as a shock to us all, particularly to

Bofors guns being assembled; (left) Chadha: pay-off confirmed





The much-awaited Swedish report, though incomplete, has come as a devastating blow to the Government. It has demolished its claims and confirmed the pay-off report.

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some of us who were made to believe that the rumours about payments in the Bofors deal was but a part of a grand plan of destabilisation engineered by foreign hands." Singh also demanded that the Government pressure Stockholm to release the names of the parties to whom payments were made, and also demand a full audit of the Bofors account.

Predictably, Singh was supported by the entire Opposition in demanding that the Government not stonewall the issue. The politbureau of the CPI(M) passed a resolution stating that "only a thorough inquiry into all these issues by a parliamentary committee will satisfy the people." Added BJP President L.K. Advani: "If the Government's hands are clean, it should have no hesitation in insisting upon the exposure of all the beneficiaries particularly those who have stashed away their gains in Swiss accounts. And if Bofors is unwilling to cooperate, the Government will be justified in considering the cancellation of the contract."

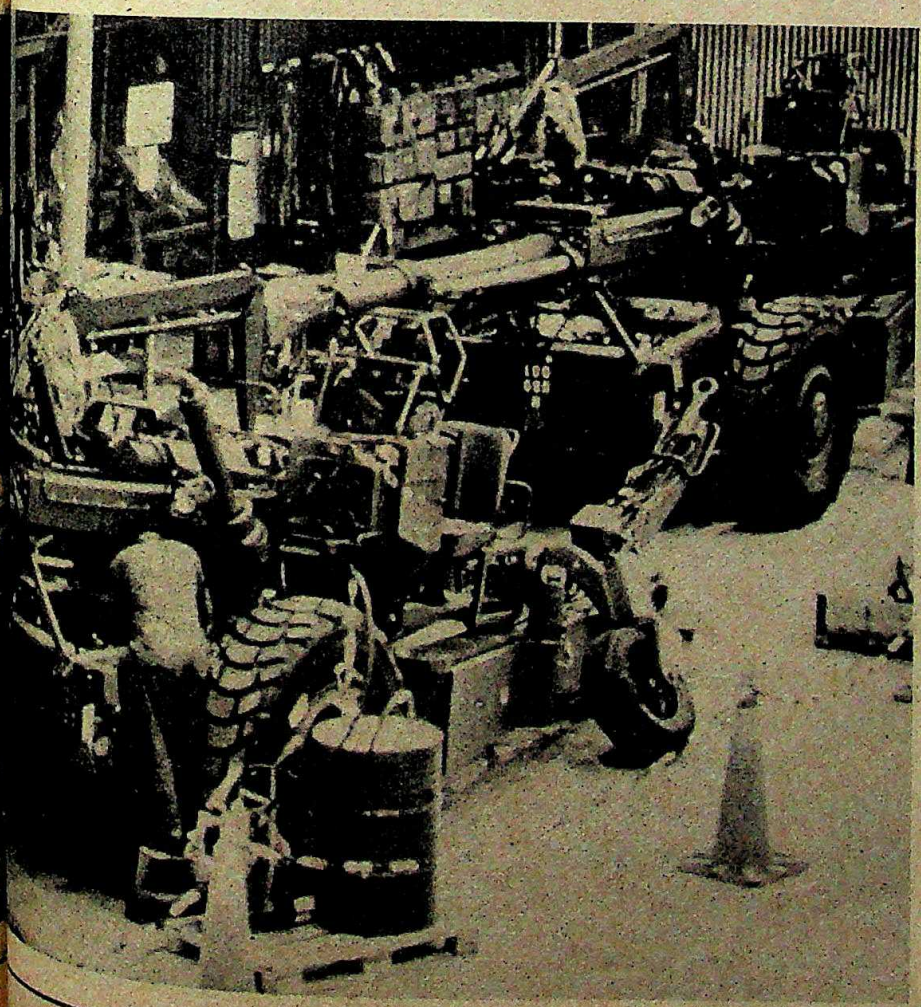
The Government, however, seemed to be depending heavily on the parliamentary committee's report. Said Rajiv: "We will chase every thing through Parliament." Admitting that the amount paid as "winding up charges" was enormous, the prime minister asserted that the Government had received a clean chit from the Audit Bureau report. A lengthy statement signed by Nawal Kishore Sharma and A.K. Anthony, both AICC(I) general secretaries, and V.N. Gadgil, a former Union minister, declared: "We urge the parliamentary committee to employ all means at its disposal to discover the identities of those who have received payments and recommend exemplary punishment to law breakers".

HOWEVER, even though this statement was intended to convey the message that the ruling party supports a thorough investigation, there were serious doubts about whether a parliamentary committee will be able to accomplish anything at all given its powers and capacity to track down information and pursue leads. Parliamentary experts say, for starters, that the presiding officers of the two houses probably do not have the power to appoint the committee when the Parliament is not in session. According to the former chief election commissioner S.L. Shakdhar, only Parliament, while in session, can elect members of a panel and finalise its terms of reference as well. And even if the committee comes into being expeditiously, it can hardly be expected to conduct a probe covering foreign governments and companies. Said H.N. Bahuguna, Lok Dal (B) chief: "Various agencies of the Government are far better equipped and competent in collecting information from foreign governments. The parliamentary committee may mean delay in exposing the people." In consonance with this stand, the Opposition has made the following demands:

- The Government should launch a prosecution case against Chadha and request the Swiss Government to give details about his Swiss accounts;
- The Rs 50 crore paid as commission to various agents be reimbursed.
- Bofors be forced to give the names and details of the people, in and out of government, who have been paid commissions.
- Initiate extradition proceedings against Chadha who has left the country with his family.

Opposition leaders and critics seem convinced that the pay-off—which appeared designed to bribe Indian officials to facilitate the award of the contract—exceeds the amount mentioned in the report. According to defence sources, commissions have also been paid to agents representing various companies that supplied other items such as gun carriers, shells and other components for the Bofors purchase.

But the Government is no doubt fighting against heavy odds. Defence Ministry officials and the Prime Minister's Secretariat still maintain that the report has clearly stated that no middlemen were involved in the deal. But it is in the repetition of this very assertion that the Government has been embarrassingly snared. Originally, this defence was based on the declaration that the late Swedish premier Olof Palme had given a solemn assurance to Rajiv that Bofors had withdrawn middlemen completely from the deal. During the parliamentary debate on the scandal, Defence Minister K.C. Pant repeatedly invoked the dead Swedish prime minister's name to rebut opposition charges that middlemen had influenced the deal. He stated in Lok Sabha on April 28: "There has been a tendency to ignore what the Swedish Government has said. There has been a tendency to slur over the fact that a man of the stature of Olof Palme gave a solemn assurance. It is for you to balance and see whether it is right to put this one radio against the (whole) Swedish Government, not to



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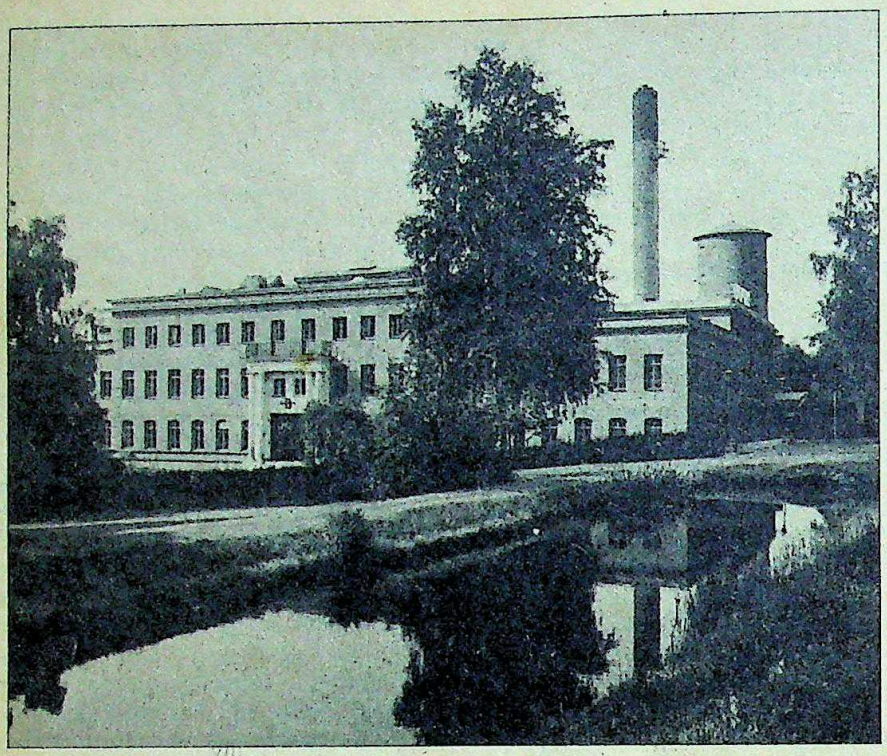

Bofors head office at Karlskoga

speak of our own government."

The Government also disputed the Opposition charge that the parliamentary probe is intended to be nothing more than an eyewash. Said an official in the Prime Minister's Secretariat: "We have now done what all of them wanted. If the Government had conducted its own inquiry we would have been accused of hiding facts."

So far as the Swedish Government is concerned, it seems to have washed its hands off the deal. Swedish Government officials indicate that they had done all that they could do under the circumstances. Lars Olof Lindgren, the political adviser at the Ministry of Foreign Trade which is affiliated to the Foreign Office, said: "The Government could not have done more since Bofors has not violated Swedish laws. We have no legal provisions to pursue the case. What the Minister for Foreign Trade, Anita Gradin has done is to appeal to Bofors to provide information to unanswered queries. As it is the Government has come under attack for making the major portions of the report public." The Swedish Central Bank invoking banking secrecy laws had recommended to the Government that parts of the report be classified—a recommendation faithfully implemented by the Swedish government. However, the leader of the Swedish conservative opposition, Carl Bildt lambasted the Government for not making the entire report classified. Bildt argued that it was not the Swedish Government's business to do India'a work. The message was clear—Bofors had done nothing wrong under Swedish Law if it had paid "provisions" or "commissions" or "winding up costs". It was now upto the Indian Government, which had requested the probe to find out the recepient's identity.

A. OBJORNSTRON

"So far we have been unsuccessful. But we believe it could simply be a code name or a reference number like Lotus."

BORJE REMDHAL
senior journalist, Swedish Radio

It was on April 29 that the Swedish Government instructed the "Riks revisions verket" (the National Audit Bureau), after consultation with the Military Equipment Inspectorate to carry out an audit of the records based on Bofors' written report of April 24 to the Indian Ambassador in Stockholm, Bhupatrai Oza. The Director of Information of the National Audit Bureau, H. Antell said: "Do not assume that the Bureau was not thorough. It went about its task scrupulously. For the Bofors investigations, besides Ingemar Mundebo the auditor general and Bo Sandberg, the audit director, an authorised public accountant Ulf Gometz was part of the Military Equipment Inspectorate. The Bank of Sweden, the National Police Board, the National Tax Board, the Customs Office, the Exports Credits Guarantee Board and the Public Prosecution Authority were contacted. The Bureau also contacted the editorial offices of the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation."

At first the Audit Bureau had contacted Bofors at the highest levels. Anders Carlberg, president of Nobel Industries, Per Ove Morberg, president of Bofors and Lars Gothlin, the chief company lawyer at Nobel, were present at this meeting. Although Bofors said it wished to "assist in the Bureau's investigations", the company also sought "confidentiality" with regards to its business operations which the bureau refused. On May 20 they slammed the door on the Audit Bureau, saying that since secrecy could not be guaranteed by the Bureau, they did not wish to cooperate further.

Under Swedish laws, Bofors apparently had iron-clad protection. As R. Sparve, the chief legal advisor to the Swedish Central Bank, explained: "There are two main provisions for secrecy—one relates to national interests when dealing with foreign states and international agencies and the second deals with protecting a company's commercial interests and customer trade practices. In this case, Bofors was ensured protection under the second."

In its communication to the Indian ambassador, Bofors had stated that the

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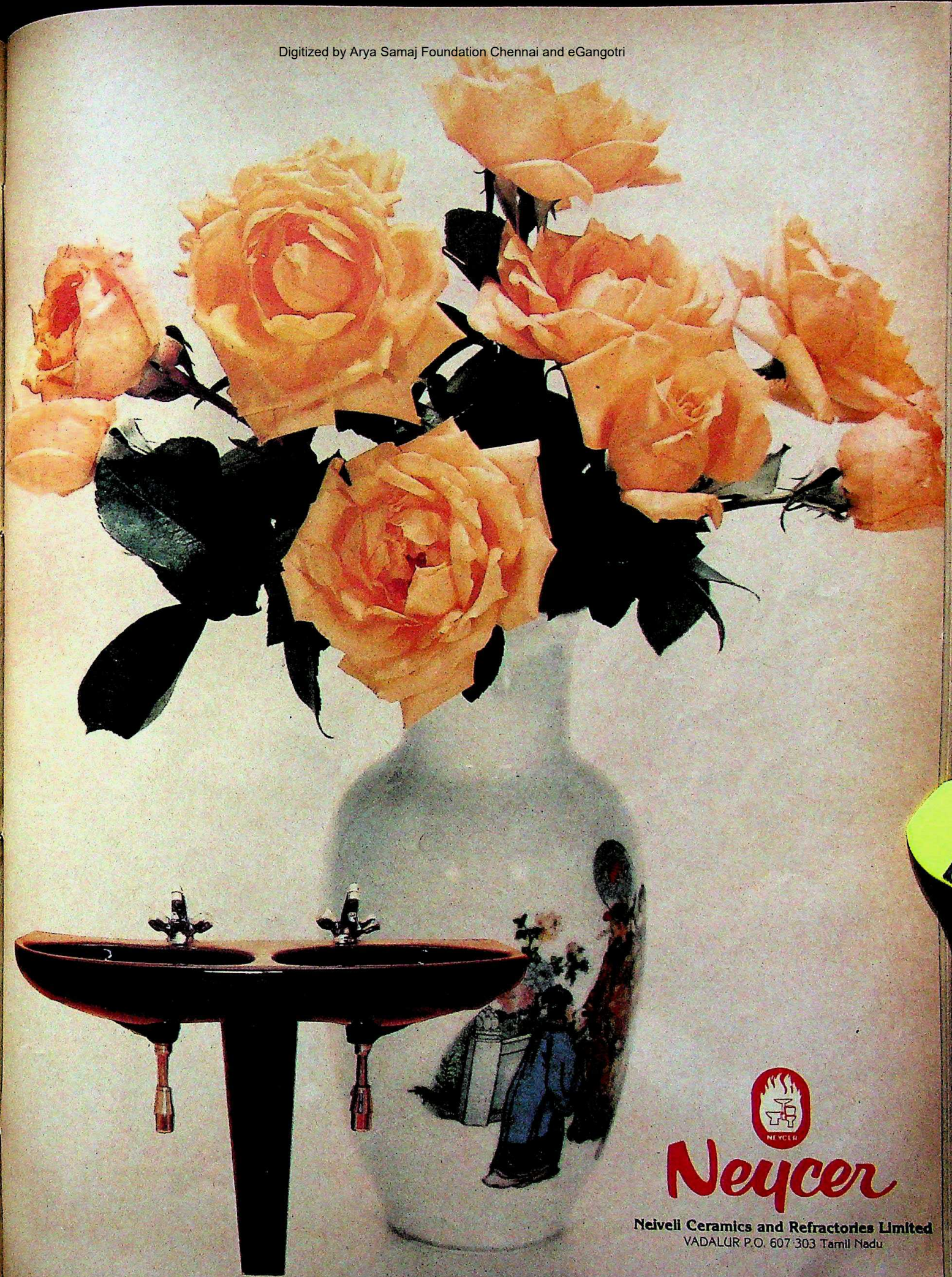

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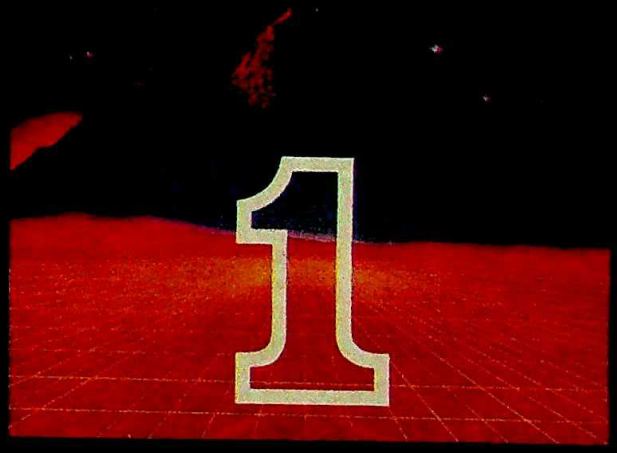

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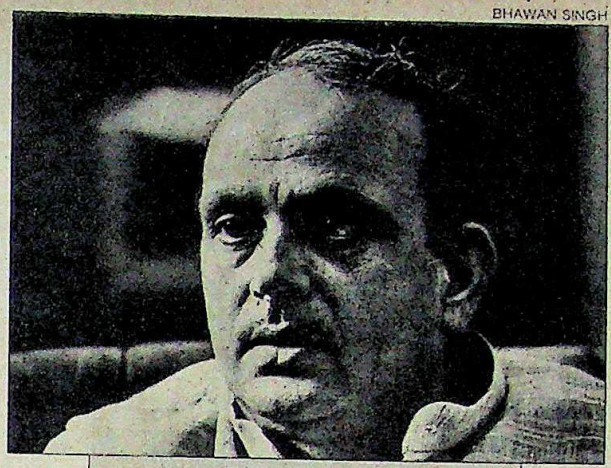
only payments made were to a Swiss company and these were "completely in accordance with the Swedish currency regulations". It went on to add, significantly that the stated payments have not been made to any "Indian company or Indian citizen and have no connection with the winning of the contract of 1986". The then president of Bofors, Martin Ardbo in a letter dated March 10, 1986 to the Defence Secretary S.K. Bhatnagar had said: "We hereby confirm that we do not have a representative/agent especially employed in India for this project." He, however, added that Bofors engaged Anatronic General Corporation for administrative services at Swedish kroners (SEK) 100,000 each month.

Close on the heels of the publication of the Audit Bureau's report, the Swedish Radio alleged that Svenska Incorporated was the recipient of SEK 170-250 million. The radio's extensive efforts in Switzerland to unravel the identity of this mysterious firm came to nought. Said a senior journalist Borje Remdahl: "So far we have been unsuccessful. But we believe it could simply be a code-name or a reference number like Lotus".

According to the radio, Lotus was the code name for two payments made in 1986 totalling under SEK 40 million—one to the Societe De Banque Suisse (Suisse Bank Corporation) and the other to the Hanover Manufacturers Bank, an American Bank. The radio had evidence of one payment under the Lotus code in the form of a pay order. In the pay order to the Suisse Bank Corporation the name of a senior bank official Lafonde is mentioned. When INDIA TODAY contacted the Swiss bank in Geneva and asked to speak to Lafonde, an assistant responded: "Lafonde is ill and he cannot be contacted now."

But with Bofors officials adamantly unwilling to provide any further information on the identity of those who have been paid and refusing to comment to the media, several Swedish commentators—one argued that the prodigal firm be nationalised—have demanded that the Swedish Government ask for cooperation from their Swiss counterparts to provide information on the payments. For, despite requests from the National Audit Bureau to the Central Bank, the latter had after "careful consideration" declined to do so. The question, however, was would the Swiss banks have cooperated had the request gone through. Legal advisor R. Sparve demurs: "Swiss banks have in recent years been slightly more open especially with requests from the US Government. But these relate to major crimes like Mafia-related crimes, not fiscal crimes. The other famous precedent is that of millions of dollars stashed away by former Philippines President Marcos which is now under scrutiny. I would imagine the Swedish government would have been unsuccessful in its attempts to glean information from Swiss banks".

BHAWAN SINGH



"The report that Bofors did indeed pay upto Rs 50 crore comes as a shock to us all...we were made to believe that the rumours about payments was but a part of a grand plan of destabilisation."

V.P. SINGH
former finance minister

The key question thus remains unanswered. Swedish radio journalists argue that if the Indian Government can be forced to apply pressure on Bofors, the last remaining piece of mystery in this fascinating "jigsaw puzzle" could be solved. And it was upto the Indian opposition leaders to trigger off this debate. For its part, the Swedish radio had been in touch with politicians like George Fernandes, who recently visited Switzerland. Much also depended on the Indian Government's desire to unravel the mystery.

BHAWAN SINGH

"There has been a tendency to ignore what the Swedish Government has said....to slur over the fact that a man of the stature of Olof Palme gave a solemn assurance."

K.C. PANT
defence minister

Meanwhile, in New Delhi there is talk that the parliamentary committee may even invite Bofors' executives to appear before it and, in case of their refusal, recommend that the contract be cancelled. And by sending a high-powered team to Switzerland, the Government hopes to collect evidence against Bofors, should it refuse to cooperate with the parliamentary committee. The Government, however, feels that any harsh action may precipitate matters. Competing arms dealers may jack up prices. Also, arms delivery may be affected, something India can ill afford when there is mounting tension on her borders.

The government is clearly caught between the devil and the deep sea. Though Rajiv has taken a few serious administrative measures to unravel the pay-off mystery, the Bofors issue will continue to haunt him till the recipients of the money are exposed and nabbed.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN in London and
PRABHU CHAWLA in New Delhi

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GUJARAT

Helping Hand

LAST fortnight, 30 poets got together at a kavi sammelan in Ahmedabad to focus attention on national integration and the dangers of communalism. They attracted an audience of 28. This spoke eloquently of the current mood in a state which, in the last five months, has been witness to over 500 cases of communal rioting, leaving nearly 100 dead and 500 injured. Last year, there were 398 communal incidents, with 132 deaths and injuries to over 800. Now, New Delhi has sat up to take notice.

This time the Amarsinh Chaudhary Government's communal fire-fighting mission is under Rajiv Gandhi's initiative. The prime minister took time off to give Chaudhary three sittings in two days last month just to discuss this problem in Gujarat.

Rajiv believes that the main reason for these recurring riots is the economic backwardness of the minorities and is keen on correcting this situation. Though the riots in Gujarat do not seem to suggest this theory, Rajiv sent a task force headed by R.K. Saiyed, additional secretary in the Ministry of Welfare, last month, to the state. Its brief: to evolve an economic package in selected minority-concentrated and riot-hit areas like Bharuch, Jamnagar, Viramgam and Siddhpur.

The task force decided to identify 250 families from each of the areas and give them financial assistance to stand on their own feet. Unfortunately, the planners did not realise that such packages could trigger off more bitterness. Said one Muslim leader who insisted on anonymity: "Just picking out Muslims to give financial assistance could prove detrimental as they will definitely become targets during riots." In fact, during recent violence, there was a pattern in the attacks on Muslim households which had received loans from the state Government.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) was aghast at the very idea. Charged V.A. Vanikar, vice-president of the VHP's state unit: "This very move proves that the Government is thinking on communal lines. By trying to appease the minorities, they are only going to create more trouble. There is poverty even among Hindus. Why are they not being identified for economic packages?" Meanwhile, the Minorities Commission in the state has pointed out to the task force that just picking out 250 families was not enough since there were many hundreds of other poor Muslims who also needed attention.

To ensure that things got moving, Rajiv despatched Union Minister of State for Internal Security P. Chidambaram to extensively tour the riot-torn areas and get a first-hand account. Chidambaram talked to scores of people in various communally sensitive pockets, patiently listening to complaints of inaction by the Chaudhary Government and examples of political interference. He then whipped out an action plan and asked the state chief minister to implement it.

But the plan was kept under wraps for a few days. Chidambaram had said that only Chaudhary would announce it, but when he did, the expectations that had been generated fizzled out, for it only underlined strategies that ought to have been taken up anyway: the need to take preventive action before a communal flare up ballooned out into a major riot, arresting anti-social and communal elements and giving the police a free hand by keeping out political interference. But Chidambaram did say sternly that "action would now be taken against culprits, irrespective of their status and political affiliation".

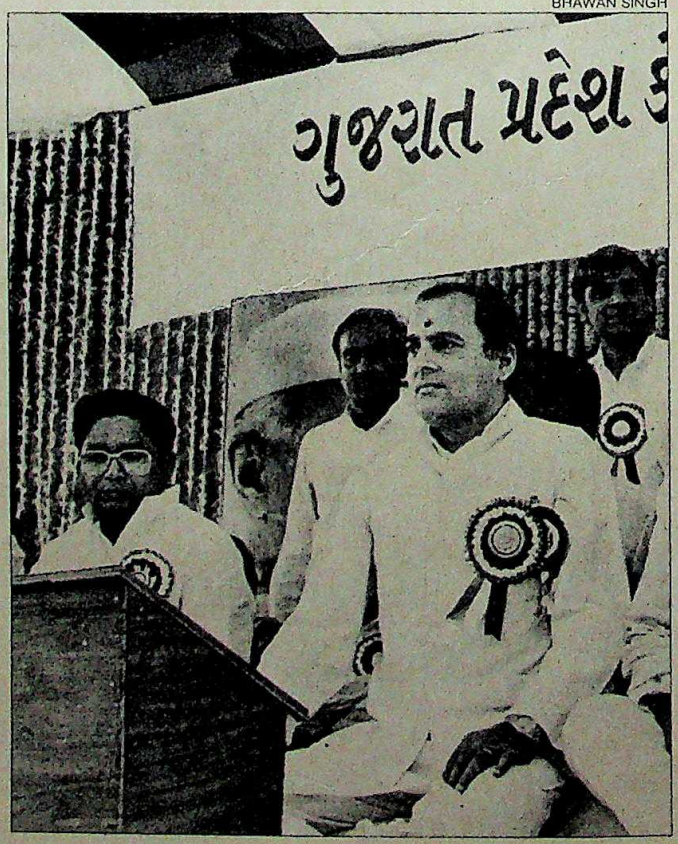
The Centre was also keen on reshuffling the top brass of the police and the Home Department so that they function more effectively. Chaudhary brought in tough-cop Manmohan Singh as director-general of police and he immediately set about clearing his department of deadwood. In another major change, N. Vittal, managing director of Gujarat Narmada Valley Fertilisers Limited, who made the company into one of the greatest success stories in Gujarat, was brought in as additional chief secretary for home.

The other problem which dogs both Chaudhary and the Centre is the growing influence of the BJP in the current sordid atmosphere in which religious festivals are being used to whip up communal sentiment. The Ram Janki Rath Yatra in recent weeks travelled to over 4,000 places to rouse public opinion on the Ramjanambhoomi issue. In half a dozen places, it left behind a trail of disturbances. As it is, the riots have made the Congress(I) lose its base among the Muslims.

A manifestation of their anger came in the recent Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation elections when Muslim voters chose to plump for an independent, Abdul Latif, a National Security Act detenu, from five Muslim-dominated areas. And the BJP was swept to power on the Hindu vote. Then, late last month, Chaudhary and BJP Mayor Jayendra Pandi broke with tradition by abstaining from attending the Jama Masjid Id prayers at Ahmedabad, further increasing the distrust between Hindus and Muslims. The Centre may be trying out action plans and economic assistance, but the most important measure, a concerted effort to heal the wounds, still seems to be out of sight.

—RAMESH MENON

BHAWAN SINGH



Rajiv with Chaudhary: Central initiative

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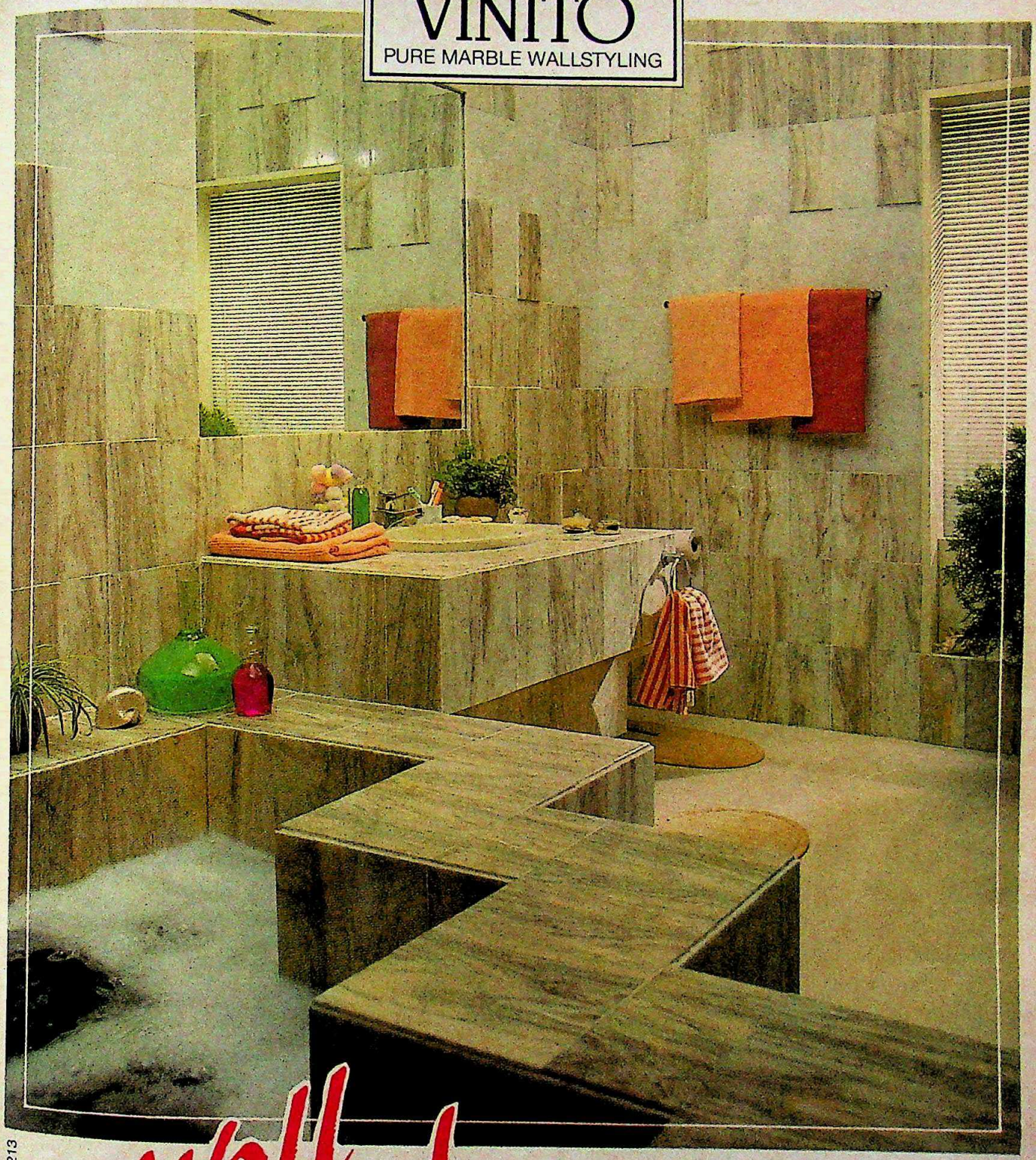

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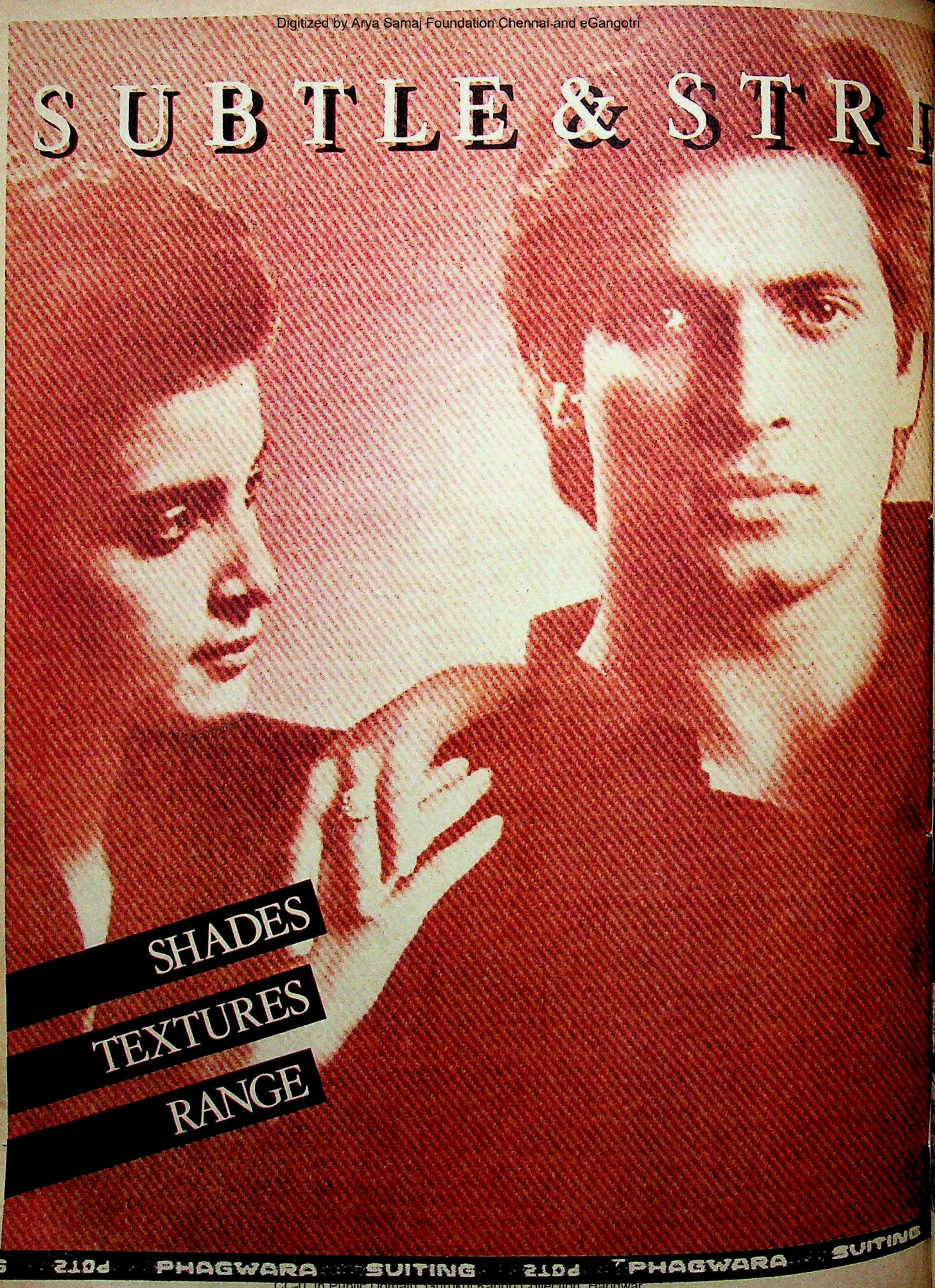

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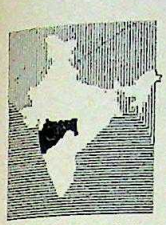
MAHARASHTRA

Fatal Failure



THE brand-new clay and cowdung helipad at Bamni village in Maharashtra's Dhule district appears incongruous in a land that time seems to have forgotten. But the helipad is indicative of the sudden importance this hilly tract inhabited by more than 4,000 adivasis has acquired after years of almost total isolation. The outside world intruded only after several people died of ailments related to malnutrition in recent months—the state Government acknowledges 31 deaths while unofficial surveys put the number at 93—as the district authorities failed to provide even basic medical assistance to the hapless tribals.

But last month, the Government acted quickly when details of the tragedy finally became known, suspending two health officials and rushing relief to the desperate adivasis. After sending Health Secretary D.T. Joseph on a fact-finding visit to the remote region, state Chief Minister S.B. Chavan flew down in a helicopter to Bamni to meet the villagers. The helipad built for the visit has suddenly brought a prestigious symbol of modernity to an area which for all practical purposes exists in another century—it has no school, no primary health centre, no shop, no electricity, no industry, no roads, no transportation or any other modern facility. And a few years from now, even the bamboo huts will disappear as the tribals are evacuated from this inaccessible area to make way for the massive reservoir of the Sardar Sarovar dam.

The 38 villages in the Akkalkuva taluka of Dhule, tucked away on the banks of the Narmada in the Saputara hills, inhabited entirely by Vasava, Tadvi and other tribals, can be reached only after several hours of arduous trekking through the hills. After successive droughts and the denudation of what were once thick forests, the adivasis lead abjectly impoverished lives, with the shift cultivation of jowar, maize and dal unable to provide them any longer with the already low level of sustenance. As a result, the entire population suffers from chronic malnutrition, besides a host of debilitating ailments like diarrhoea, malaria, goitre, scabies and other skin diseases. To make matters worse, they are also afflicted with sickle cell anaemia, a genetic disease characterised by deformation of the red blood corpuscles which increases the chances of death after dehydration by two hundred times.

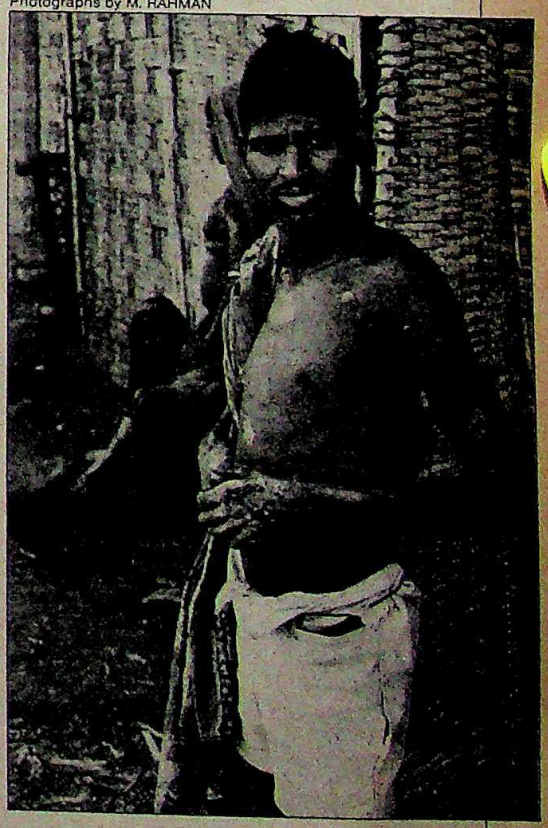
Earlier this year several deaths occurred in the area, especially of children afflicted with measles, and the adivasis sent word to a primary health centre across the hills asking for medical attention. But the doctor ignored their distress message. In desperation, more than a month later in May, the kotwal of Bamni village set out to inform the Akkalkuva tehsildar. It was only then that the district administration became aware of the tragedy in the hills. A survey by the district collector put the number of deaths at 31, of which nearly 20 were children, while the Bharatiya Janata Party compiled a list of 93 persons who died in recent months. "Unless the Government surveys all the 38 villages and ham-

Malnutrition and disease, compounded by a lax administration, have claimed 31 tribal lives in the remote hilly tracts of Dhule district.

A child being examined: late relief

Photographs by M. RAHMAN

Damania who lost his son: high toll



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lets in the area it will be impossible to say how many have actually died," says the party's Dhule leader Dharamchand Chordia.

The tribal villages in the hills had been virtually forgotten by the district administration until last month. The villages, a part of Maharashtra since the Narmada was taken as the state boundary in this region, are actually more accessible from Gujarat, and the tribals also speak a smattering of Gujarati. For Maharashtra government officials, a visit to Bamni and neighbouring villages means a 300-km drive through Gujarat followed by a trek in the hills. "Even then, since we do not know their language, it becomes extremely difficult to do anything," says a medical worker now camping in Bamni. "We will be forced to resign if we are asked to live permanently in this desolate area." No government doctor has visited the region for the last two years and even the medical kit, stocked with the trained *dai* (midwife) of the area, dates back to 1980.

The Government has now set up a primary health sub-centre at Bamni with medical teams on eight-day duty assignments. A tribal health research centre will also be set up in the district. "We have absolutely no excuse for the neglect of the tribals," says Health Secretary Joseph. "But now, besides immediate relief, we are also considering what should be done on a permanent basis. Ultimately, only training local people will ensure day-to-day medical care in the area."

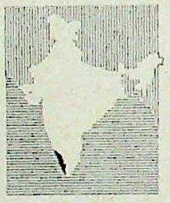
A medical team from Pune's B.J. Medical College which accompanied Joseph to Bamni discovered the incidence of the hereditary sickle cell anaemia in a quarter of the adivasi population. The doctors found that among parents of children who had died of measles, a disproportionately large number (66 per cent) were suffering from the genetic blood ailment, clearly indicating that it was an important contributory factor to the spate of deaths. Ramsinh Damania, one such tribal who lost his one-and-a-half year-old son, recalled: "The child died just five days after getting fever. There was nothing we could do."

But with the deaths, the adivasis find that after years of total neglect the outside world has suddenly woken up to their miserable condition. Groups of young tribals now take home bundles of jowar gifted by the Government, while medical and agricultural workers trek through the hills providing advice and assistance. With the Sardar Sarovar reservoir expected to inundate the region in five years time, there are no permanent plans for development. However, till they are rehabilitated elsewhere, the adivasis at least have the hope of a better deal from the local administration. As a wizened Gardia Surdia pointed out: "It is good to see the doctors here. At least our children have stopped dying now."

—M. RAHMAN in Dhule

KERALA

Riding High

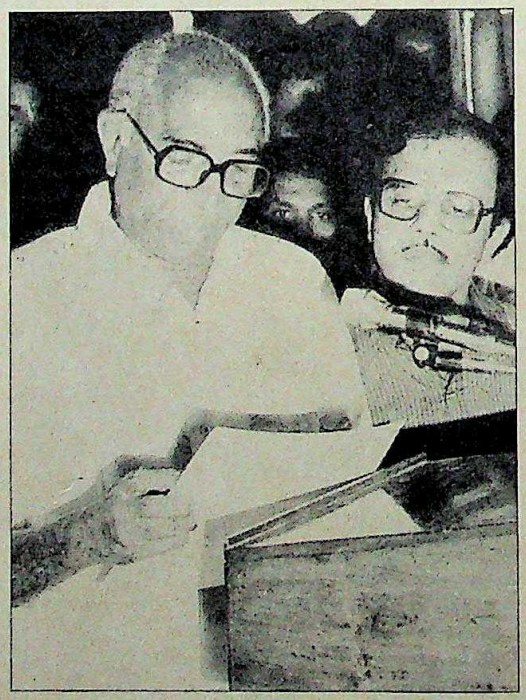


FOR the first time in many years, a government in Kerala seems to be actually rising in public esteem with every passing day. This appears to be the message following the victory of the ruling Marxist-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) in by-elections to the Vamanapuram and Kottayam assembly constituencies.

While the victory of Marxist candidate Krishnan Nair had been foreseen in Vamanapuram—he won by 10,116 votes—what baffled the opposition United Democratic Front (UDF) was the outcome in Kottayam where the Minister for Cooperation and Fisheries, T.K. Ramakrishnan, an outsider, was expected to have a hard time against R. Radhakrishnan, state Congress(I) general secretary. However, the Marxist won by a convincing 9,526 votes. After the twin triumphs, the LDF strength has risen to 79 in the 141 member House.

The Congress(I) had campaigned fiercely to retain Kottayam, headquarters for half a dozen Christian churches and the trading centre of the powerful Christian-dominated plantation lobby. Said a despondent Congress(I) MLA: "The priests, nuns and businessmen, our traditional supporters, went against us this time." Confessed Thachady Prabhakaran, the former Congress(I) finance minister: "At this rate, the LDF in Kerala will become as strong as its counterparts in West Bengal and we will be in the wilderness for ever."

Ramakrishnan: convincing win



That remark epitomised the despondency now prevailing in the Congress(I) camp, amid fears that the voting public has more or less turned its back on the party. And much of the party members' anger is directed against former chief minister K.Karunakaran, whose continued leadership of the state unit has now become anathema to many partymen. Following the UDF defeat in the March assembly elections, the name of AICC(I) General Secretary A.K. Antony had been suggested for the state president's post, but the move was dropped because of the Karunakaran group's fierce opposition. However, the latest by-election losses may provoke another upheaval in the state unit of the party.

Pro-Antony stalwarts—like former ministers Prabhakaran, Oommen Chandy and Vayalar Ravi—have been joined by erstwhile supporters of Karunakaran, like the controversial former minister M.P. Gangadharan and state Congress(I) chief C.V. Padmarajan. That's a formidable line-up, and even die-hard Karunakaran supporters are keeping mum.

Former revenue minister P.J. Joseph, of the Kerala Congress(Joseph), goes so

After its two recent by-election victories, the LDF strength has risen to 79 in a House of 141 members.

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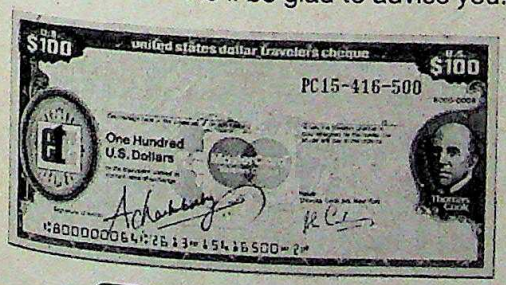

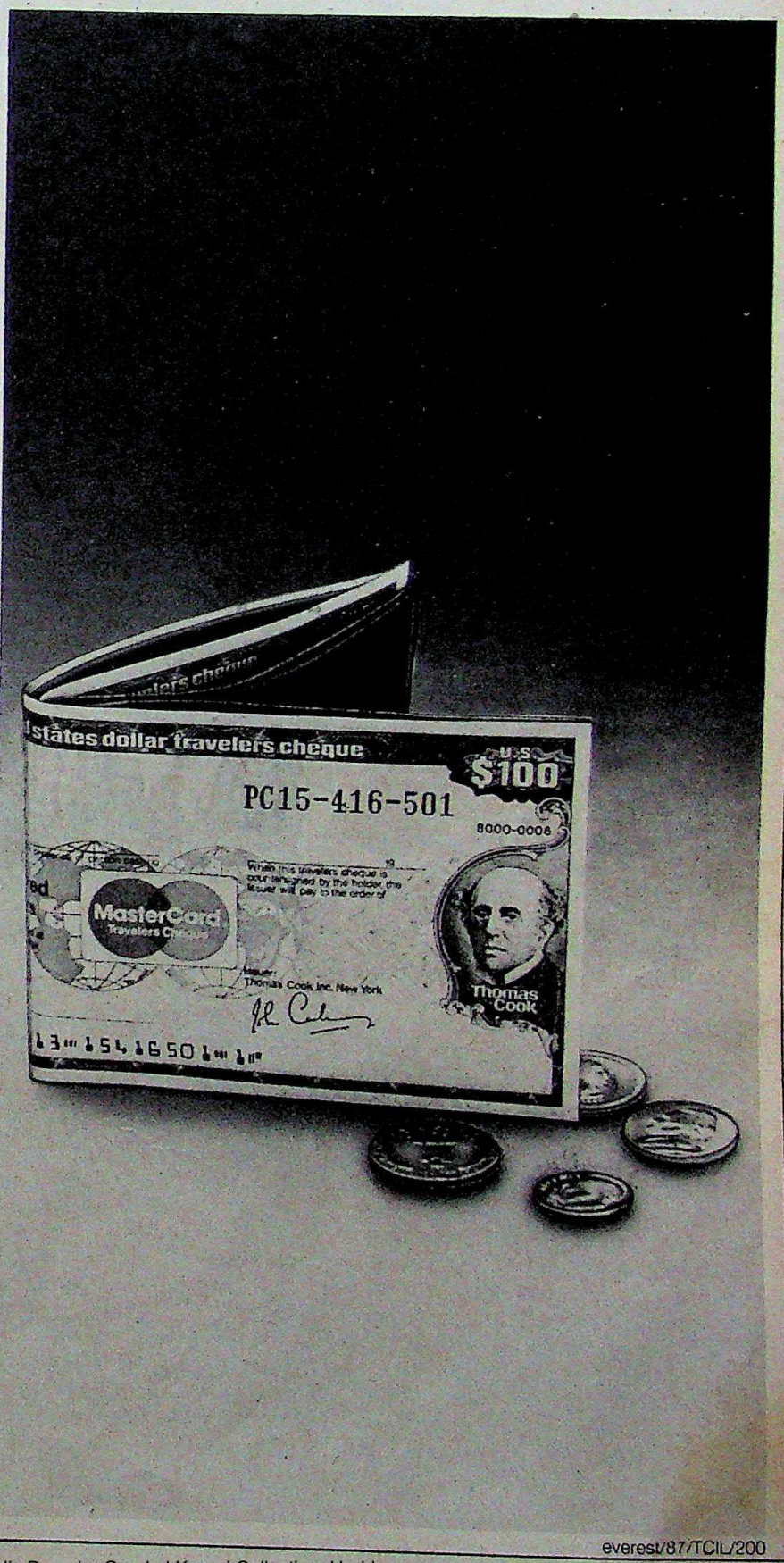

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far as to say that when people think of the UDF they think of Karunakaran, and decide on voting for the LDF. Though that sounds harsh, most partymen do seem to agree that the Congress(I) has little to hope of regaining power as long as the former chief minister is at the helm. Said a senior Congress(I) MLA: "In the next couple of months, the CPI(M)-CPI relationship is sure to deteriorate and we have to capitalise on this. The CPI has made it clear to us that it doesn't trust Karunakaran. Rajiv Gandhi should take him away from Kerala for a long holiday in some Raj Bhawan or the other." Karunakaran himself seems calm in the face of the attacks—"I have done what best I could"—and dismisses the situation as just another of those vicissitudes in political fortune.

Meanwhile, Joseph has also begun to feel that the UDF leadership is more intent on promoting his arch rivals within the front, the Kerala Congress (Mani). He has expressed resentment at party meetings over having to accept the lead of the Congress(I), and is said to have sought entry into the LDF, an advance that was turned down. Apparently driven to desperation, Joseph is also willing to merge with the Congress(S), an LDF constituent, but though that party appears interested, it is not about to accommodate him until the Marxists give the nod.

The LDF's ride, leading up to the by-elections, has so far been trouble-free despite a difficult financial situation. It passed a vote on account in a four-day session in March—the budget will be presented in the monsoon session—leaving a deficit of Rs 139.46 crore. But Finance Minister Vishwanath Menon says he had no option. "The UDF has reduced the state economy to a shambles and the Centre's economic policies have further damaged it." Menon adds that the LDF not only has to begin with a large deficit but also faces the prospect of Central assistance being scaled down by Rs 50 crore this year because of an advance plan assistance of Rs 125 crore taken by the previous government.

The one factor that seems to be going against the Marxists is their overdependence on instructions from the A.K. Gopalan Centre, the state Marxist headquarters in Trivandrum. LDF constituents have already begun to feel that the Marxists are not giving them due weight before arriving at decisions that concern them all. Unless the Marxists improve their style of functioning, relations could sour among LDF constituents.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

LAST WORD/RAJINDER PURI

Headline Headaches

A few days ago, I met a senior adviser of the prime minister. He looked very worried. "The prime minister is very unhappy with us," he said. "The Punjab crisis is causing a problem!"

"What's the problem?" I asked.

"It's creating very bad headlines in the press," he said.

A few days later, I met him again. He looked more relaxed. "Thank goodness we've solved the Punjab problem," he said.

"How did you do that?" I asked.

"We've created the V.P. Singh controversy," he said smugly. "Now, no one talks of Punjab; the papers are full of nothing but V.P. Singh!"

One month later, when I ran into him, he looked tired. He mopped his forehead and said: "V.P. Singh had become a headache! He had hogged all the press. It was hurting the prime minister as well as the party! It required a real effort to get rid of that problem!"

"How did you manage that?" I asked.

"Don't you read the papers? There's hardly a line about V.P. Singh now! All the news is about the communal carnage in Meerut. That takes care of V.P. Singh and Fairfax!"

"But Meerut hurts the prime minister's reputation too!" I pointed out.

"It did till yesterday, but not now," he said. "It's been taken care of. See tomorrow's papers, they'll be full of the caste riots in Bihar. We got the news this afternoon!"

A couple of days later, I met him again. He looked worried once more. "We've solved the Bihar problem all right, but the solution has a terrible fall-out!"

"Like what?" I asked.

"The Bofors report did manage to knock Bihar off the headlines," he said crossly. "But now the papers are full of nothing else. The prime minister isn't happy! But don't worry, we're working on something!"

The next day he was his cheerful self again. "So, we've solved the Bofors problem too," he said, rubbing his hands in glee.

"Now the papers are full of nothing but Sri Lanka. We're in control of the situation again!"

"But Sri Lanka can become a big problem too," I warned him.

"We've already made arrangements about that," he said confidently. "If Sri Lanka escalates, we can always expect China or Pakistan to push Sri Lanka off the headlines!"

"China will be terrible," I said, turning pale. "They've even got atom bombs!"

"Exactly," he said cheerfully, "and that means we can always control the Chinese problem, because Russia and America are sure to step in and take the headlines away from China!"

"But don't you see," I gasped, "Russia and America could mean world war! That would be nuclear! Nothing would be left of civilisation after that!"

"Of course we've thought of that," he said with a beaming smile. "But don't you see, that would solve our problems once and for all—there won't be a single newspaper headline to embarrass the prime minister after that...!"

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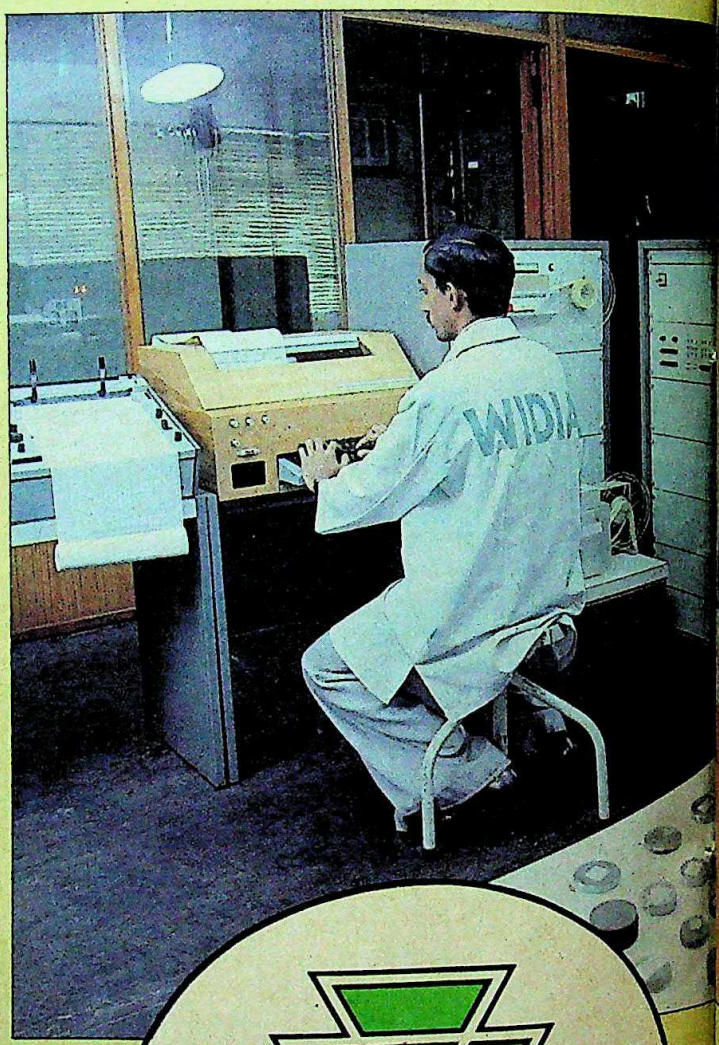

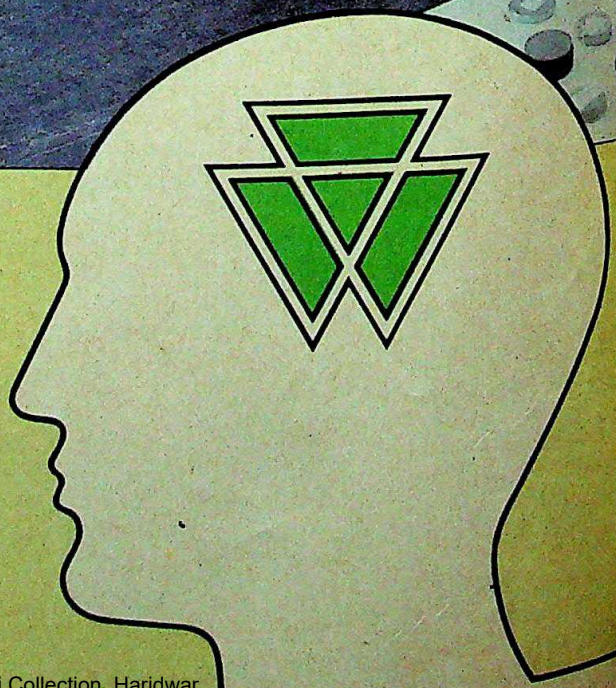

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KARNATAKA

Rural Tensions

■ *Rajanna of Hassan district's Hoskopulu village stared in dismay as the fire consumed his 15-ft haystack. While he has not lodged a police complaint, he is convinced that the arson was caused by an independent candidate who resented Rajanna's support to the victorious Congress(I) contestant.*

■ *In a village in Mysore taluk, a quarrel due to cattle straying into a farmer's fields snowballed into a Congress(I)-Janata Party fight.*

■ *The police resorted to firing in Gundlupet taluk's Hangala village after a clash between Congress(I) and Janata Party workers in which several men were injured. Forty Congress(I) activists were arrested.*

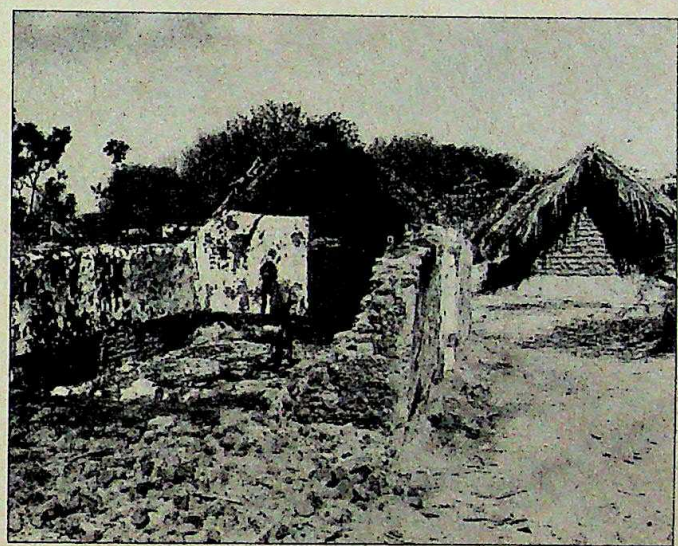
KARNATAKA'S two major parties are currently arguing over what decentralisation of village administration has come to mean. While Janata Party workers sing paeans of praise for their experiment which culminated in the zilla parishad and mandal panchayat elections in January this year, Congress(I) supporters insist that the taking of power to the villages has only succeeded in disturbing rural peace.

Though the people still have to see the benefits of the 2,580 mandal panchayats which will begin functioning only in June, the negative aspects of panchayati raj are already becoming evident. Taking party politics to village lanes has inevitably resulted in adding political colour to existing social tensions.

The first indication of the new tensions that would be generated came during the mandal panchayat elections when 215 incidents of violence occurred. During the zilla parishad elections that followed three weeks later, there were 128 incidents. But the worst rifts were created by the elections to the pradhan and upapradhan (president and vice-president) of the mandal panchayats. The violence was not only widespread but also more serious. Though the state police headquarters still has to compile the statistics, there were 30 to 40 incidents in each of several districts. This is not surprising since the pradhan is the main repository of power in the new structure. Says a superintendent of police: "The work of the force has increased tenfold." Adds the police chief of Tumkur, A.R. Infant: "The tribe of politicians with power has increased. Naturally, there are more conflicts."

Though the situation has quietened now, undercurrents of tension have come to stay. Mandya district's Kangalahundi village was witness to just one disturbing illustration of this trend when an attempt by some pro-Janata Party youngsters to put up an innocuous play was resisted by Congress(I) workers. This simple issue ended up involving some senior party leaders and ultimately the play had to be staged under heavy police security. At other places, even fathers and sons have been known to have hurled accusations at each other publicly in the course of campaigning for their respective parties.

A burnt Harijan home: new fears



Photographs by G. DEEPAK PAWAR

Political horse-trading is also no longer seen as something that happens in distant capitals. There have been reports of mandal panchayat members being paid cash to vote for a contestant to the pradhan's post and, in one case, these privileged voters were even whisked away to Ooty and Coorg by a Congress(I) pradhan to keep them away from Janata Party allurements. Since money was used freely to influence the election of pradhans, many villagers fear that this may widen the scope for corruption.

Most worried by the new developments are people from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes who say that the strength of the more powerful communities has been enhanced by the elections. Minister for Rural Development Abdul Nazeer Sab concedes that Harijan fears of intensified oppression are justified but says that he consoles complainants by saying that "this is the best system to benefit them. It is for them to make it work". But with the majority communities having captured the bulk of the seats, the Harijans will have a difficult time standing up to them.

Though minister Nazeer Sab says that the new rural structure is the best possible, many question this view.

While Congress(I) state party chief Oscar Fernandes has tried to adopt a constructive attitude with regard to the mandal panchayats, the same cannot be said for his party workers at the village level. Already out of power for four years, they fear for their very survival because the success of the panchayati raj could mean the consolidation of the Janata Party at the grassroots level. Their entire attitude, therefore, is obstructionist.

Nazeer Sab says that "politicisation of villages is a good thing—it is the supreme edifice in a political set-up". But as friction escalates in rural Karnataka in the coming months, when the mandal panchayats actually start functioning, how many people will agree with this view is a good question.

—ANITA PRATAP

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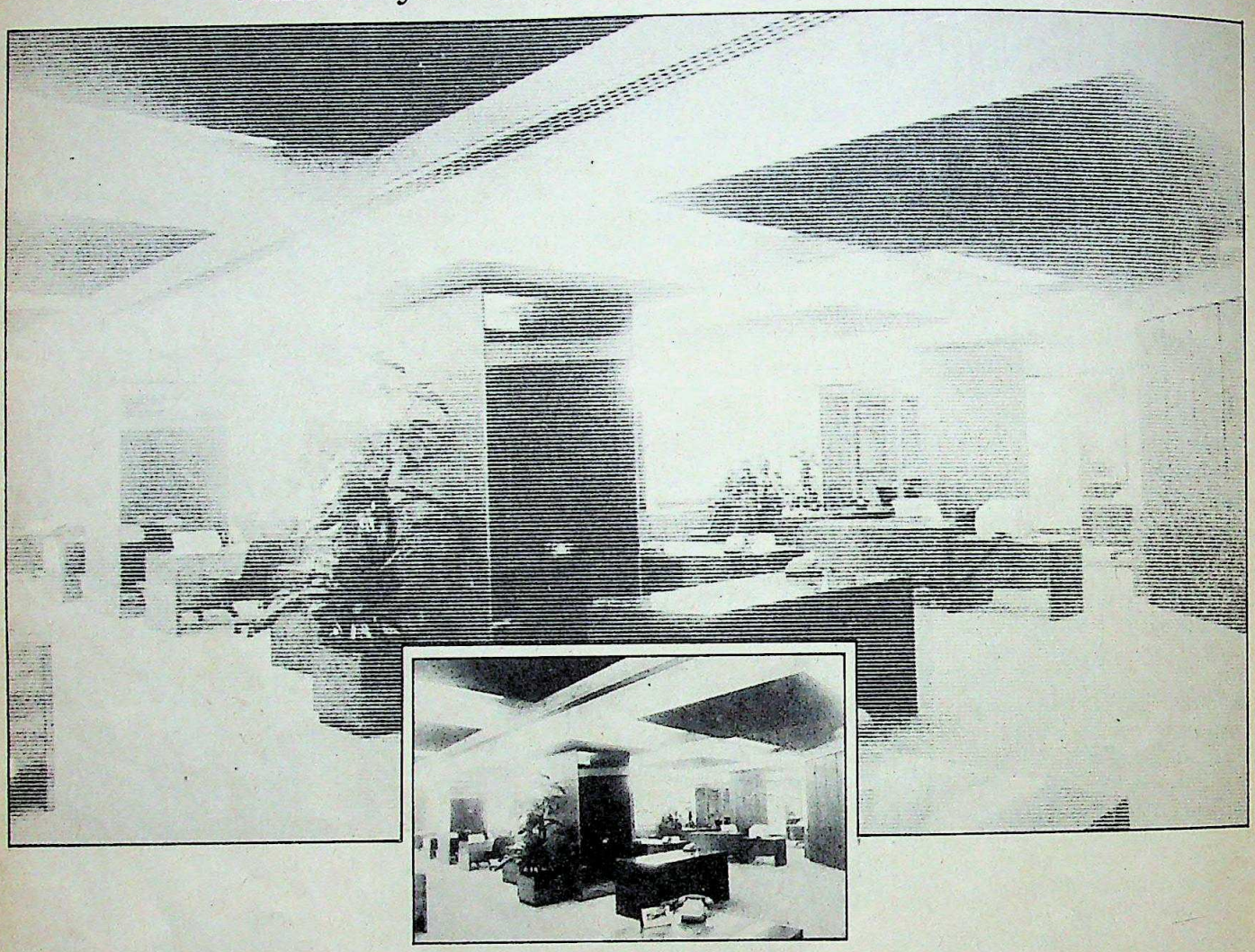

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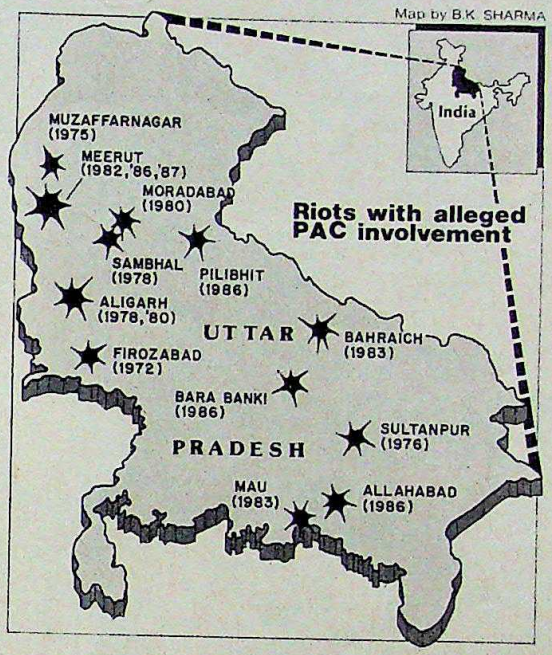
PAC

Questionable Conduct

■ *"It was around 1 a.m. Armed men firing indiscriminately, forcibly entered 50 houses simultaneously. They picked up young men from these houses, dragged them out and shot them dead in full view of their relatives. By the time this ruthless operation was over, the Jali Kothi locality of Meerut had turned into a graveyard for 27 young Muslims killed in cold blood by the* PAC."

■ *"Muslims had kept firing on the force for well over three hours from house tops. The district officials....ordered the* PAC *to conduct a combing of Jali Kothi. The sector magistrate and circle officer accompanied the force. It took two hours to complete a house to house search. A total of 38 persons were arrested and 52 licensed and unlicensed firearms and 21 hand bombs were recovered. Two bodies of Muslims....were also recovered. They died of bullet injuries, of shots fired from a .303 mm rifle, generally used by* the PAC. *The* PAC *did open fire, but within limits. Sufficient restraint was exercised by officials and* PAC *despite great provocation by Muslim mobs."*



THESE two contradictory versions of riots in a Meerut locality in 1982, could be appended blindly to almost any riot in Uttar Pradesh where the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) has been called out. The first scenario was painted by a fact-finding committee of minority leaders, the second is an excerpt from an unpublished official inquiry report. The Malliana carnage near Meerut last fortnight, in which over 100 Muslims were killed, has only sharpened the division of opinion on the PAC. The Muslims view the force with intense suspicion and fear. The state stoutly defends the group. And dangerously, the Hindus have decided to chime in on an issue which has turned explosive.

Today, the state's prime strike force finds its uniform blotted indelibly by charges of communalism. In the 29 riots reported in the state since 1972, it stands accused of butchering Muslims in 13. The trail of terror, say Muslim leaders, snakes through Firozabad (1972), Sambhal (1978), Aligarh (1978 and 1980), Moradabad (1980), Meerut (1982, 1986 and 1987), Bahraich (1983), Mau (1983), Pilibhit (1986), Bara Banki (1986) and Allahabad (1986). PAC firings in Muzaffarnagar (1975) and Sultanpur (1976) also resulted in the death of 12 Muslims in the sterilisation drive during the Emergency.

Says Syed Shahabuddin, Janata Party MP, angrily: "The PAC is no less evil than the Nazi occupation armies. It is out to destroy the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh." All India Muslim Majlis President Fazlul Bari refers to it as "the saviour of the Hindus". And Islam Ahmed, who retired as inspector general of police in 1971, says: "It was a fine force in my time but now something is seriously wrong."

But the Government does not think that anything is wrong anywhere. State Home Secretary Mata Prasad, without commenting on any particular riot, says: "So far, not one such complaint that the PAC acted in a communal manner has been substantiated by various inquiries." The official Moradabad inquiry committee report—where Muslim leaders claimed that over 500 lives were lost in the communal holocaust unleashed by the PAC—notes pointedly: "If the PAC would not have acted the way it did, there would have been complete chaos, large-scale loss of human lives and property." Adds S.C. Dixit, who retired as director-general of police in March 1984 and is now a Vishwa Hindu Parishad functionary: "The PAC is the finest force we have. I assure you that minus the PAC, the Government cannot run the state for one day."

The battle lines are now clearly drawn. While the Government is standing solidly by its 32,000-strong strike force, the state's Muslims want it to be either disbanded or reconstituted as a

PAC patrolling Meerut: blotted copybook

PRASHANT PANJIAR

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THE ECONOMIC TIMES

GIVE A PERK TO THE EXECUTIVE MIND

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riot force with a 6 per cent to 8 per cent Muslim representation. They dismiss the Government claim that 5.07 per cent of the men in the PAC are Muslims and say it is only 3 per cent. They also charge that men of the backward classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, (45.7 per cent of the force), are their main tormentors. But S.K. Bhatnagar, the state's director-general of police until he was shunted out after the Meerut riots, states categorically: "Our force is not constituted on a communal basis and it would be dangerous if we start doing this."

PAC officers have a simple explanation for the low Muslim representation—the failure of Muslim youth to fulfil the basic eligibility criteria, a primary condition being matriculation. A Police Department survey conducted in 1980 in 35 districts, found only 6.64 per cent of Muslims to be matriculates, though Muslims made up 17.78 per cent of the population in these districts.

Another study reveals that not many Muslims applied for PAC posts in the first place. Of the 11,983 applications received between 1977 and 1980, only 401 were from Muslims. So, of the 2,291 PAC constables recruited in this period, there were only 70 Muslims. Says a senior PAC official: "They somehow do not come forward and the handful who do, do not fulfil the basic requirements." Ahmed disagrees: "They are lying. Muslim applications are just not entertained."

The PAC may be justified in rigidly upholding its eligibility criteria, but it cannot wipe off its pro-Hindu image easily. In Meerut recently, where Muslims were vehemently canvassing for the PAC's removal, over 200 Hindu women gheraoed District Magistrate R.S. Kaushik, chanting "PAC *nahin hategi*" and "Tripathi *ko vapas laao*" ("PAC will not be removed" and "Bring back Tripathi"—a PAC commander).

Undoubtedly, the overt Hindu reaction has grave overtones, almost as serious as the charge of indiscipline levelled against this force. The memories of the 1973 PAC revolt are still fresh in people's minds. The revolt, which was finally quelled by the army, cost 51 lives—30 PAC and 21 army jawans. Even during the Moradabad, Meerut and Aligarh riots, the PAC has been found to have "gone out of control" at times.

BHAWAN SINGH

Hindu women demand PAC presence: sectarian support

Even on this count, PAC officials have a ready explanation: they say there are only 180 Class I and Class II officials to inspire and command 32,000 men structured in 33 battalions. Also, while an officer of the rank of deputy superintendent commands a company in the Border Security Force (BSF) or the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), a mere inspector is a company commander in the PAC, in charge of 100 jawans. And, whereas the BSF and CRPF usually move in platoons, the PAC moves in sections. (Each company has three platoons and each platoon has three sections.)

On riot duty, the PAC sections, comprising nine men and a head constable, often work independently despite mandatory orders that district police and civil officials accompany them. "It simply isn't always possible to have a sub-inspector with each section," says a superintendent of police. Thus command can lie with a head constable who is not trained to deal with tense situations. Obviously, fatal errors are often made.

Surprisingly, though the PAC is mainly a strike force, it is often deployed in riot-affected areas, for which it is not fully equipped. Says a PAC DIG: "It is basically a strike force. So when it moves in, it will either use canes or bullets."

Following the 1980 Moradabad riots, the Government decided to train five battalions—38, 39, 40, 41 and 42—as a specialised riot control force. Ambitious plans were formulated, the unit was christened Vishesh Sewa Unit and placed under a deputy inspector general of police. Among other things, its .303 mm rifles were to be replaced by self-loading, semi-automatic rifles and each battalion was to have its own fire brigade and medical teams. But even basic riot control training has not been imparted to this unit yet. These battalions are like any other PAC battalion. One of the companies of the unit—the 41st—was even involved in the Malliana carnage.

The PAC also suffers from over-use. Instead of the one-and-a-half months continuous mandatory training recommended for each company every year, the frequency is barely one month in two years—that too in phases.

The PAC jawan is finding it difficult to cope with public criticism. The withdrawal of seven companies in Meerut has angered him further. And dismissed constable, Ram Ashish Rai, general secretary of the Uttar Pradesh Police Parishad, who had led the 1973 revolt. Says: "The 1973 revolt has to be repeated to reply to this demoralisation of the force by the Government and the minorities." If feelings continue to run high, the worst may not yet have been seen in the PAC-Muslim stand off.

—DILIP AWASTHI

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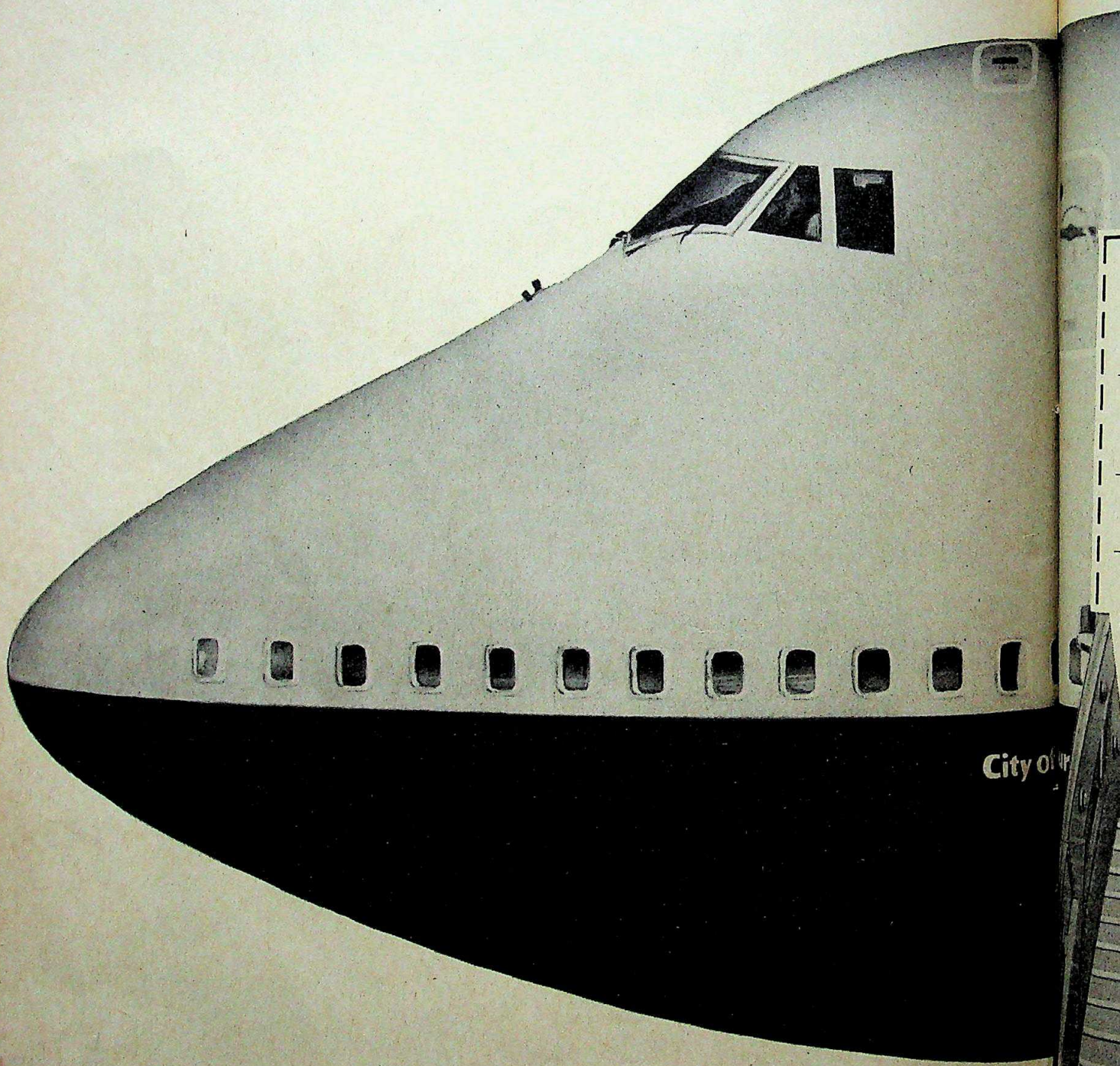

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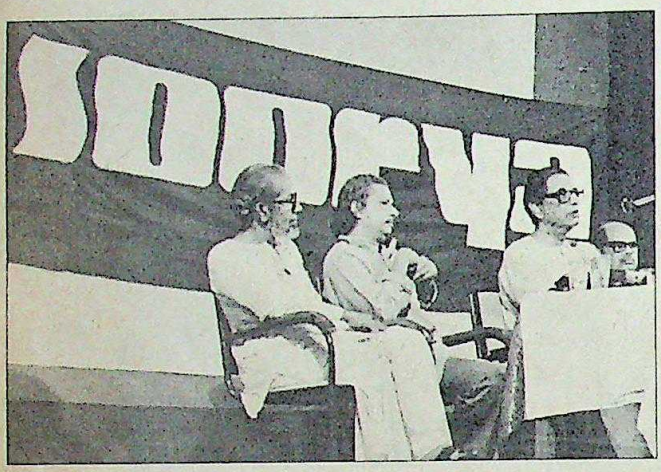
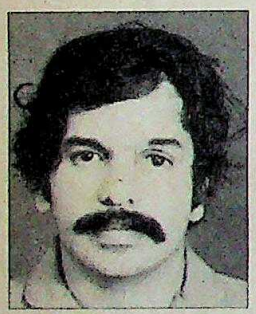
Cinematic Awareness

WITH more than 60 film societies, some even in villages, Kerala is today witnessing the biggest ever film society movement in the country. It appears that the Malayali film buff is not just turned on by porno films but enjoys serious cinema. Soorya, a film society in Trivandrum is recognised by all the others as the leader of the movement. Started eight years ago by N. Krishna Moorthy, an





Film directors at seminar and Krishna Moorthy (left): success story

engineer working with the Indian Space Research Organisation in Trivandrum, Soorya according to well-known film director, Shyam Benegal "is by far the most well organised film society in the country". The main activities of this society are confined to screening good films, presenting film directors and holding retrospectives. Almost all the big names in the film industry—from Satyajit Ray to Shabana Azmi—have been hosted by Soorya. Lecture classes attended by Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Aravindan have discussed great masters like Zoltan Fabri and Ingmar Bergmen. The film society has premiered many Indian films like *Aakrosh* and *Tabarana Katha* for its nearly 2,500 members who are the elite of Trivandrum.

According to Moorthy, who was a member of the national jury of the film award committee: "Soorya has brought an awareness among the Trivandrum audience of the works of the masters and their taste has definitely improved". He even dreams of the day when Fabri and Bergman would be invited to attend retrospectives in Trivandrum—a possibility that cannot be scoffed at considering the Soorya success story.

Assembly Crisis

THE West Bengal Assembly has conjured a crisis out of thin air. In the centre of the storm is Congress(I) MLA, Sadhan Pande, who is accused by members of the Left Front of making allegedly obscene remarks against a female Marxist legislator, Maharani Konar, in the House. By last fortnight, the storm had become a typhoon with the Assembly Speaker, Hashim Abdul Halim denouncing Pande for debasing the hallowed tradition of "the House" and suspending him from the Assembly for the rest of the session.

Interestingly, the entire controversy had its origin in a remark made in the Assembly by Public Works Minister Jatin Chakraborty, that "all journalists are prostitutes...". The press staged a walk-out and the Congress(I) took up the issue, demanding that Chief Minister Jyoti Basu apologise for his minister's misbehaviour. The crisis snowballed and the speaker refused to allow a motion against the minister, on the grounds that "prostitute" was not unparliamentary. But in order to assuage the feelings of the press, Halim ordered that the unfortunate remarks be expunged from the official records.

Pande: show down

The speaker's decision and the Opposition's howls of protest sparked off the interesting sequel to the confrontation. Senior Left Front ministers rushed to the Congress(I) benches with fists raised, spoiling for a fight. In the free for all that followed, Konar—seen standing with a slipper raised in her hand—declares that Pande humiliated her by calling her something unmentionable. The Marxists, quickly concluded that the lady had been called a prostitute.

Pande, of course, vehemently denies the accusation and claims that he has been requesting the speaker to produce the evidence. "If I had indeed made such a remark then it should be recorded in the proceedings", says Pande. But the Marxists point out that his remark might have gone unrecorded in the pandemonium that prevailed. The MLA even dashed off to Delhi and met party leaders and the press to prove that he was being framed. The Nari Kalyan Samiti, a women's organisation has also come out in support of Pande. What queer turn the issue now takes is anybody's guess.

Collision Course

STUDENTS of two medical colleges in Bangalore are on a collision course thanks to the State Health Department taking a "the left hand knows not what the right hand is doing" policy. Last fortnight, the students of the capitation fee-based Ambedkar Medical College had gone on strike protesting against the management's inordinate

G. DEEPAK PAWAR

Striking BMC students: organised protest

delay in constructing their own buildings. Barely had this problem been settled when the students of the merit-based Bangalore Medical College (BMC), too went on an indefinite strike, protesting the Government's decision to allow the undergraduate students of Ambedkar college to utilise the clinical facilities of the Lady Curzon and Bowring hospitals,

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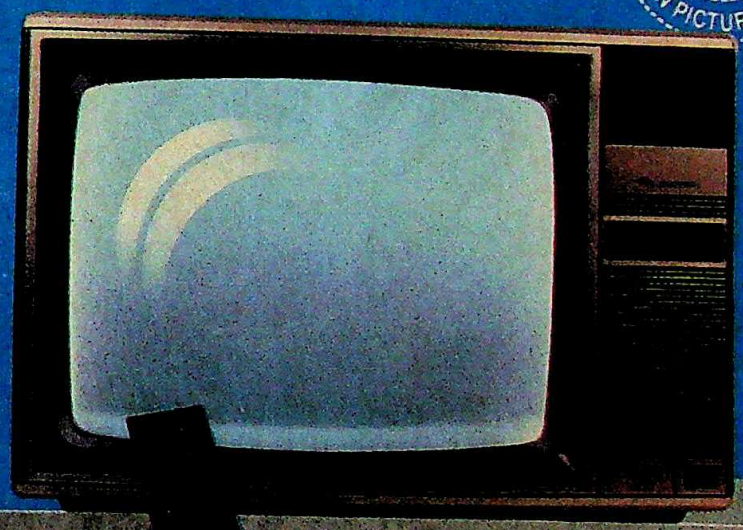

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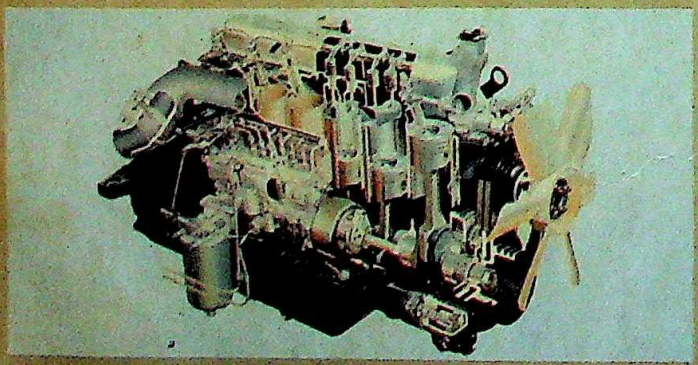

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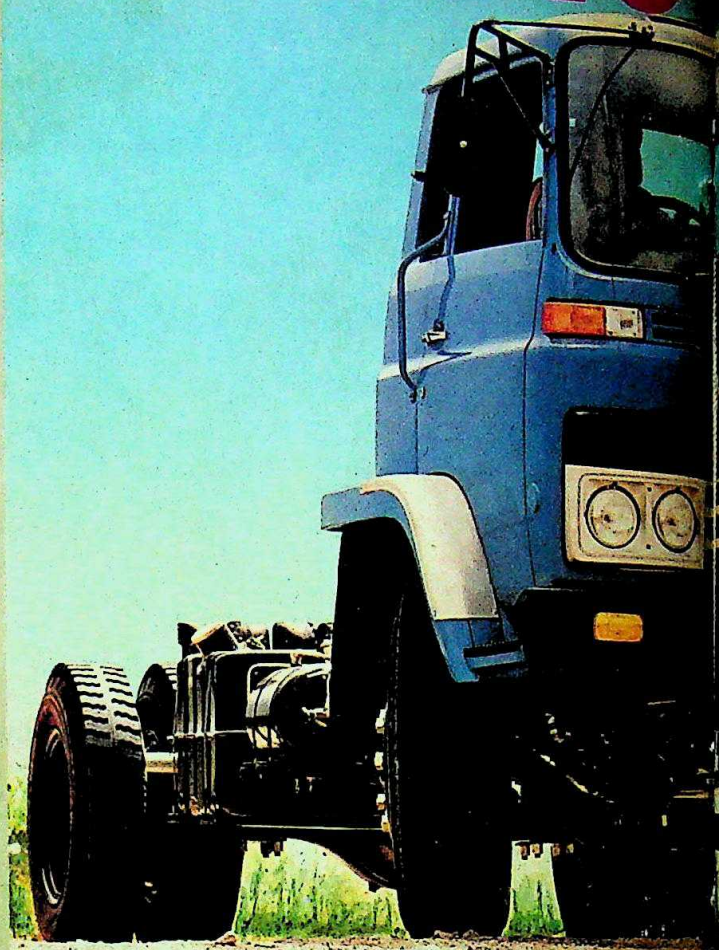

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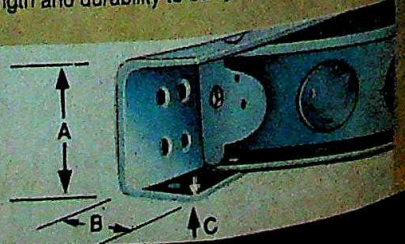

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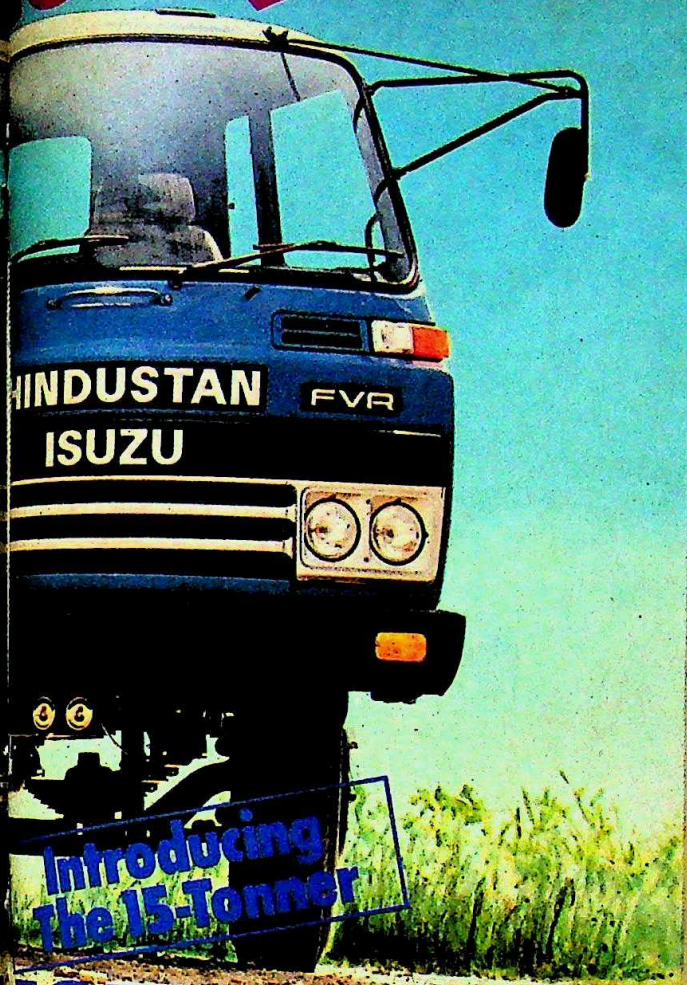

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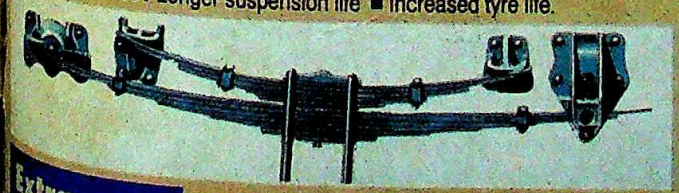

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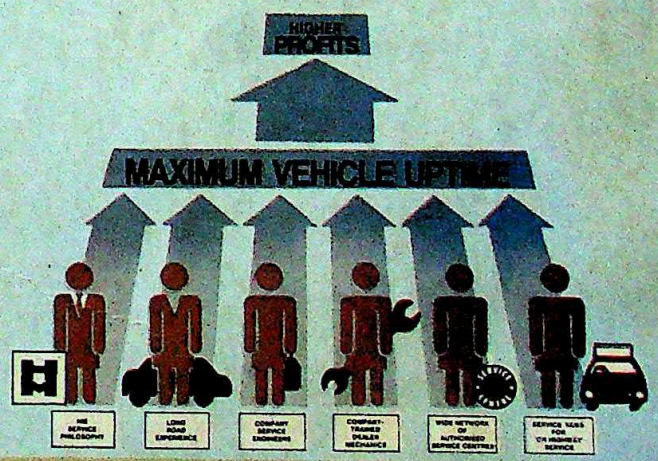

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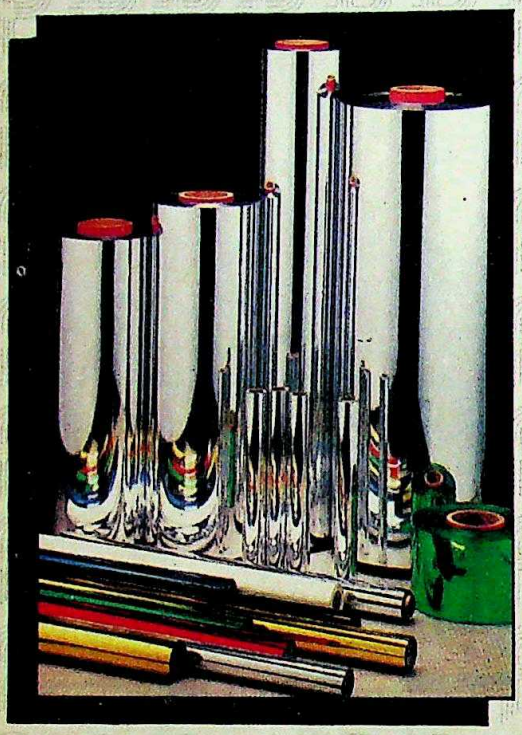

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which had so far been the exclusive preserve of the BMC medicos. BMC students pointed out that in sharing the clinical facilities, they now have to contend with the problem of an inadequate student-patient ratio which might provoke the Indian Medical Council to derecognise their college.

To add to the state Government's woes, Janata Party legislator, Roshan Baig has threatened to expose the 'misdeeds' of his own government in "handing over" the clinical facilities of the two hospitals to Ambedkar college. In a letter to the chief minister, Baig implicated Health Minister B. Rachiah, by stating that the "ever obliging minister of health seems to be falling over himself to cater to every whim and fancy of the Ambedkar Medical College management". If the charges are substantiated, BMC students are bound to create a stink the Government will not very easily live down.

Differences Deepen

THE Samyukta Maharashtra Seema Samiti (SMSS) is a motley collection of political groups constituted to get the Marathi- speaking areas of Belgaum merged with Maharashtra. But united as they are by this one slender thread, political differences were bound to spill over into the open, threatening to split the Samiti.

Last fortnight, veteran Janata Party leader S.M. Joshi, 82, largely responsible for keeping the different political groups together in the Samiti, announced his decision to step down from the chairmanship. His resignation was to protest Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray's criticism of his devotion to the Gandhian principle of non-violence. Joshi, though in poor health, has been maintaining that the Samiti must eschew violence in its confrontation with Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde. But the principle of non-violence is against the grain of the Shiv Sena. At Samiti meetings, Thackeray has been openly demanding a more "aggressive" action plan to resolve the long standing border dispute.

Thackeray: agitated

Joshi's decision to resign was, however, not anticipated by the Shiv Sena. Thackeray immediately offered to withdraw his party from the SMSS "in the interests of resolving the border issue". The future of the border agitation now depends on whether the Shiv Sena tiger can be tamed by meetings between the two leaders with conflicting standpoints.

Fawning Felicitations

FOR members of the Telugu Desam, May 28 was both the final day of the annual party convention—*mini-mahanadu*—and the birthday of their leader, N.T. Rama Rao. The nearly 4,000 handpicked party activists, invited to Teluguvijayam—the party headquarters, 25 km outside Hyderabad—greeted their leader with sweets, and garlands, and some even prostrated themselves at his feet. The high point was the huge birthday cake, carried in by yellow shirted volunteers—which was cut and passed around.

Accepting the fawning of his supporters unreservedly, NTR told the gathering: "I do not know why I was born and I cannot say how this journey will end. What is the meaning of this life's journey?"—words which foxed party members.

BABJI/Janata Studios

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NTR at meet and (left) being greeted: birthday treat

During the three day meet, party members discussed a host of issues, and passed 25 resolutions. All except two were directed against the Central Government and its handling of the Sri Lanka Tamil problem, Centre-state relations, and Punjab. But issues closer to home, like the widespread shortage of drinking water, were referred to only in passing.

Commenting on this shift in priorities, *Newstime* editorialised, "It seems the crusading zeal with which NTR launched the party is lacking...Let him look after the state first. The nation can wait till his own house is in order." Unsolicited advice, the chief minister might say.

Defamatory Issue

JASPAL Singh, former police commissioner of Baroda is again in the news. But this time the MLA, elected mayor of the city earlier this year, is fighting off a personal communal attack.

The problem arose after Singh passed a cursory remark in Baroda last fortnight that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had goofed on the handling of the Punjab situation, Bofors, and Fairfax. This kind of outspokenness was not going to be tolerated by Congress(I) members. Ranjit Singh Gaekwad, Congress(I) member of Parliament immediately declared that Singh's action was a cheap gimmick made by one born a Sikh. Most people were shocked by his brashness. But once started, Gaekwad was not going to stop. In a statement to the press he wondered why the people of Baroda had put their faith in a Sikh.

Singh: under attack

Singh, shot off a long, indignant letter to Gaekwad. The mayor said he was proud to be born to a Hindu mother and Sikh father and that this did not make him a terrorist. Singh has now filed a criminal complaint in Baroda's chief metropolitan magistrate's court against Gaekwad for defamation and making statements which could lead to communal trouble. The mudslinging has only boosted Singh's image.

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BIHAR

The Lawless State

Caste carnages have become almost synonymous with Bihar: one takes place every few months. But even by that troubled state's horrific standard of killings, the massacre last fortnight of 42 Rajputs at Baghaura and Dalelchak villages in Aurangabad district marked a new level of brutality. But more than that, it also marked a new stage in a rapidly escalating caste war, mixed now with the deadly influence of a Naxalite organisation that is prepared to kill on caste lines. As class and caste combined in a potentially explosive mixture, Bihar last fortnight seemed to teeter at the edge of a dangerous precipice. A report by Executive Editor T.N. NINAN *and Principal Correspondent* FARZAND AHMED:

WELL COME", the hand-painted sign said above the doorway. "Drawing Room", it then announced somewhat quaintly, in the same green paint.

Ram Deen Singh, head clerk in the forest department, was once proud of this doorway, the drawing-room it led into, and the house—Baghaura village's only pucca dwelling. But on the night of May 29, a lynching party of Yadavs from nearby villages and activists of a dreaded Naxalite group, the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), scooped out the mud floor of the verandah just under the welcome sign, forced the frightened womenfolk in Ram Deen Singh's house to place their necks on the improvised chopping block, and beheaded them with country-made axes. Those who came for the mass funeral the next evening saw the scooped-out hole filled to the brim with the congealed blood of the slaughtered women.

The menfolk were killed earlier, in the yard outside. A couple of them were shot as they tried to escape into the darkness of the night. Ram Deen Singh escaped as he was not in the village that night. But 20 members of his family—from his 80-year-old father to his one-and-a-half year-old grandson—were butchered mercilessly along with other Rajputs from three other families in the village. A visiting tractor-driver, a Harijan, was tied to his

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vehicle's steering wheel and burnt alive.

Barely a kilometre away, Dalelchak village was living through its own nightmare. Kamla Devi had just returned from her in-laws'-house after her marriage a fortnight earlier, and her father was celebrating. When the dogs barked outside, Kamla's sister Lalita Devi peeped out, to see a horde of armed men marching on the village. The two sisters, their parents and other relatives fled into the fields, but were pulled back by a neighbour who insisted they had nothing to worry about. The family returned home. Two hours later, only Kamla and her sister were alive. Everyone else's throats had been slit.

After the killings, the mob set a torch to all the Rajput houses in both villages. The bodies were thrown into the fire. The flames lit up the night sky for miles around, but not a soul came from any of the surrounding villages to help. Hiding in his haystack, Amresh Singh of Dalelchak heard the killer mob shout "MCC zindabad" and "*Chhechani ka badla le liya*" (We have taken revenge for Chhechani—where Rajputs had killed Yadavs in April) before disappearing into the night.

For over a month, the police in the district had been expecting just such a carnage, and had been on full alert. Armed pickets were posted in dozens of villages, including two in the neighbourhood of Baghaura and Dalelchak. Mobile patrols swarmed around. But on the night of May 29, a mob described as between 450 and 700 not only assembled unnoticed, but killed entire families in the most organised fashion and made a bonfire of two villages before melting away into the night once again, unseen, untraced.

The police picket at neighbouring Anjan, 3 km away, saw the fire and five men were despatched to the site. They had to walk cross-country and along a canal, because roads are non-existent in backward Aurangabad. Another group on regular patrol also reached Dalelchak, picked up two who were still alive and rushed them to hospital. The district Superintendent of Police, Satish Jha, reached within two hours. But not a soul from the surrounding villages came to help put out the flames, despite Jha personally going round and pleading for assistance. And by the next day, all the surrounding villages too were deserted—and stayed deserted for the next week. Everyone had fled in fear.

Forty-two Rajputs were slaughtered that night. Bihar had never seen carnage on such a scale before. In terms of plain

Mass cremation of those killed in Baghaura (left); and weapons used by the killers: unparalleled brutality

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BINDESHWARI DUBEY

"It will not help if I resign"

CHIEF Minister Bindeshwari Dubey has attracted most of the flak for his administration's failure to stop the repeated caste carnages in Bihar. But Dubey himself feels he deserves credit for taking the fight into the Naxalite camp and mounting a determined police campaign. On the other hand, he admits frankly that Naxalites control large tracts in the troubled state—levying their own taxes and holding 'people's courts'—and that his government's writ simply does not run in hundreds of villages. Excerpts from a candid interview with T.N. NINAN *and* FARZAND AHMED:

Q. *How do you react to the latest outrage in Bihar?*

A. Massacres in Bihar are not a new thing. It seems alarming only because the number of cases is now bigger than before. But Naxalite extremists have been operating in this area from 1970. They have become practically entrenched in 49 blocks.

Q. *Why has the problem become more serious now?*

A. After I became chief minister (in 1985), I recognised the evil designs of the extremist forces. Earlier, the administration was passive, and those people who didn't believe in the extremist ideology were completely demoralised, irrespective of their caste. So when the Government started building up resistance against them, the extremists became furious. We assured safety to people of all castes, and people started refusing to pay any levy to the extremists.

Q. *What have you actually done to tackle the problem?*

A. We sent a task force with jeeps and policemen to create confidence among the people. The people started defying the extremists, who were infuriated. So they launched their assault with more vigour, and there has been a retaliation. The Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) has attacked Rajputs because the Rajputs went to the MCC hide-outs.

Q. *Have you been able to catch the main culprits behind the carnages?*

A. We are trying to find out the hide-outs of the culprits. A number of persons have been arrested. One extremist leader, Nepali Yadav, was killed in a recent police encounter. And Chandeswar Dusadh, who was responsible for the Darmia massacre last October and who had fled to Dhanbad, has been caught there. These, in fact, provoked the MCC.

Q. *But the police have failed to prevent the carnages.*

A. I can't say the police have failed in their duty, as they have got these two people recently. Forty-five of 111 extremist leaders have been arrested in the last six months. All this has been achieved by the special task force.

Q. *Are you saying the police have been successful?*

A. No, the extremists are so deeply entrenched that it will not be possible to eliminate them in a short time. They have collected huge amounts of funds, including money from labourers' wages. No one dares to disobey them.

Q. *What you are saying is that the extremists are controlling these 49 blocks in a very organised fashion.*

A. Yes. The tax on each family used to be between Rs 100 and Rs 1,000 every year, and also a part of the grain at harvest time. We have seized papers in police raids which indicate they had regular party cadres to operate in these villages and adopt violent methods. We seized registers with names, code names, villages to be attacked, villages 'liberated', levies fixed, arms snatched, etc.

Q. *Why were the police unable to prevent the latest attack?*

A. A guerilla fight has been going on. We didn't know where they will attack, and the police can't protect every village. The extremists hide in the hills and keep track of police movements through their cadres in the villages.

Q. *So you are saying this kind of carnage can be repeated.*

A. We are going to intensify our efforts. We will double the number of armed police. We have bought 175 jeeps, and will buy 150 more jeeps this year. We have asked for 200 wireless sets from the Central Government.

Q. *How has militant extremism got mixed up with caste in Bihar?*

A. Harijans, Yadavs, Koeris and Dusadhs are involved. Some of them own more land than the Rajputs, but they are Naxalites. So it is not a question of haves and have-nots, nor is it a question of economic disparities. These disparities are much greater in Purnea or Darbhanga, where people have up to 5,000 acres of land. In the Aurangabad area, where the murders have taken place, the ratio of the landowning population to the landless is not so bad. And the people who have been killed in Baghaura and Dalelchak villages now are quite poor. So it is not a question of economic disparity. But it is not exclusively the caste factor either. It is basically MCC vs non-MCC.

Q. *You don't think the Naxalites have been successful because of the poverty and exploitation in the area?*

A. It is not a question of fighting for the have-nots and for minimum wages.

K.M. KISHAN

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because once a village starts paying a levy to these extremists, all land disputes and minimum wage quarrels stop. So their main purpose is to use poor people for their political gain.

Q. *So you think poverty has nothing to do with the success of the extremists?*

A. Of course, there is poverty in the area, and these districts are underdeveloped.

Q. *So shouldn't you be trying to tackle the problem of poverty?*

A. We have gone in for development of the area and given it additional money. We gave Rs 5 crore last year for these 49 blocks, and we have given another Rs 5 crore this year. We are building roads, schools, health centres, and conducting poverty alleviation programmes.

> "The extremists are so deeply entrenched that it will not be possible to eliminate them in a short time. They have collected huge amounts of funds, including money from labourers' wages. No one dares to disobey them."

Q. *Nevertheless, you seem to be treating this essentially as a law and order problem. What about the political aspect, and the socio-economic aspect?*

A. It is not a political problem. It is not a socio-economic problem. Nor is it a question of haves and have-nots.

Q. *So you are not looking for a political solution?*

A. No, it is a law and order solution. Only preaching non-violence will not help, because violence can only be fought by the police, not by preaching.

Q. *But doesn't the war have to be fought in the minds of men?*

A. That is true. They have indoctrinated people, forced villages to surrender. So first we have to create confidence in people through better policing, so that the extremists cannot harm them.

Accelerating development is also a method of motivating the poor, to wean them away from the MCC. Our party cadres have been advised to go there.

Q. *But aren't Congress(I) leaders themselves involved with these groups?*

A. This is their strategy, to spread this. You can't take what they say at face value. But, in the process, they have forced a cleavage between the castes.

Q. *Why did you ban the MCC?*

A. In the past, such bans have helped. Jehanabad is quiet after the MKSS was banned last year. Now the MCC too will become quiet.

Q. *After the Darmia massacre last October, you promised a 'final crackdown'. Yet we now have an even worse massacre.*

A. I did say that, and I did try. But no one can be sure. I did try.

Q. *Your police force does seem quite incapable of handling the job.*

A. We spend the second lowest amount in the country on our police. The strength of the force, for every 1,000 of the population, is the lowest in the country. We should have looked at all this earlier, but my predecessors never thought of it. We've started all this now.

Q. *What action are you taking on the failure of the district administration to act when intelligence reports predicted the attack on Baghaura?*

A. A cabinet group has been formed to go into this. I have transferred the district magistrate and the superintendent of police, because if there are lapses, then I must change the man. I may be a good officer, but if I fail, then I must go.

Q. *By the same logic, shouldn't you resign as chief minister?*

A. It will not help if I resign. The chief minister's is not a policing job. When there have been no communal incidents in Bihar, no one praises me. I have made Bihar the number two state in rural development in 1986-87. It was ranked number 17 earlier for the 20-point programme. Now it is ranked number 8.

Q. *Is the Centre thinking of replacing you with someone else?*

A. There is no indication of them looking for a new chief minister. And why should I resign? I believe in facing the problem and resolving it. I did it with the dacoits in Champaran, and the problem has been completely solved. I have solved the same problem partially in Rohtas. And I am sure I can counter the MCC. Only those who are not confident of themselves flee from problems.

brutality, the attack was unparalleled: the killing of women and children was taking place for only the third time. In the audacity and scale of the attack—getting hundreds of people together, ringing and attacking two neighbouring villages simultaneously—this latest outrage raised the state's escalating caste war to a new pitch. And finally, the self-proclaimed involvement of Naxalite extremists in caste massacre added a new and dangerous element to a crisis situation, even as it focused a horrified nation's attention on the dreaded MCC (*see box*).

AURANGABAD district is not anyone's idea of god's own acre. The majority don't have a shirt on their backs, the land allows barely one crop with a yield that is one-third that in Punjab or Haryana, there are next to no jobs. Even primary schools are scarce, hospitals non-existent, and there are no more than a couple of roads. What money is provided goes into corrupt pockets. A handful of big farmers (including the Bodh Gaya mahant and a minister in the state cabinet) own thousands of acres, and feudalism of the worst kind prevails. It is the kind of place where caste feuds can run through generations, where Naxalism will strike root in ravaged minds, and where the administration is so inept that the national flag above the district magistrate's residence will be unrecognisably faded.

But even though trouble had been brewing in this ravaged land, the state Government was stupefied by the scale of the outrage after six months of a special police operation aimed at taming the Naxalites in central Bihar. The district magistrate and superintendent of police—both of whom had been posted at Aurangabad after their predecessors were summarily transferred in the wake of last October's Darmia massacre—were now summarily transferred themselves. And as evidence surfaced that an attack on Baghaura had been predicted, a cabinet committee was set up to investigate the failure of the district administration to act on this intelligence information. Home Minister Buta Singh paid a visit, and eventually Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey was summoned to New Delhi for what seemed like a dressing down from the prime minister. A change of chief minister seemed very much on the cards.

But all this concerned only New Delhi and Patna. On the ground in Aurangabad, everyone feared for the next round of reprisals, and tension crackled through the district like a sparking electric wire.

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MCC

Red Rebels

A revolution is an uprising, an act of violence whereby one class overthrows another. —Mao Zedong

Veteran revolutionaries only end up as monsters and ghosts. —Deng Xiaoping

Red salute to the brave martyrs of Chhechani and Ramdeeha! Tit for tat. Forget not, forget not!
—Gaya-Aurangabad South Bureau Committee, Maoist Communist Centre

LAST fortnight, Bihar's Aurangabad district—part of the state's "liberated zone"—reflected Deng's observation more truly than Mao's vision. At the site of the massacre of 41 hapless Rajputs, the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) left behind printed pamphlets containing a heated, 3,000-word diatribe against police and upper caste thuggery. Its slogans recalled Chhechani and Ramdeeha, villages where the upper castes had wreaked havoc on lower castes earlier. A Naxalite group had joined Bihar's escalating caste war.

The MCC promptly attained national notoriety, though it has been held responsible for earlier carnages, notably the killing of 11 Rajputs at Darmia village last October. Known as a particularly virulent Naxalite group, it began in West Bengal as the Dakshin Desh group (Dakshin as India is south of the Himalayas; Uttar Desh is Mao's country, China). It followed an intensely theoretical 'party line' before Kanhai Chatterji renamed the group MCC around 1975, shifted the base of operations to Hazaribagh in south Bihar, and adopted a more 'action-oriented' course of violence.

But the group was not very successful, and moved to the Palamau/Aurangabad area. Five years ago, a secret Bihar Government report described the MCC as "a most militant underground group" which believed in commando-type operations and exhibitionist killings by its cadres.

Estimates of MCC strength vary widely, from 15 or 20 active cadres (with many informers and village-level supporters) to several hundred strong 'red defence corps' led by area commanders. Indeed, underground MCC literature shows pictures of its 'red defence corps' in the Aurangabad hills.

Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey says the group controls scores of villages in the utterly feudal and backward Aurangabad-Gaya belt. And local police chief Satish Jha said that though the MCC has only 20 hard-core activists, it has committees in every village which meet secretly, hold people's courts, collect levies and post sentries to report police movements. Intelligence officials in Patna call it a "situation of parallel government and insurgency".

But due to its excessively militant line, the MCC has failed to reach out to very large numbers. Instead, its ranks have been swelled by village toughs and criminals who are often hired by landlords or political candidates.

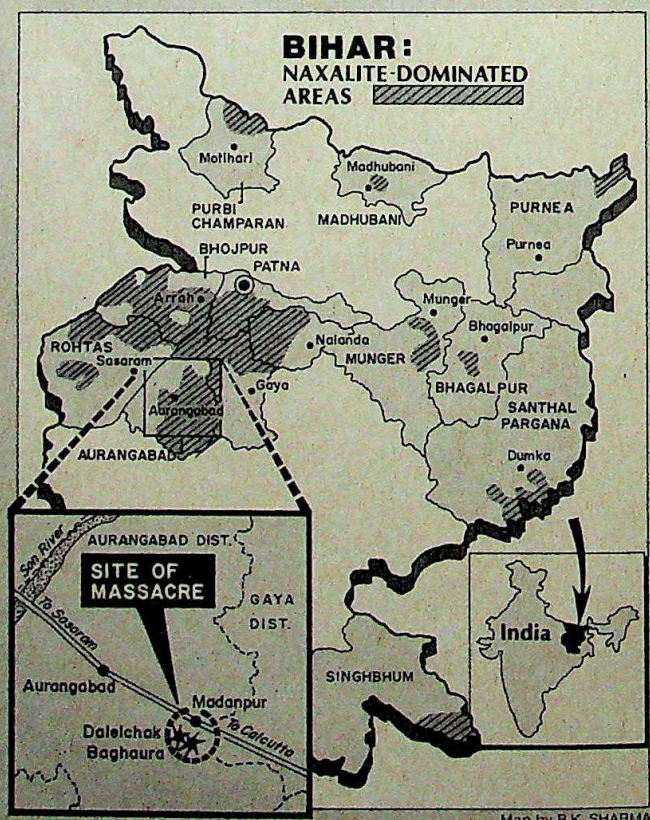
MCC literature talks of destroying the landlords' authority through "revolutionary farmers' committees" and the defence corps. A former MCC leader said the group has so far killed 250 people, and police say it has seized and distributed to the landless over 5,000 acres belonging to absentee landlords—far more than the Government has.

Meanwhile, the MCC has been riven with factional disputes following Kanhai Chatterji's death. The new leader, Sivenji, fell out with his deputy, Ramadhar Singh, over the policy of individual annhilations. Singh (a Rajput) recently left the MCC to join the Kanu Sanyal faction of the CPI(ML), and, perhaps significantly, the MCC has been taking up Yadav cudgels against the Rajputs. Indeed, last month's pamphlet expressed extreme indignation at the police reacting only when Rajputs are killed. Clearly, the group has decided to align itself with the lower castes in Bihar's escalating caste war.

Ramadhar Singh, meanwhile, remains a wanted man with a price of Rs 15,000 on his head. INDIA TODAY tracked him down to his hide-out in a remote Bihar town last fortnight, where he argued: "You can't have a mass movement through individual violence. This is a total misreading of Marxist-Leninist philosophy." He insisted that the MCC is now a depleted force and that the police are blowing up the issue to cover up their own failures. But intelligence officials say the new MCC leaders, Pramod Misra and Sanjay Dusadh, are "local legends".

Apart from the MCC, two major Naxalite groups operating in Bihar are the Liberation Group (Bhojpur-Rohtas belt), which functions through its front organisation, the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha, and the Party Unity Group, which has strong links with the Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti (MKSS), active in Jehanabad district and banned last year, after the police shot 21 of its activists in Arwal town in broad daylight. Dubey claims the MKSS has been subdued, but on a late night drive through Jehanabad last fortnight, a police patrol warned INDIA TODAY reporters to continue their journey in daylight: "The MKSS people are roaming around, we can't protect you." It quickly became clear why this whole area is considered a 'liberated zone'.

—T.N. NINAN and FARZAND AHMED



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Survivors view the burnt-out remains of their home: organised destruction

For Rajputs had been slaughtered, and Rajputs must inevitably take revenge. In Patna, intelligence officials warned of a potential caste conflagration the like of which the country has not seen.

FOR those looking for causes, the answers lay at several levels. At the most immediate level, a Rajput and a Yadav—both middle-level farmers—had been squabbling over control of some government land in Baghaura. The Yadav had links with the MCC, and the extremist organisation (already identified with the Yadavs in the state-wide feud with the Rajputs) was probably called in to kill or drive the Rajputs out. Said Ram Deen Singh: "The Yadavs want us to be finished, so that they can take our land cheaply." With the Koel canal coming up right alongside Baghaura, land in the village would soon have been precious beyond words.

In Dalelchak, similarly, two families had been involved in a petty dispute. One of them had links with the MCC, and on the night of the carnage he was seen pointing out the homes to be attacked. If that seemed to suggest that the MCC was playing the role of hired killers settling local disputes, there was another level of causality as well. And here the chain of events went back a couple of years.

The MCC had been involved in an acrimonious dispute with the Bodh Gaya mahant over the rights of sharecroppers on the mahant's land in the area. In stepped a local Janata Party stalwart and the man at whose home party President Chandra Shekhar stopped on his way back from Baghaura: Ram Naresh Singh. Singh bought 46 acres of the disputed land from the mahant and forcibly dispossessed the sharecroppers. Singh's worker, Krishna Kahar, was murdered, then his ally's son was waylaid by MCC activists from Parasdih village last September and killed. Ten days later, the landlords struck back at Parasdih and killed some MCC activists, who in turn struck back by killing 11 Rajputs in Darmia village three weeks later. Landlords from Darmia had been involved in the attack on Parasdih.

Darmia shook the state administration, which launched a special Operation Task Force to put an end to the Naxalite menace. Chief Minister Dubey promised there would be no more caste killings. Both the district magistrate and the superintendent at Aurangabad—a miserable, one-street town after which the district is named—were changed. Under the new, active police chief, Satish Jha, some successes were indeed notched up. The MCC was engaged in at least one pitched battle, and a tense truce prevailed in the caste war.

But this was not to last. The Central Reserve Police Force company was withdrawn for more urgent duties in Punjab, and several deputy superintendents of the special task force went back to Patna. In April, the MCC killed a Rajput of Anjan village, whose landlords promptly struck at the culprits in the nearby Chotki Chhechani village, killing seven Yadavs. Of them, six were known MCC activists.

Police supremo Jha was now fully on the alert. "I knew there would be a reprisal, it just had to come," he said last fortnight, shortly before he too was transferred out of the district. In fact, the local block development officer knew of the land dispute in Baghaura, and of the connections the MCC had in the village, and warned District Magistrate Jogendra Prasad that there could be trouble. Prasad told Jha, whose forces were fully stretched but who had police pickets all around Baghaura. That, however, was not good enough—as the carnage of May 29 eventually proved.

If this provided a second level of causality, there was a third level too. As Jha asked angrily last fortnight, "Why do

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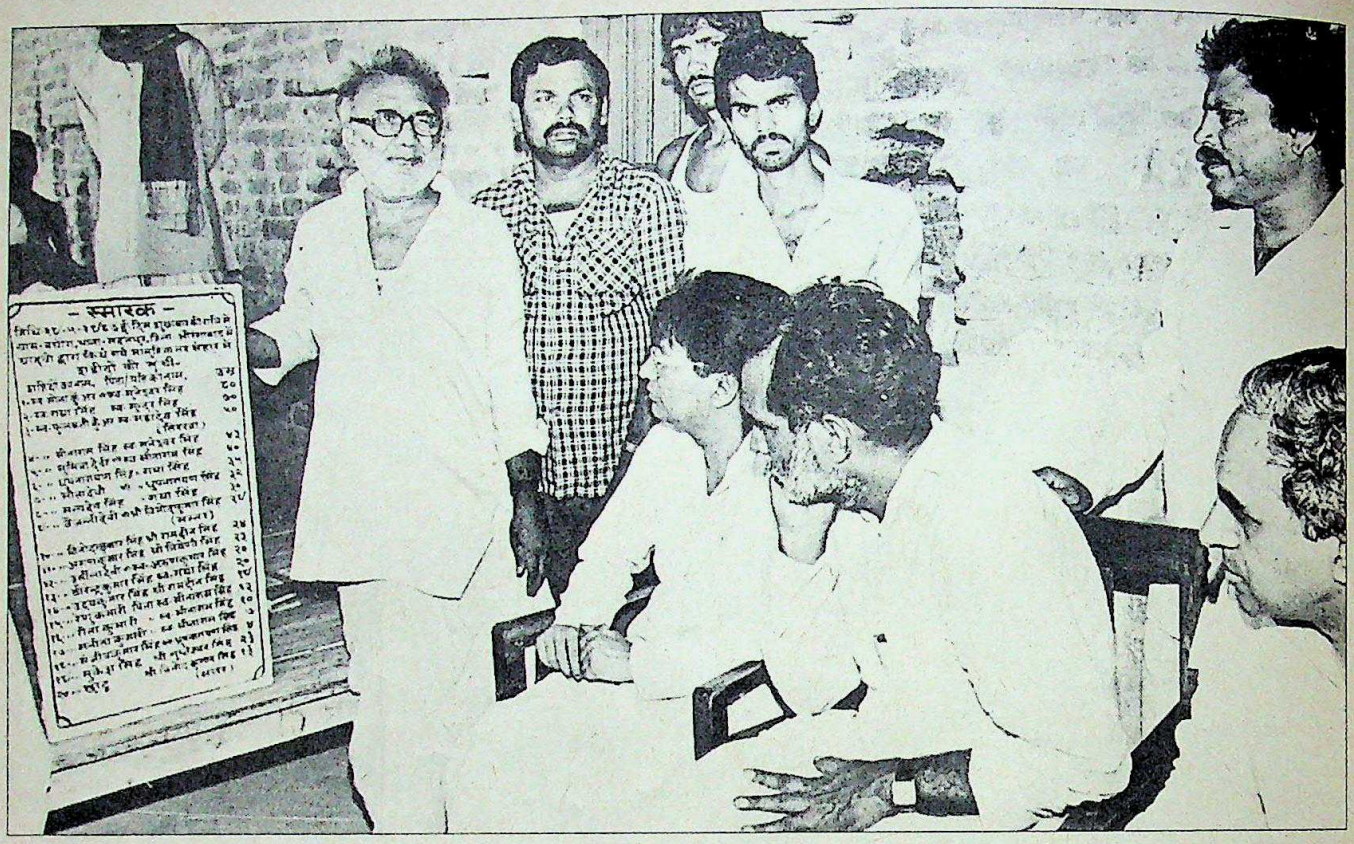

Ram Deen Singh showing Chandra Shekhar and Ajit Singh a memorial slab listing those killed in his family

people turn to Naxalites in this area?" The answer lies in the fact that:

► agricultural wages are still as low as Rs 3, when the official minimum wage is five times as high;

► the Bodh Gaya mahant continues to control 7,488 acres of land, and can hold off action against him under the land ceiling laws by going to court;

► a local Harijan is brutalised for giving his son the same name as a local zamindar;

► the seniormost district officials are clueless about progress on basic development programmes in the district, although special programmes with extra funds have been drawn up. Worse, the officials don't seem to care.

As Ashok Singh, collector of the neighbouring Gaya district admitted, "If the administration does not solve the people's problems, they are bound to go to the extremists to get justice, and this is what has been happening in this belt."

But the problem has also been getting more complex. C.P. Thakur, Congress(I) MP from Patna, points out that newly powerful castes like the Yadavs have been flexing their muscles, and the Rajputs and Bhumihars have not given up their superiority, leading to a new type of caste rivalry in a state where casteism is endemic. More important, Pradhan H. Prasad of the A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Sciences in Patna points out that Bihar's agricultural sector has been growing by no more than 0.5 per cent annually since 1969-70, whereas the population has been growing at over 2 per cent annually. Said Pradhan: "Per capita income in the agricultural sector has been falling for some 15 years. Naturally, the farmer will try to squeeze his labourer and not pay him proper wages. This class conflict is a direct result of non-development."

CASTE is added on because the upper castes traditionally own most of the land. Said Pradhan: "Half the land is owned by the upper caste 16 per cent of the population. So caste identifies with class." When these problems become manifest in extreme form—as they have in Aurangabad and in some neighbouring districts—a caste-cum-class war is inevitable.

But the most instructive lesson in Bihar last fortnight was in the reactions of leading Congress(I) politicians, including ministers in Dubey's Cabinet. One chuckled in good humoured resignation at the situation and said about Baghaura and Dalelchak: "What had to happen has happened." Former chief minister Jagannath Mishra criticised Bindeshwari Dubey for attending a conference organised along caste lines by the Yadavs, while a couple of backward caste leaders criticised Dubey for going to the scenes of only those outrages where Rajputs were killed. Last April, they said, when a Rajput was killed in Anjan village and seven Yadavs killed in neighbouring Chhechani on the same day, Dubey went first to Anjan. A minister from central Bihar also virtually admitted that the special funds that Dubey had been allocating for the Naxalite-infested districts were disappearing without a trace.

Through it all, Dubey talks bravely of his development programmes, of doubling the police force, and of launching an all-out offensive against the Naxalites and the caste war. But with caste feelings running high, with large tracts of land in 49 blocks spread over 14 districts under the influence of various Naxalite groups, including the MCC, no one can rule out a continuation of the chain of killings that led last month to the massacre at Baghaura and Dalelchak. Aurangabad remains the devil's acre, neglected, but with the potential to thrust itself into the national headlines yet again.

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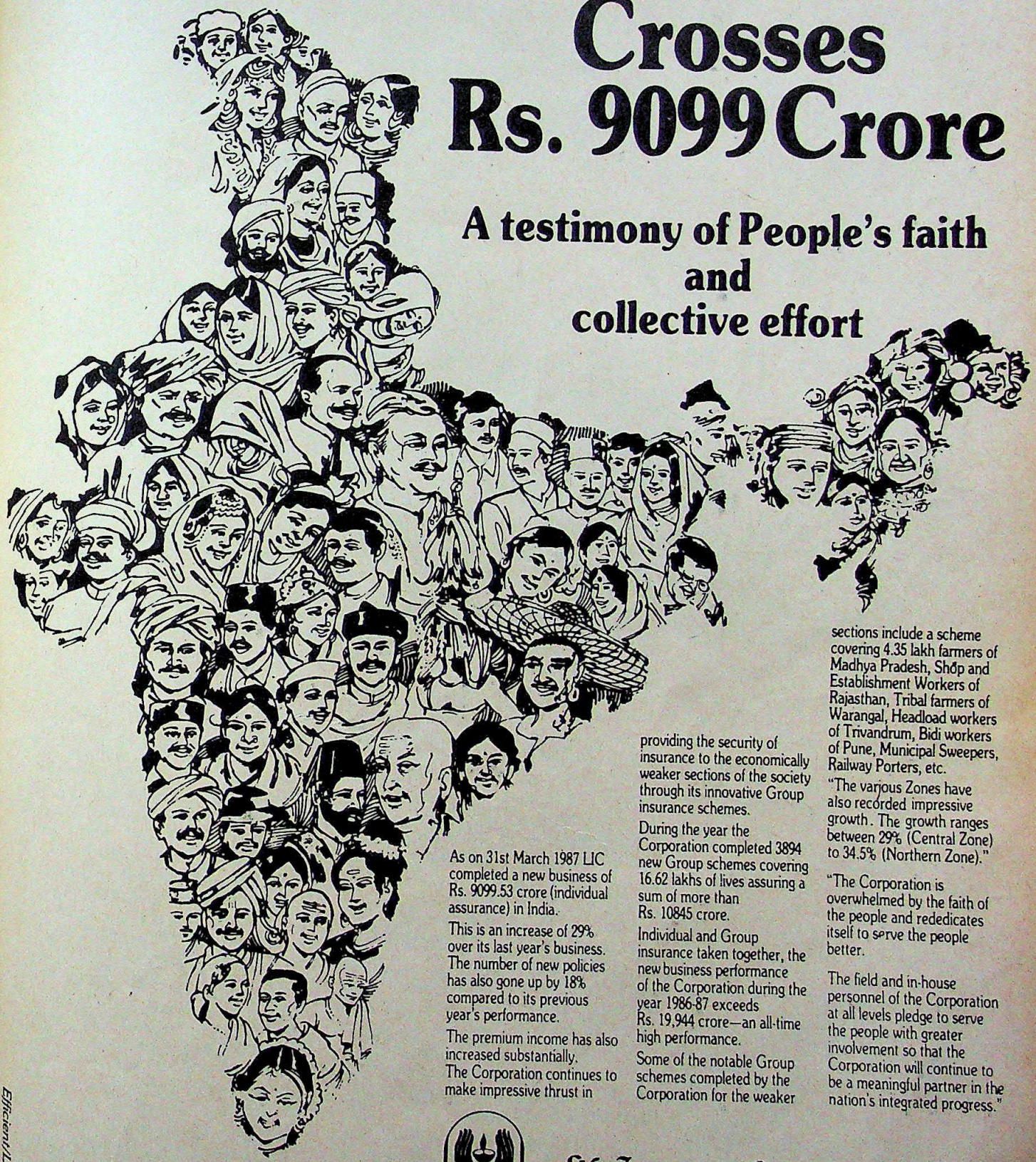
LIC'S New Business Crosses Rs. 9099 Crore

A testimony of People's faith and collective effort



As on 31st March 1987 LIC completed a new business of Rs. 9099.53 crore (individual assurance) in India.

This is an increase of 29% over its last year's business. The number of new policies has also gone up by 18% compared to its previous year's performance.

The premium income has also increased substantially. The Corporation continues to make impressive thrust in providing the security of insurance to the economically weaker sections of the society through its innovative Group insurance schemes.

During the year the Corporation completed 3894 new Group schemes covering 16.62 lakhs of lives assuring a sum of more than Rs. 10845 crore.

Individual and Group insurance taken together, the new business performance of the Corporation during the year 1986-87 exceeds Rs. 19,944 crore—an all-time high performance.

Some of the notable Group schemes completed by the Corporation for the weaker sections include a scheme covering 4.35 lakh farmers of Madhya Pradesh, Shop and Establishment Workers of Rajasthan, Tribal farmers of Warangal, Headload workers of Trivandrum, Bidi workers of Pune, Municipal Sweepers, Railway Porters, etc.

"The various Zones have also recorded impressive growth. The growth ranges between 29% (Central Zone) to 34.5% (Northern Zone)."

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The Good-Bad Hero

POPULAR cinema, students of society like to believe, is more than mere entertainment. Indeed, cinema is perhaps the major shaper of an emerging third form of culture, pan-Indian in its scope, which draws upon the older folk and classical traditions and combines them with the more modern themes. As popular culture, cinema can then be an important source of information on changes taking place in Indian society in response to the political, economic and social forces which impinge upon it.

Take, for instance, the relatively new kind of hero, epitomised by Amitabh Bachchan. The Bachchan hero is the good-bad hero who lives at the margins of his society. His attachments are few but they are strong and silent. Prone to quick violence and to brooding periods of withdrawal, the good-bad hero is a natural law breaker, yet he will not deviate from a strict private code of his own. He is often a part of the underworld but shares neither its sadistic nor sensual excesses. If a policeman, then he often bypasses cumbersome bureaucratic procedures to take the law into his own hands. His badness is not shown as intrinsic or immutable but as a reaction to a deprivation in early childhood, often of a mother's loss, or absence.

The good-bad hero is both a product of and a response to the pressures and forces of development and modernisation taking place in Indian society. He thus reflects the psychological changes in a vast number of people who are located in a half-way house—in the transitional sector—which lies between a minuscule (yet powerful) modern, and the numerically preponderant traditional sectors of society. Indeed, it is from this transitional sector that Bachchan films draw the bulk of its viewers.

The individual features of the good-bad hero can be directly correlated with the major psychological problems experienced by the transitional sector during the course of modernisation. Take, for instance, the effects of high population density in urban slums. Here, the necessity of dealing with relative strangers compel the individual to be on constant guard and in a state of permanent psychic mobilisation. A heightened nervous arousal, in order to ward off potential encroachments, becomes a characteristic of the good-bad hero.

Then there is the bureaucratic complexity with its dehumanisation. The mounting effect of the daily blows to feelings of self-worth, received in frequently rude bureaucratic encounters, from police stations to government offices, gives rise to fantasies of either complete withdrawal from social relations or following the dictates of one's personal interests, even if this involves taking the law in one's own hands.

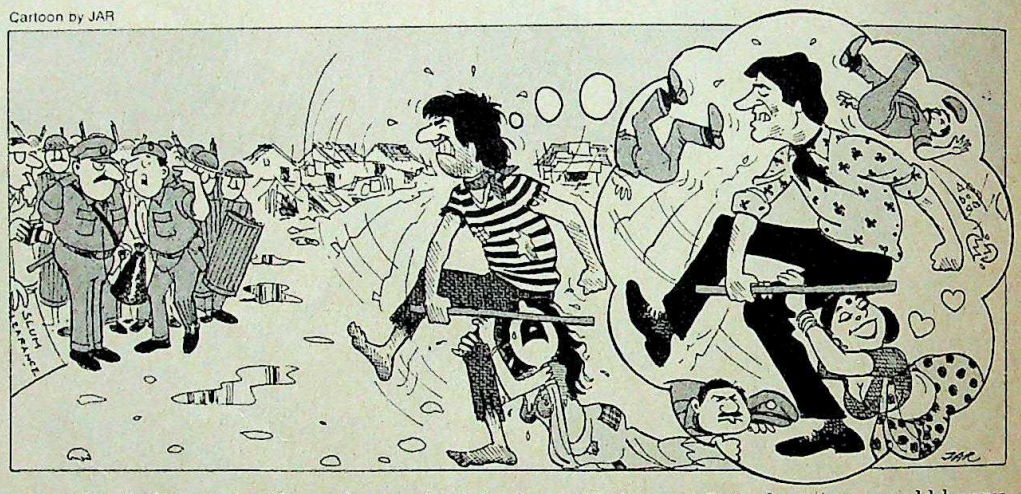
Furthermore, the erosion of traditional roles and skills of those entering the transitional sector destroys their self-respect and questions their social status. For the families of the affected, there may be a collapse of confidence in the predictability of the established world. The future itself begins to be discounted to the present. The good-bad hero incorporates the transitional man's collective dreams of success without hard work and of life lived primarily, and precariously, in the here-and-now.

The last feature of the portrait is the core sadness of the good-bad hero. This may be traced back to the effects of the population movements which take place with economic development. The separation of families and the loss of familiar village neighbourhoods can overcome many with feelings of bereavement. Sometimes, concretised in the theme of separation from the mother, these feelings are mirrored in the hero and are a cause of his depressive detachment, in which the viewers can recognise a part of themselves.

As a lover, the good-bad hero is neither overtly emotional, like the hero of the early Dilip Kumar movies nor boyishly phallic like the lovers portrayed by Dev Anand. A man of controlled passion, somewhat withdrawn, he subscribes more closely to the lines of the Urdu poet Faiz that "our world knows other torments than of love and other happinesses than a fond embrace".

Afraid of the responsibility and effort involved in active wooing, the withdrawn hero would rather be admired than loved. It is enough for him, to know that the woman is devoted to him while he can enjoy the position of deciding whether to take or leave her. The heroine is more a junior comrade to the hero than his romantic and erotic counterplayer. The heroine makes few demands on the hero and can blend into the background whenever the man has more important matters to attend to. Yet she is not completely unfeminine. She is not a mere mask for the homosexual temptation to which many men living in crowded city slums, and away from their womenfolk, are undoubtedly subject. She exemplifies the low place of heterosexual love in the transitional man's life, his fantasies absorbed more by visions of violence than of love, more with the redressal of injuries to self-esteem than with romantic longings. For those who grew to adulthood in a more settled era, the transitional man's values, are bound to appear as unappetising as his cinematic idols.

Cartoon by JAR



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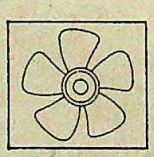

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BAIL-OUT BID

MARUTI UDYOG is seeking tax cuts from the Government for its vans, on the lines of the customs and excise duty concessions granted earlier to light commercial vehicle manufacturers. The objective: to cut prices on a product whose waiting line has disappeared. While Maruti's order books for cars are full for three years, it has problems marketing its jeeps and vans, both of which are now available off the shelf. It believes that the high price is one reason for this, and hopes to cut price tags by over Rs 8,000 if the Government grants it tax concessions. This would make the vans cheaper than Maruti cars. Other solutions being considered are folding seats for vans (thereby providing more space to be used for commercial purposes) and increasing the fuel efficiency by 10 per cent, which the company's Japanese partner Suzuki is working on. Finally, the canvas-covered jeeps will get a hard top.

COURTING CALLERS

MAHANAGAR Telephone Nigam (MTN), the public sector corporation set up a year ago to run the telephone systems in Delhi and Bombay, is on a drive to improve customer relations. MTN will hold open house sessions by the month-end in the two cities. Apart from hearing subscriber grievances, the sessions are meant to help telephone personnel of various ranks interact with subscribers. The telephone company has also introduced a system of graded financial incentives for telephone operators under which they are awarded points for long distance calls. This move follows a study by the National Productivity Council. While MTN expects to fork out some Rs 7 lakh a month by way of incentive money, it expects to earn Rs 1.10 crore in additional revenue, the assumption being that people will make more long distance calls if they find it easier to do so.

BITTER PILL

PHARMACEUTICAL companies are in for a bitter dose. Far from condoning the hefty sums many of them have to pay as a result of a recent Supreme Court ruling, the Government is likely to ask them to fork out the money in instalments. Drug concerns had since 1981 been charging more for medicines than the officially fixed prices after obtaining stay orders from the Delhi High Court, but the Supreme Court held that they would have to roll back prices and pay the difference to the Government, with retrospective effect. The pharmaceutical industry already faces official demands for some Rs 200 crore in an issue relating to the so-called Drug Prices Equalisation Account (an official committee is examining the matter again), and the latest government stand will put it in a tight corner.

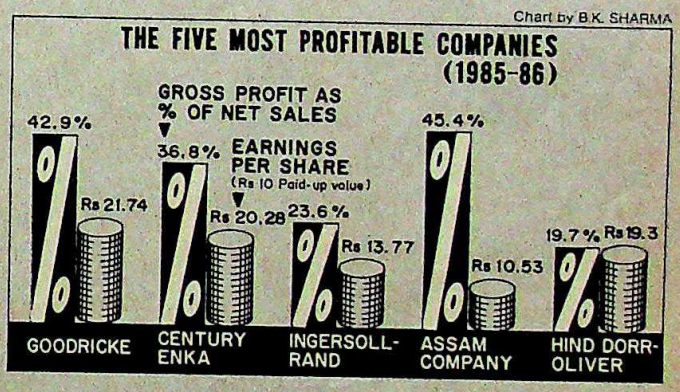
SEEKING SUPPORT

THE Government has permitted the Calcutta-based Guest Keen Williams (GKW) to buy 25 per cent of the equity shares of Webel Precision Industries Ltd, a jigs, dyes and components company promoted by a West Bengal Government undertaking. The state Government unit had earlier approached GKW for financial and technical assistance, and the two sides had arrived at an understanding on these and other matters. A number of other state-owned units have similar links with private sector companies in West Bengal.

TEA TIME

TEA it seems is more than the cup that cheers—it's also the stuff that sets the cash registers ringing. An *Economic Times* ranking of the profitability and earnings of 251 companies in 1985-86 puts as many as three tea concerns in the top 10 list (*see chart*). Heading the pack is the Calcutta-based Goodricke, the most profitable company in the business firmament (judged by a composite of profitability ratios). The

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



other two tea companies are Assam Company and Tata Tea. The Tata company had top billings in the list the previous year but has slipped to 10th position.

The rankings are based on the gross return on total capital employed, gross return on sales, and earnings per share. What is also striking is that Goodricke, along with Reliance Industries and Hind Dorr-Oliver, paid shareholders the fattest dividends—a hefty 50 per cent.

ACQUISITION MOVE

SOUTHERN Petrochemical Industries Corporation (SPIC)—which has been on a diversification spree—has now got into the corporate acquisition market, and sought government permission to take over Kothari Chemicals, a Kothari Industrial Corporation unit, at a price of Rs 29.23 crore. SPIC will finance the deal by taking over the loan liabilities of Kothari Chemicals, amounting to Rs 19.23 crore, dipping into its own kitty for the rest of the cash. Kothari Chemicals, manufactures among other things, chlorine and hydrochloric acid, and production has been hamstrung by power cuts. The Kotharis want to sell the unit because of the heavy interest and loan burden. SPIC on the other hand can use this to offset its profits for tax purposes.

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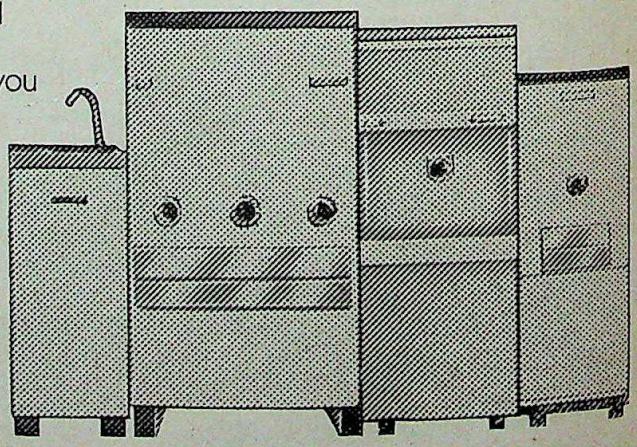

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TAKE-OVERS

The Corporate Raiders

SUDDENLY it's open season on companies. From coast to coast, corporate raiders are training their financial sights on some of the biggest corporations in the land, plunging into negotiations or striking multi-crore deals. Even smaller companies have come in for attention. Two in the south have, in fact, changed hands.

Clearly, take-over time is here—and the heat is on enterprises with significant overseas shareholdings. Among them: the Calcutta-based Chloride India, a GEC (India) subsidiary Genelec, Jokai India, Tribeni Tissues and the Bombay-based Mather & Platt. The list is even longer if Guest, Keen Williams (GKW) and McLeod Russell are counted.

Reflecting the action, the shares of at least one target of the take-overs plunged, with brokers on the Calcutta Stock Exchange kicking up a shindig, till the stock exchange authorities wrote to the Government asking it to intervene to help halt the slide.

The rash of take-overs this summer has partly been prompted by the fact that many companies, especially former British-controlled ones, are ripe for the taking. Most of them are in Calcutta, and P.L. Roy, managing director of Genelec, which itself is up for sale, argues: "It is only the old imperial British houses that are disinvesting in India, because they want quick returns on their money and don't see the long-term benefits of remaining in India".

They are also unloading some of their equity because their domestic counterparts are not flourishing. Example: GKW, battered by a downturn in the automobile and electrical sectors, made a Rs 42-lakh loss last year. And the engineering company needed to raise Rs 52 crore over the next four years for modernisation. What the Rs 213-crore outfit clearly needed was a Galahad. Enter K.K. Birla, whose companies bought almost 7 per cent of the 46.8 per cent British shareholding in GKW, put in a director on the board, with another to follow after the Reserve Bank of India clears the transaction. K.K. Birla has the first option to buy more shares should GKW in the UK disinvest further to some 25 per cent, as it is expected to. The Birlas, on their part, believe that GKW will fare better, once the electrical and automotive sectors revive. If that happens, they may have bagged a potential winner relatively cheap.

In some cases, the foreign principals themselves are in a financial bind, and wish to hawk their local subsidiaries. Chloride (UK) plc has a crippling debt burden which it is obliged to trim as part of a British bank's rescue package last year. So it put its 51 per cent controlling interest in Chloride India, the battery company, on the market —a point the highly profitable subsidiary's officials vigorously contested for almost a year.

Last fortnight, however, Chloride India Chairman Jahar Sen Gupta conceded that the company had been put on the auction block. The snag so far has been the price—a daunting Rs 80 crore to Rs 100 crore, way above the market value of the shares. So Chloride (UK) has come up with a solution: either a "split" sale whereby the shares would be hawked to more than one Indian buyer, or a sale of part of its shareholding.

The big question is: who are in the race for the company? The financial press has identified MacNeill & Magor's B.M. Khaitan as being in the running. The JK group's Hari Shankar Singhania and Dubai-based marauders Manohar and Kishore Chhabria also have reportedly made a joint bid for Chloride. But all four are quick to dismiss the reports. Said Singhania: "There's absolutely no substance to all this. We're not interested in Chloride India." Added Kishore Chhabria: "We're not negotiating for Chloride. We have not talked to Singhania either. Our plate is full."

Whether the Chhabrias are buying or not, they certainly have their hands full. After snaring Gordon Woodroffe and establishing a presence in Dunlop India along with R.P. Goenka, they are in the driver's seat at Shaw Wallace following a bitter battle for control. What is more, the take-over artistes are now negotiating for Mather & Platt, the Rs 36-crore Bombay-based pumps, motors and machinery company. While Kishore Chhabria says flatly that "all these news reports about our bidding for Mather & Platt are inspired," reliable sources claim the contrary and assert that the Chhabrias have been talking to the Australian Wormald International, which owns 60 per cent of the company's UK parent. Wormald wants £ 14 million (nearly Rs 30 crore) for the shares, and the Chhabrias are trying to beat down the price.

Mather & Platt's blandishments for a suitor are not merely its profits (almost Rs 6 crore last year). Its order books are full for the next year and it does not owe a rupee to any bank. So a raider will not have to spend too much time in the nitty-gritty of running the company, and he could use its healthy balance sheets to raise loans for funding other take-overs.

Tribeni Tissues (a sister company of ITC because it is part-owned by British American Tobacco (BAT) abroad) may also change hands in the near future.

RAGHU RAI

K.K. BIRLA

A stake in GKW

K. CHHABRIA

Shopping for Mather & Platt

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

K.K. MODI

Moving into Genelec

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BAT has offloaded its interest in Tribeni to Gillette, which recently made an entry into the country by promoting Indian Shaving Products.

Again, the attractions of what is essentially a sound tea company have lured practically every other tea company in the eastern region into bidding for troubled London-based businessman Rajendra Sethia's Jokai India. Last month, a financial daily claimed that Warren Tea had written to Punjab National Bank (PNB) seeking to buy 74 per cent of Jokai's overseas equity (the bank had acquired this as collateral for loans to Sethia's Esal Commodities). Warren Tea Managing Director Vijay Goenka denies having put in a bid, a contention backed by PNB Chairman J.S. Varshneya.

Still, PNB has received 10 to 15 offers for the company. It is also true that the bank will unload the shares—if it can establish its title to them. Here, buyers have clearly jumped the gun because Esal's liquidators have laid stake to the shares and Jokai Tea Holdings Ltd, the UK-based holding company of Jokai India, has refused to register the equity in PNB's name. The bank filed suit against the holding company a year ago, and Varshneya quite validly points out that any offers are meaningless till the title is established. "When we don't have anything to sell, how can there be an offer? The question doesn't arise."

The question does, however, arise in the Genelec case. Says Managing Director Roy: "GEC (India), which has a 33 per cent stake in Genelec, has the intention of divesting itself of its holding to raise funds for its own modernisation and expansion programme." He argues that selling Genelec is a cheaper way of raising money than obtaining interest-bearing loans. Genelec is raking in modest profits (Rs 46.2 lakh in 1985-86), so the gambit could make sense.

The company is being pursued by a number of businessmen who have so far remained in the shadows, the exception being K.K. Modi. Roy declines to reveal any names or even to confirm whether Modi has swung the deal. Modi was abroad last fortnight, but he said in an interview last month that Modis had bid for only half the GEC (India) holding in Genelec.

Certainly, Modi is not the only industrialist whose name has figured prominently in corporate raids. Another is B.M. Khaitan, whose spree of acquisitions (McNally Bharat, Standard Batteries and, more recently, India Foils and Metal Box) has put him in the spotlight. Many observers believe that his newest acquisition is tea company McLeod Russell, something he stoutly denies. Last month, the UK-based George Williamson, which holds a majority stake in MacNeill and Magor, bagged 80 per cent of McLeod Russell (UK). The latter firm in turn has a 40 per cent stake in three Indian tea firms, including McLeod Russell (India). Mcleod Chairman N.A. Atal admits that the three companies will act in consort with MacNeill & Magor. The question then is: does Khaitan now control all four concerns?

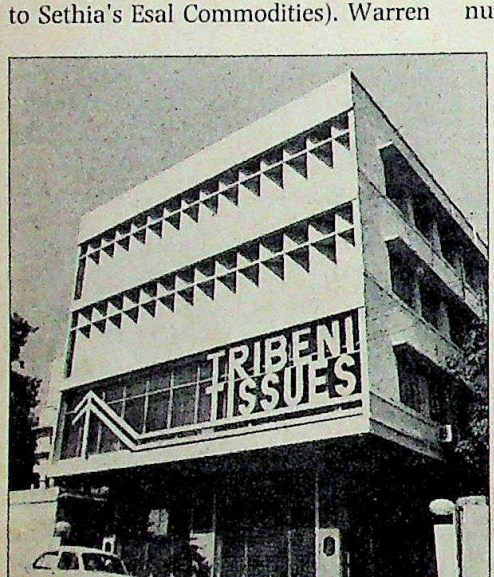
No answers may emerge, because Khaitan is a cagey industrialist. Inevitably too, his name has been linked with bids for companies as diverse as Chloride, ITC and Bata India. "But where on earth will I get the money for all these companies?" Khaitan asks, dismissing the rumours with a laugh.

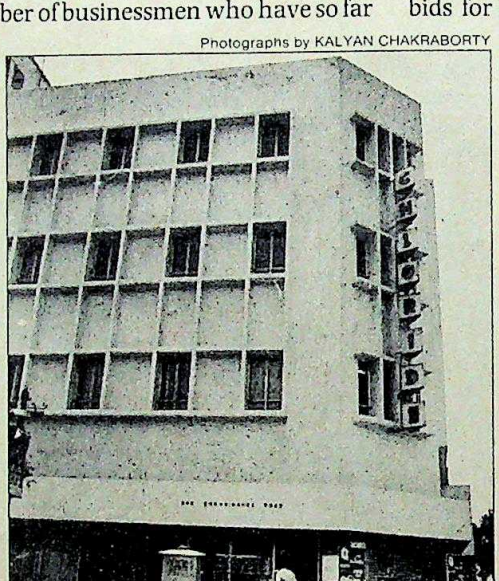
Meanwhile, it is clear that the take-over mania is spreading to the minor leagues too. Last January, the JK group bought from Madura Coats 25 per cent of the shares of the Madurai-based Fenner India. And last month Raghu Modi, who runs the Rasoi group of companies, finally got his nominees on to the board of the Bangalore-based J.L. Morrison Sons and Jones (India). He bought a 22 per cent stake in the drugs and toiletry company.

The sudden spurt of take-overs and attempted raids on companies inevitably raises several questions. Since foreign companies are disinvesting, are they losing faith in the Indian business environment? The answer is probably no, and the disinvestment is mostly linked to problems elsewhere. Indeed, as Saroj Poddar (K.K. Birla's son-in-law and the man considered likely to take charge of GKW) argues: "The fact that Indian businessmen are ready to take on companies that are sick but have potential is another indication of industry's health and optimism." And Singhania adds: "By and large the climate remains good in the country. With a competitive society, mergers and take-overs should increase. They are a normal thing in the West." Quite obviously, they are well on the way to becoming a normal event in India too.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE with PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

Photographs by KALYAN CHAKRABORTY





The head offices of the Calcutta based Tribeni Tissues and Chloride India are likely to change hands because of disinvestment decisions taken abroad in the hope of getting quick returns.

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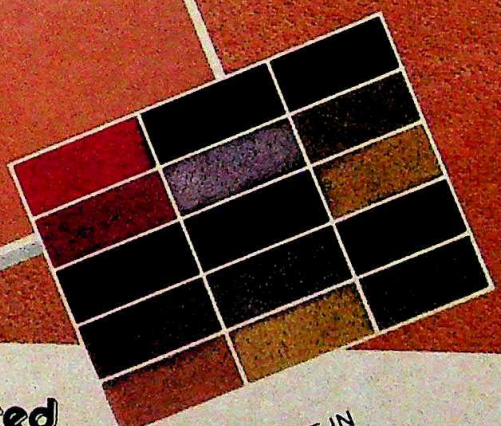
Oops ! Don't tell the boss...



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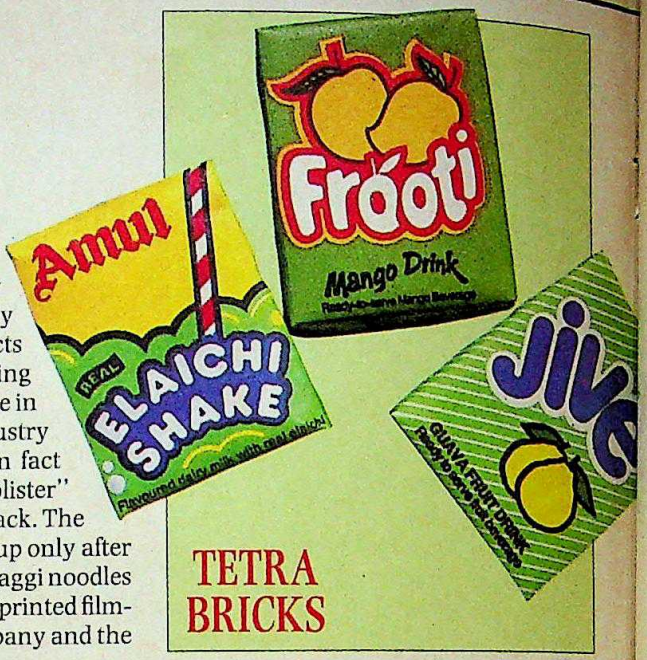
PACKAGING

A Ritzy Revolution

IN the capital, an entrepreneur plans on hawking pure Ganga water in India and overseas, after having packaged lube oil for cars and two-wheelers in stand-up pouches for the Government's oil companies. Down south, a Muruga temple has kicked off machine-packed *prasad* packets, and at least one other temple in Tamil Nadu is considering a me-too act. Across the country, a host of juices and juice-based drinks, snack foods, ready-to-eat mixes, meat products and milk have hit the market in quick succession, with more waiting in the wings.

Making all this possible is one common factor: a spectrum of new packaging materials. Quietly, manufacturers of products as disparate as pan masalas (Pan Parag), piston rings (Goetze), pharmaceuticals (most of the drug companies), coffee (Food Specialities, Brooke Bond) and edible oils (the cooperative oilseed federations) have already switched or plan to switch to new ways of wrapping their wares. Even the public distribution system is climbing on the bandwagon. In Delhi, a small beginning has been made to package sugar in 800 gm polyfilm packets and distribute it through ration shops. Rice and flour could be next.

The revolution in the market-place began two or three years ago but went largely unnoticed. Explains M.R. Subramanian, director of the Indian Institute of Packaging (IIP): "The new trends in packaging are mainly to be seen in the food products industry. That's why it's getting noticed. They have been there in the pharmaceuticals industry already." Drug companies in fact leaped into "shrink and blister" packaging quite some time back. The processed foods industry sat up only after Food Specialities launched Maggi noodles in 1983, packed in six-colour printed film-based packets. Both the company and the IIP were swamped with letters from firms seeking information on the new packaging material.



TETRA BRICKS

> The country is in the grip of a packaging revolution. Products as disparate as pan masalas, piston rings and edible oils now have attractive new exteriors.

But from hovering at horizon's end, the packaging revolution has finally arrived today. "It's kicking off," says Kamal Meattle, who runs a clutch of packaging companies in the capital. Adds B.M. Vijay, president of Cosmo Films, the biaxialy oriented polypropylene (BOPP) film company: "The whole concept of packaging is changing. Everything used to be packed in tins and then in poly jars. We're now coming to laminates and pouches."

He is right. Hindustan Lever has launched cheaper varieties of detergents like Wheel in polybags, while trying out the upmarket Surf in polybags in the eastern region. "In five years time we will probably shift to bags entirely," says J. Basu, the soap and detergent giant's senior purchase manager. Lever also recently switched from wax-coated paper to polyester film to wrap its Rin.

K.R. Kamat, sales manager of Garware Plastics and Polyester Ltd, underlines the breath-taking sweep of the packaging revolution when he points out: "In Uttar Pradesh, 42 different varieties of pan masala are now packed in polyester film packets. In Nagpur, the local *sevwalla* markets his *sev* in polypacks and is doing roaring business."

Even aerosol cans have caught on. M.I. Patel, managing director of Ex-

Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

PILLOW POUCHES

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trusion Processes, a major packaging company, reports that his company used to make a couple of thousand cans a year. "Now the total market has suddenly jumped to nearly five million cans," says Patel.

Still, the buzzword today is "flexible packaging," based on a range of films such as low and high density polyethylene, polyester and BOPP, or combinations of these. Indeed, some suspect that the newest segment of the Rs 4,000-crore packaging industry is growing at a blistering pace. Representative of the heady growth rates may be the Flex group of packaging companies, whose sales, says Ashok Chaturvedi, the group's 30-year-old chairman and managing director, have climbed exponentially from Rs 1 crore in 1983-84 to Rs 15 crore last year.

Expectedly, the mood among the new packaging men is upbeat. Says Meattle: "I'm very bullish." He argues that the switch to flexible packaging is inevitable because the raw materials for conventional packaging will get depleted. "We're chopping trees. Once there's no wood, what will you do? This has to happen." So he's setting up packaging units in the four metros (and plans to sell Ganga water and distilled mineral water in pouches).

Film manufacturers can hardly keep pace with the burgeoning demand. "We have a waiting-list because we cannot meet the existing customer demand," says Cosmo's Vijay. He reckons that the present demand of 8,000 tonnes will more than triple by 1990. So Cosmo is furiously expanding annual production capacities from 800 tonnes to 4,000 tonnes, as are rivals in the business. What is more, new companies are making a foray into film manufacture or related areas. Examples: Finnpack (India), a Rs 1.48 crore joint venture with Finland's Tuomo Halonen Oy, went into production a few weeks ago, on the outskirts of Delhi. Paharpur Cooling Towers is putting up a more ambitious Rs 50 crore laminating, printing and colour separation plant, also on the capital's fringes.

Unquestionably, the boom is fuelled by the overwhelming advantages product manufacturers see in pouches and tetrabricks. "Rigid containers like tins and jars are on the way out because the laminated pack is cheaper, and can maintain product quality," notes a Food Specialities executive. The new juice and drink brands, such as Amul Shakes and Volfruit, would probably not have been viable at all were it not for the cheap tetrabrick packs (tinned juices are still prohibitively expensive).

Companies have also been quick to recognise that selling products in smaller, more affordable, quantities can at times dramatically push up sales graphs. The classic example is Pan Parag, whose sales soared after Kanpur-based manufacturer M.M. Kothari switched from tins to metalised sachets made of film. And the state-owned oil companies have realised that more appropriate packaging can also cut wastage. The point was rammed home by the results of a private survey which discovered that putting lube oil into pouches instead of plastic jars meant a saving of Rs 45 crore for the economy, simply because this would help two-wheeler owners put the right amount of oil into their vehicles.

The new packaging offers manufacturers a wide range of other benefits: it cannot be copied very easily by small spurious goods manufacturers (who are mostly small-timers and cannot afford the investments in equipment, especially if complex printing techniques are involved), is more attractive and so catches the consumer's eye, at times offers a longer shelf life and, best of all, requires vastly less storage space than conventional packages, in turn cutting transport costs. "Tin and glass are ideal materials for packaging as both are absolute barriers against oxygen and moisture. But the high cost and the inconvenience in storing them are making manufacturers

STANDUP POUCHES

The new packaging has helped cut costs, boost sales and increase shelf life of products. Tins and jars are on the way out and tetrabricks and pouches are coming in.

METALISED POUCHES

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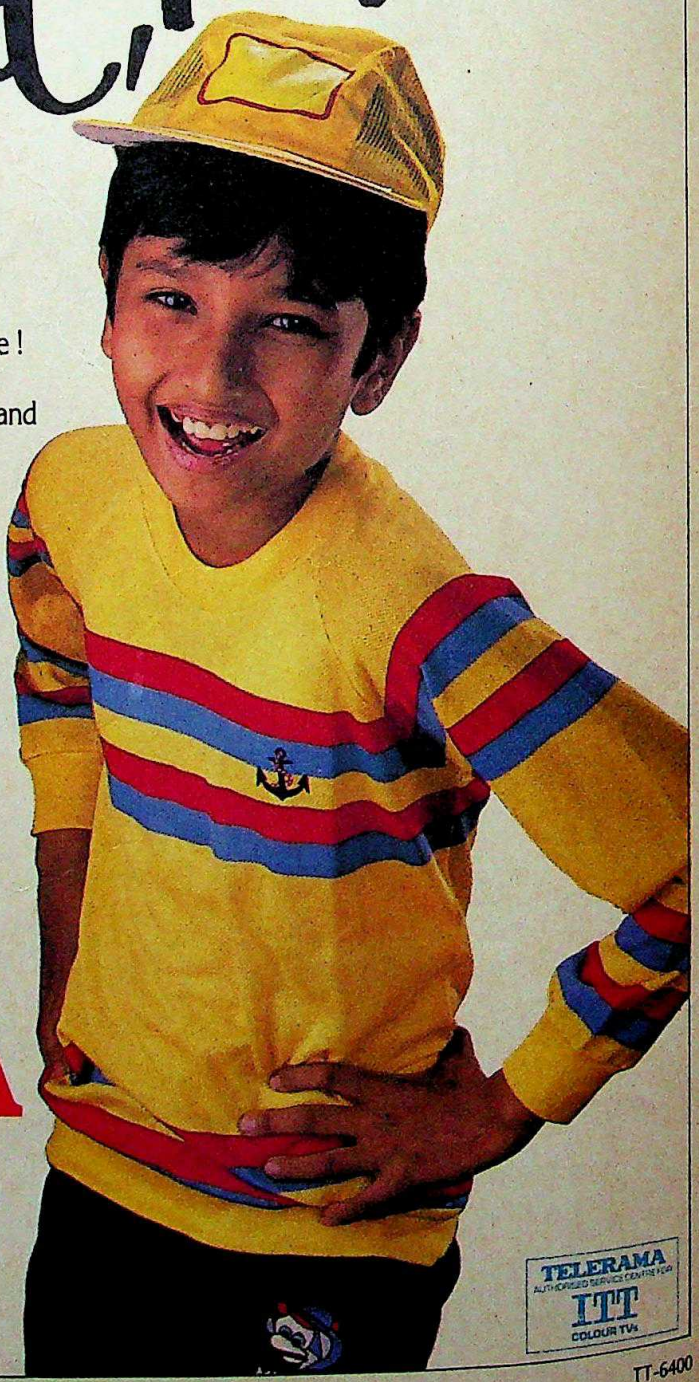

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go in for plastic," notes K.K. Talwar, chief engineer of Paper Products, a packaging company.

Still, the benefits alone could not have ushered in the new packaging trends without a marriage of other factors. Among them: liberal official attitudes which permit equipment to be imported on open general licence (at least 40 machines have been imported at a cost of Rs 1 crore or more), and the availability of newer and relatively inexpensive downmarket packaging and printing machines. Locally made "form-fill-and-seal" machines, of the size of a small fridge, can cost under Rs 2 lakh (Rs 12 lakh to Rs 18 lakh if imported) as against some Rs 50 lakh for an imported automatic tin packaging line. "Some printing machines too are cheaper now," says an industry executive.

If all this has obviously helped hundreds of small "converters" or businessmen who turn out flexible packages to set up shop all over the country, the plastic wave may also take a toll of the more conventional packaging materials such as tins. Some argue that this will not happen because tins cannot be dislodged from the packaging pantheon (they offer the best protection against spoilage for products like baby foods). Nevertheless, there are straws in the wind suggesting that fewer tins may be used to package wares. Finnpack (India) promoter Brijesh Goel, whose family owns ghee and milk companies along with a tin outfit, says that their captive consumption of tins has dipped by two-thirds simply because they have switched to newer packaging materials.

For all the cheer among packaging men, most admit that the industry still has miles to go before catching up with developments world-wide. And there are problems too. Packagers contend that the shortage of basic raw materials will be a damper on further growth. Complains Chaturvedi: "The biggest constraint is that not enough raw materials are available." For instance, polyethylene, a raw material for films, is scarce at home and abroad and an official of the state-owned Indian Petrochemicals Corporation Ltd, which makes half the country's requirements, admits that the shortage will continue for the next two or three years. But the shortage itself is an indication of the burgeoning demand, and the outlook for both the packaging industry and the consumer is wrapped in a rosy glow.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI and M. RAHMAN

SOYABEAN

Bubble Bursts

The wonder-crop, soyabean, has begun to wilt. And the country's infant soyabean industry, which was growing with the speed of a child prodigy, is in for a period of retardation. A crippling drought has reduced the soya crop this year to half the expected level, and excess capacity has pushed the processing industry into an unexpected crisis.

In Madhya Pradesh, which accounts for 80 per cent of the national production as well as processing capacity, 90 per cent of the 40-odd units now lie closed.

Said a Soyabean Processors' Association (SOPA) spokesman: "There is simply no soyabean available in the market and the units are lying idle." The average level of capacity utilisation in the industry is barely 33 per cent.

While the actual production of soyabean has fallen only marginally (from 7.83 lakh tonnes in 1985-86 to 7 lakh tonnes in 1986-87), the crisis has been precipitated by the breakneck expansion in the number of processing units: up by some 75 per cent last year. In fact, the processing capacity that has been created already totals 21 lakh tonnes, against the seventh plan target for 1990 of 14.4 lakh tonnes.

This may not have created an unmanageable problem if the year's production target of 15 lakh tonnes had been reached. As industrialist O.P. Goyal pointed out: "The industry had pinned its hopes on the projected target of 15 lakh tonnes, but the drought has halved the production and ruined everything." The drought also doubled prices (from Rs 275 per quintal in 1985-86 to Rs 550 per quintal this year) and lowered the oil content of seeds (by 0.70 per cent).

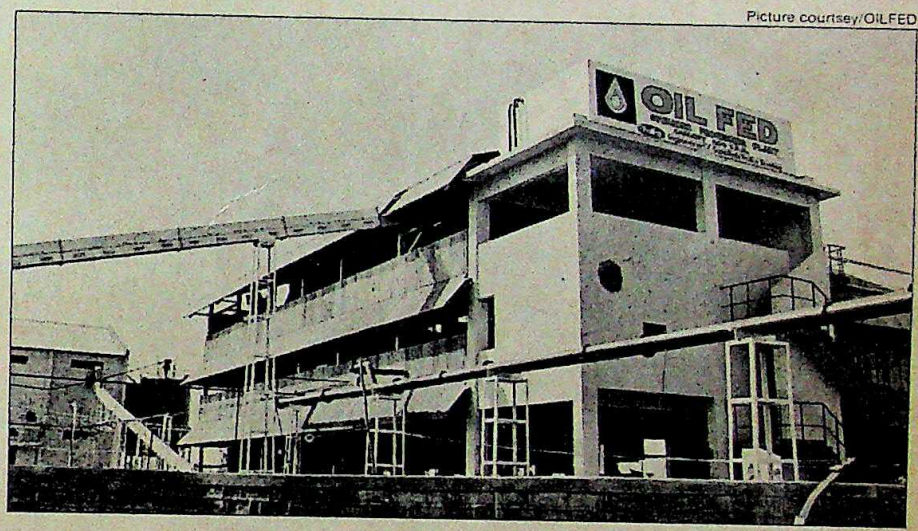
In a sense, however, trouble had been building up even before the drought. Soya solvent extraction plants shot up from four in 1980 to 40 last year, and the total processing capacity increased 35-fold in this period. In contrast, soya production increased only nine-fold, from 87,000 tonnes to 7.83 lakh tonnes. In fact, despite an increase in area under cultivation—from 9.34 lakh hectares in 1984-85 to 11.20 lakh hectares now—overall production had failed to show a matching increase.

"Everyone had joined the gold rush," said Congress(I) MLA Swaroopchand Jain, who runs one of the oldest soya units in the state. "Drawn by the high profitability, government concessions and easy terms offered by financial institutions, everyone had jumped in." In fact, the former SOPA chairman M.P. Mansinghka had warned of excess capacity four years ago, and in 1983 SOPA had pleaded that no additional capacity be sanctioned unless abundant soya supply was ensured. But the state Industrial Development Corporation stopped encouraging new units only two years ago and Central financial institutions woke up only last year.

In the wake of the supply crisis, some of the processing units have been clamouring for imports of soyabean. But Shyam Prasad Bajpai, managing director of the Oilfed cooperative, said this would be disastrous for the farmers and for the continued growth of soyabean cultivation. Clearly, an industry that was once full of beans is now in for troubled times.

—N.K.SINGH

Picture courtsey/OILFED



Soya extraction plant: supply crisis

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OIL INDIA

Executive Drain

SIX years ago, when Chairman and Managing Director Major-General S.C.N. Jatar joined Oil India Ltd, nearly a third of the state-owned oil outfit's executives resigned to take up jobs in the Gulf. Today the wheel has turned full circle at Oil India. Jatar himself may be poised to leave amidst a blaze of publicity—and another exodus could be in the offing.

Certainly, the sparks are flying at the Assam-based Central Government undertaking. Last month, the media reported that Oil India executives were flooding the company's management with transfer applications because they feared for their safety at the company's Duliajan headquarters. The reports were swiftly contradicted by an Assam government spokesman who challenged the oil company to furnish the names of the employees to the President.

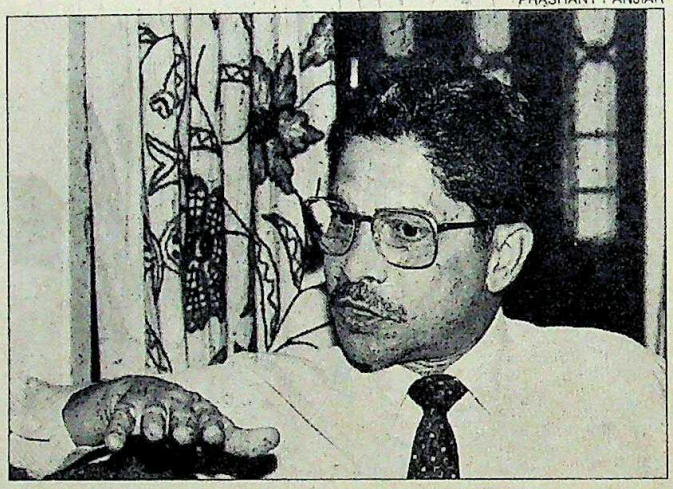
A rumpus has also erupted over Jatar's future, with reports suggesting that Jatar was being shifted from Oil India to Hydrocarbon India Ltd (HIL), a small Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) subsidiary—triggering off suspicions that the Government was buckling under pressure from the All Assam Students Union (AASU). Editorialised *The Times of India*: "The Centre has capitulated to AASU's pressure."

AASU has been spearheading an agitation against Jatar at Duliajan on grounds that he is anti-Assamese (favouring non-Assamese for jobs at Oil India), and that he is corrupt—a charge that the Central Government has now completely cleared him of after an investigation. He has also been cleared of the AASU charge that in his effort to increase Oil India's production, he ruined the company's oil wells. The agitation has made it impossible for Jatar to visit Duliajan since last October because AASU has threatened a bandh if he does. It has also demoralised employee ranks, and cost the company a production loss of 70,000 tonnes of oil worth Rs 12 crore (INDIA TODAY, April 15).

There is little doubt that Oil India faces an executive drain. As a company list of names shows, 50 executives have resigned over the last 16 months while another 208 have sought transfers. Quite simply, that means 25 per cent of the company's executives have either quit or want to get out. Last October, when the public sector Gas Authority of India Ltd (GAIL) wrote to Oil India seeking executives on deputation, only 23 volunteered. Next time round in March, an astonishing 170 shot in applications. GAIL ultimately picked only 13 of them.

It is on Jatar's alleged move to HIL that things get more foggy. Has the Oil India chairman been transferred from his post? He says that he has not been informed in writing of a new posting: "Officially, I'm still chairman and managing director of Oil India. But if the Government wants to post me elsewhere, I will go. I'm a soldier."

PRASHANT PANJIAR



Jatar: uncertain future

The Government too agrees that Jatar has not been moved out—but lends a fresh twist to the controversy. A senior bureaucrat maintained last fortnight that Jatar had appeared of his own will for an interview before the Public Enterprises Selection Board for the HIL job along with several other hopefuls: "It's not as if he's compulsorily being shifted out. He's generally accepted that he's unable to function at Oil India."

Backing his contention, the official brandishes a letter Jatar wrote to the Government in March saying that the chief secretary of Assam had written assuring him protection, but he was sceptical of the Government's ability to maintain order, and so did not want to visit Assam. "You can't have an Oil India chief executive who operates from New Delhi," argues the bureaucrat.

Jatar agrees that he wrote the letter and that he appeared for the interview. He, however, says that the chief secretary of Assam did not guarantee that the state Government could prevent AASU from agitating: "An agitation means a bandh which will stop the company's operation and involve a loss of production. So it's pointless for me to go." On the interview question, Jatar adds: "My appearing for an interview evolved out of consultation with the Government."

While the chairman declines to comment further on matters, his supporters claim that the Government had in fact sounded him out some months ago on the HIL job and that shifting him raises serious issues for the public sector. A senior public sector executive contended this would set a precedent: "Is the Centre going to be dictated to by AASU or a similar organisation? Suppose the Maharashtra Government says tomorrow that the ONGC chairman should be a Maharashtrian because ONGC is based in that state. It can happen."

The government official, however, counters that the argument doesn't hold water: the problem is specific to Oil India. "The Assam Government has told us that it is not against non-Assamese. What they're saying is that there's a lot of dissatisfaction in the organisation with Jatar, that it's a specific case."

That may or may not be so, but the Government is clearly in a fix. If Jatar is selected for the HIL job, it is open to the charge that it has succumbed to AASU pressure. If he's not, the Centre is faced with a chief executive who runs a key oil company far from the hot seat—and so may eventually have to sack Jatar. Said the bureaucrat resignedly: "It's a no-win situation."

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

Oil India's executives are flooding the company's management with transfer applications as they fear for their safety in the Duliajan headquarters.

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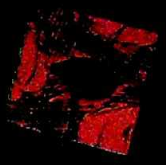
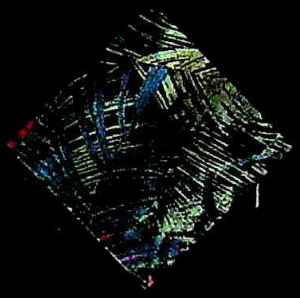
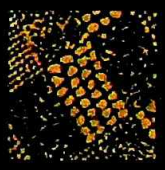
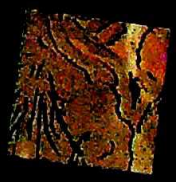
WILD WHITES IN









THE Wild Passion

Garden VARELI

A L I N O Y O R Y U

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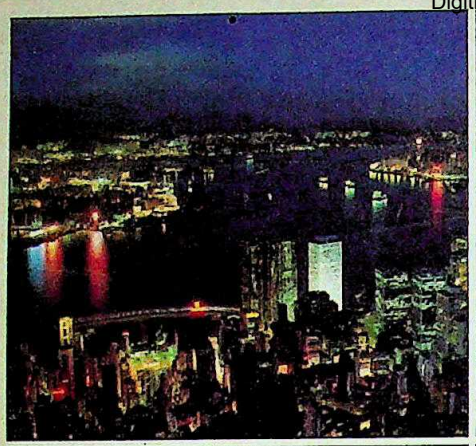

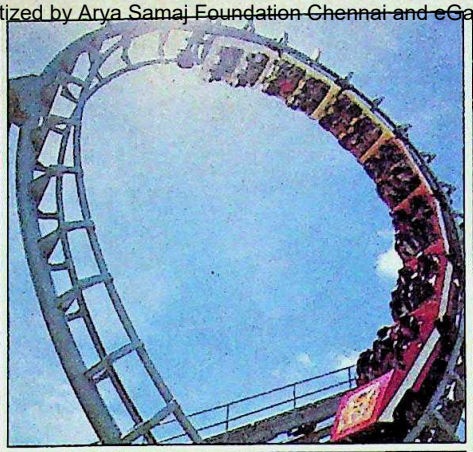

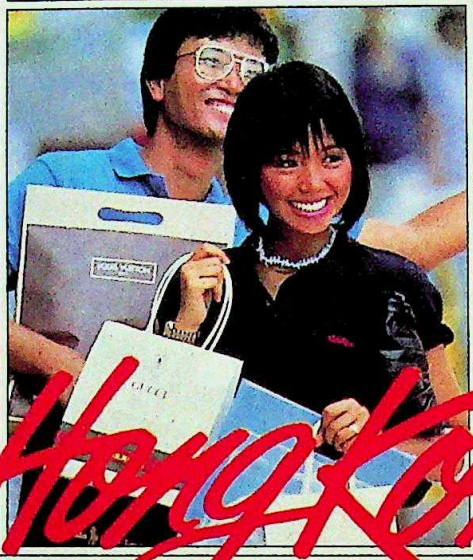

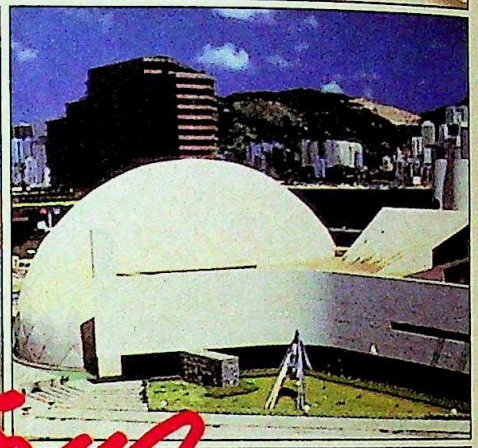

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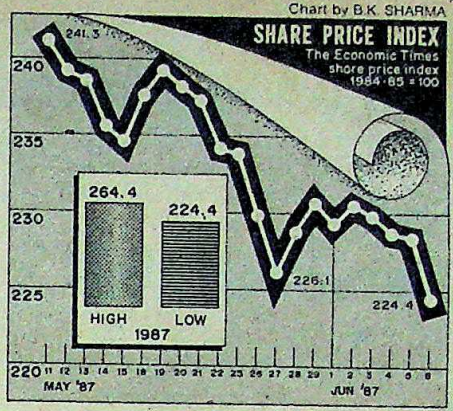
THE MARKETS

Losing Ground

ALL the king's horses and all the king's men have been trying to put a shattered stock-market together again. But with no luck. Despite crisis meetings in Delhi, arm twisting of the dominant bears to square up their outstanding positions (thus sending a clear signal to fresh sellers) and moderate purchases by the financial institutions, the markets remained weak and lacking in confidence last fortnight, and most shares lost further ground.

The Economic Times share price index dropped to a new low for 1987 at 226.1 in late May. There was a marginal upswing after that, but this couldn't be sustained and the index dropped to 224.5, on June 8 before crashing further to 218.7 the following day. The market is in the grip of the bears to such an extent that any full-scale recovery now seems remote.

Inevitably, most shares lost ground heavily. TISCO was particularly weak because the Government has yet to announce higher steel prices, while the



troubles plaguing the commercial vehicles market have left their mark on the TELCO share price. Other big losers have been Raymonds, Ranbaxy, Ponds, Orkay, J.K. Synthetics and Britannia Industries—companies spanning a wide range of industries.

There was little doubt that the market continued to be depressed because of the steady flow of downbeat corporate news. And the only real exception to the downtrend—Bajaj Auto—caught investors' fancy because of hopes of a generous bonus issue. Some other counters also notched up gains following the announcement of good annual or half-yearly results.

The stock-market can recover from its depressed state only if the news from New Delhi is good, and if companies begin to report improved performances in greater numbers. At the moment, there is little hope of either materialising in the near future. Indeed, the prospect of complete decontrol for the cement industry can only drive cement shares further down, because there is bound to be a shake-out in the industry. And the Government doesn't seem to be in a mood to announce any further concessions for the troubled industries.

Most observers now feel the market has entered a bear phase which will see share prices drifting lower for months before a fresh recovery finally begins. With the Government running into a political headwind, with trouble around the country's borders, and with some sectors of industry experiencing the shake-out that was inevitable following liberalised licensing policies, the share market can hardly do anything other than reflect the new, problem phase. The wise ones in the trading ring will, therefore, look for money to be made by riding the new trend for the time being.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1987 HIGH	1987 LOW	CLOSE 5.6.87	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	35.50	28.00	34.50	0.50 –
Associated Cement	241.50	156.00	160.00	13.00 –
Atlas Copco	150.00	105.00	147.00	17.00 +
Associated Bearings	880.00	500.00	870.00	145.00 +
Avery India	169.00	108.00	120.00	12.00 –
Bajaj Auto	4925.00	3950.00	4650.00	275.00 +
Baroda Rayon	260.00	205.00	215.00	13.75 –
Bata India	160.00	110.00	116.00	13.00 –
Bayer	785.00	600.00	750.00	nil
Bharat Forge	88.00	63.00	87.00	8.00 +
Blow Plast	126.00	92.50	108.00	7.00 +
Bombay Dyeing	83.50	40.50	82.00	7.75 +
Britannia Ind.	190.00	106.00	112.00	55.00 –
Brooke Bond	101.00	77.00	88.50	3.75 –
Ceat Tyres	70.00	48.00	65.00	nil
Century Enka	1160.00	850.00	900.00	60.00 –
Chloride India	148.00	67.00	70.00	1.00 –
Citurgia	70.00	53.00	64.00	6.00 –
Colgate	391.25	327.50	370.00	2.00 –
DCM	47.00	23.00	32.50	2.50 –
Dunlop	77.75	71.25	74.75	2.75 +
E.I. Hotels	56.00	41.00	45.50	0.50 –
Escorts	84.00	41.50	44.50	1.50 +
Finolex Cables	226.25	114.00	211.75	31.75 +
Food Specialities	188.50	126.50	140.00	12.00 +
Garware Nylon	36.00	20.50	21.50	0.50 +
G.E. Shipping	28.50	16.00	27.75	5.25 +
Gujarat St. Fertilisers	183.50	113.00	125.00	3.00 –
Grasim Ind.	95.00	80.00	91.00	3.00 +
Hind. Aluminium	126.00	71.00	100.00	4.50 –
Hind. Cocoa	262.50	191.25	195.00	10.00 –
Hindustan Lever	212.00	165.00	175.00	5.00 –
Hindustan Motors	35.35	22.20	24.50	1.60 +
Hind. Dorr	407.50	295.00	312.50	52.50 –
IEL	61.50	45.00	50.25	3.75 –
Indian Organic	78.00	51.00	59.00	4.00 –
Indian Rayon	76.50	51.00	54.50	3.75 –
Indrol	510.00	187.50	190.00	38.00 –
Ingersoll-Rand	352.50	272.50	312.50	28.75 –
ITC	78.00	40.00	46.50	2.50 –
J.K. Synthetics	93.50	43.00	45.00	8.25 –
Kinetic Engineering	312.50	210.00	220.00	15.00 –
Kirloskar Cummins	97.50	67.00	90.00	5.00 –
KSB Pumps	375.00	220.00	325.00	40.00 –
Larsen & Toubro	100.00	67.00	71.00	nil
Lipton	79.50	60.00	69.00	2.50 –
LML Ltd.	32.00	13.00	16.00	nil
Madura Coats	73.00	66.00	70.00	1.50 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	58.00	38.00	58.00	3.00 +
Motor Industries	400.00	317.50	387.50	52.50 +
Mukand Iron	81.00	63.50	78.00	nil
National Organic	577.50	417.50	425.00	25.00 –
Nirlon	26.00	11.00	14.00	1.00 –
Orkay Silk Mills	115.00	30.00	31.50	4.50 –
Peico Electronics	57.25	36.00	41.00	0.50 –
Otis Elevator	215.00	155.00	200.00	10.00 –
Ponds	375.00	252.50	252.50	62.50 –
Premier Auto	30.00	20.00	20.75	2.25 –
Ranbaxy	135.00	71.00	71.00	10.00 –
Raymond	79.00	62.50	63.00	9.00 –
Reckitt & Colman	200.00	144.00	155.50	7.50 –
Reliance Industries	277.00	118.00	132.50	3.50 –
Richardson Hind.	327.50	210.00	310.00	15.00 –
Shriram Fibres	36.00	19.50	22.00	2.00 –
Sandoz	140.00	67.50	72.50	5.25 –
Siemens India	144.50	68.00	77.00	3.00 –
SPIC	53.50	36.50	41.75	1.25 –
Tata Steel	1207.50	867.50	900.00	102.50 –
Telco	665.00	350.00	390.00	35.00 –
Vulcan Laval	63.00	45.00	60.00	nil

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.2211	9.1235
Austria	Schilling	100	101.8547	100.7689
Bahrain	Dinar	1	34.1403	34.0898
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.4738	42.4080
Canada	Dollar	1	9.6162	9.5176
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.9019	1.8818
Egypt	Pound	1	9.3600	9.2900
France	Franc	1	2.1739	2.1204
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6531	1.6355
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.9700	0.0700
Iran	Rial	100	17.9200	17.8986
Italy	Lira	100	0.9700	0.9600
Japan	Yen	100	9.1000	8.9000
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7998	0.7733
Kuwait	Dinar	1	45.0000	44.9000
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1796	5.1253
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.000	0.9900
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6008	0.5990
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.3508	6.2850
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7570	0.7339
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.1146	6.0485
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1010	0.9090
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4435	0.4220
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.0479	2.0266
Switzerland	Franc	1	8.6004	8.5098
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.2120	0.2000
Thailand	Baht	100	50.7200	50.6000
UK	Pound	1	21.0725	20.9425
USA	Dollar	1	12.9050	12.7775
UAE	Dirham	1	3.5000	3.4832
USSR	Rouble	1	19.9080	19.8580
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.2727	7.0921

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi, and quoted between the banks on 8.6.87.

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Ashok Leyland Limited

Speech by the Chairman **Mr Mantosh Sondhi** at the 38th Annual General Meeting on 19th May 1987.

A Developmental Strat

Review of Operations

1986 has been yet another difficult year; road transport industry continued to be depressed due to a combination of adverse factors. The total industry sale of medium and heavy commercial vehicles has registered a steep fall of 11% in 1986 over the previous year.

Against this adverse background, it is a matter of great satisfaction that your Company was able to achieve a new water-mark in sales and turnover, sold 16065 vehicles in 1986 compared to 15113 vehicles in 1985 and achieved a higher domestic market share. Sale of engines for industrial and marine applications was marginally lower at 2064 units compared to 2202 units in 1985. Export performance, however, continued to be on a low key due to persistent liquidity problems of Third World Countries and intense competition from advanced countries.

Gross turnover of your Company registered an increase of 17.5% compared to the previous year. However, profitability of operations continued to be under pressure; with strict control on manufacturing expenses, your Company was able to achieve higher operating profit of Rs.23.43 crores compared to Rs.13.93 crores in 1985. With the increase in financial expenses, profit before tax was Rs.6.41 crores.

Having regard to the improved performance in the year and the intrinsic strength of your Company, the Directors have recommended an increased dividend of 16% on the enhanced share capital of Rs.2139 lakhs, compared to 10% on share capital of Rs.1813 lakhs in 1985.

The road transport industry continues to be faced with an economic impasse, plagued with high operating costs, poor returns and limited growth.

The industry has been pleading with the Government to improve the availability, increase the quantum and extend the repayment period of loans to transport operators. Similarly it has been the contention of the industry that overaged vehicles which abound in the road transport system should be weeded out to improve the productivity and safety of transport services and to reduce fuel wastage pollution. It is gratifying to note that the interim report of the Planning Group on Transport has also made a similar recommendation regarding the overaged vehicles. The Planning Group has also asked for the complete abolition of octroi which it calls as "the most obnoxious form of taxation".

Macro-economic Policy Framework

While the Government's thrust in liberalising licensing regulations and inducing investment flows have been well thought out, it is unfortunate that there has been no matching appreciation of the need for follow-up measures to stimulate demand growth. The adverse impact of this policy shortcoming has been that despite a reasonable growth in quantum of road traffic — both freight and passenger — there has been a net slump in the offtake of commercial vehicles by 5% between 1981-86.

Taking the example of public transportation systems, I would like to outline the contours of a positive developmental strategy which harmonises the interests of societal development and industrial growth.

Operational aspects of Public Transport System

Firstly, it needs to be recognised by policy-makers and commuters alike that the public transport is indispensable in optimising mobility on our cramped roads. In most cities and urban centres a major portion of mass transit trips are catered to by road-based bus transport systems and this trend would continue. Alternatives such as rail-based rapid transit systems and elevated or underground transit systems have been proven to be extremely expensive and inflexible and are no longer the preferred route even in developed and capital-rich countries. With land use patterns already predetermined, road-based bus transport systems would continue to be the only viable option for several years to come. As regards rural areas, it is beyond any argument that road transport is the only relevant medium of transport for all times to come.

Traffic studies point out that for a given volume of traffic, the smaller the unit vehicle, the higher the road space required for movement of traffic leading to greater congestion. The mix of various types of vehicles on road has a vital relation to the congestion level and evidently the policy will have to be to move more passengers or freight per vehicle to maximise output in terms of passenger kilometres or tonne kilometres and minimise the input in terms of unit road space. Buses, in this context, need to be the preferred choice of transport.

Secondly, vehicle manufacturing technology today offers several options to cater to diverse needs of passenger traffic. For example, in urban transport where the problem is one of coping with peak hour traffic, the vestibuled bus — a train of two vehicles — would be an ideal option for passenger transportation in congestion and heavy rush. In certain other highly congested urban routes, double decker buses emerge as a viable alternative. More importantly, today's buses are engineered in a wide range of engine power, wheel base and overall length options to serve the needs of radial, arterial and feeder routes in central urban districts as well as for suburban extension.

Thirdly, public transport has the capability to compete most effectively with private transportation in terms of comfort. Compared to conventional truck-derived buses, integral type of buses which employ a body in monocoque construction with under-frame offers advantages of lower floor height rendering boarding and alighting quick and easy. It is indisputable that if public transport system provides for better passenger comfort, higher speed of travel and improved efficiency, it would induce some migration from personalised form of transportation to the overall benefit to the economy in terms of capital, fuel, road space, pollution and safety.

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Strategy for Public Transport Systems.

Fourthly, the vehicular technology, per se, has progressed to offer benefits of improved features such as power steering, synchromesh/automatic transmission, dual-line air brakes and airconditioning for enhanced safety and comfort.

While the medium and heavy commercial vehicle industry is fully equipped to cater to the needed shift in vehicle types, such appropriate passenger vehicles are being produced in India in limited numbers only due to reluctance of purchasers to pay a higher price. Transport undertakings, handicapped with finance, have hardly been able to offer the necessary support to newer vehicular developments, essential to update the public transport systems.

Having regard to the pressing needs of public transport and the ability of the vehicle manufacturing sector to meet the potential, I would urge the Government to implement a funding policy for the STUs, on an urgent basis so that the essential need for better transport facilities is met. To my mind, the development strategy for public transport must encompass the following components, central to which would of course be the reaffirmation of the Government's interest to restore public transport to its superordinate role.

Firstly, the Central and State Governments should consider Capital Grants to their respective STUs within the Plan framework. Also, the corporate and capital structure of STUs should be reorganised to diversify funding base and improve access to funds.

Secondly, the STUs should be treated as a priority sector for devolution of credit by Banks and other financial institutions and credit allocations should be increased as recommended by the Planning Commission.

Thirdly, as an immediate measure, the Government should make special allocations to all the STUs to gradually replace their overaged fleet and also achieve an average annual augmentation of at least 10% of their fleet.

Fourthly, the STUs should be offered purchase incentives on the lines of the successful erstwhile scheme wherein excise incentives were offered for higher production in a demand surplus situation. Each STU should be paid an excise duty grant equal to that paid on previous year's offtake, provided offtake during any year exceeds the previous year's by 20%.

Fifthly, the Centre and States should work out strategies to gradually reduce the adverse impact of passenger tax on STU finances with a view to eventually abolishing it.

Sixthly, all commercial vehicle chassis which incorporate unique features for passenger transport should be provided some excise relief so that such concepts can catch on.

Seventhly, Government companies or corporations which build bus bodies should be exempt from excise duty on bus bodies the same way Integral Coach Factory is exempt from excise duty on railway coaches.

In the long term, the funding of the STUs needs to be taken up by an Apex Road Transport Finance Corporation which will be in a position to raise finance at low rates of interest through the issue of bonds on the lines of IDBI and offer it to STUs.

Funding of transport sector must be accompanied by steps to expand and upgrade road network. Investments in roads as percentage of total plan expenditure have shrunk from 6.7% in the First Plan to a mere 2.9% in the Seventh Plan. Plough-back of tax revenues from road transport on road development has reduced from a peak of 51% in 1980-81 to a low of 23%, estimated on an average for the Seventh Plan. There is an urgent need to redefine investment priorities to cater to the future demands of highway and rural road development.

Product Plans

Your Company is fully equipped to be in the forefront of upgrading public transport systems by offering a unique and comprehensive range of buses. The popular Viking series of buses are now available with HINO engines to offer higher levels of fuel-efficiency hitherto unknown. Availability of HINO engines will be progressively stepped up to a wider range of passenger models. A new rear-engined passenger chassis incorporating superior technical features has been developed exclusively for STU requirements. These vehicles together with your Company's pioneering range of integral as well as vestibuled buses would be indispensable elements of any futuristic development strategy for upgrading the public transport systems.

In the truck range, your Company has developed a new 6×2 vehicle which would ensure optimum fuel economy and improved tyre life in bulk tanker applications. The Taurus vehicle will be upgraded to serve more effectively transport needs of high density cargo.

Your Company is poised to introduce this year a new aerodynamic, ergonomic, aesthetic Front End Structure (FES) which will provide new standards of driver comfort and safety.

Your Company has also plans to make a new thrust in the diversification of the product range by launching two new intermediate vehicle models based on indigenous development.

To meet the long-term challenges, R&D strategy is focussed on developing and sustaining engineering skills and infrastructure necessary to ensure product leadership. Installation of an advanced computer system and commissioning of a modern in-house vehicle test track facility would be key strategies for continued engineering excellence.

Business Plans

During the year under review, your Company has taken an important step towards diversifying business portfolio by signing an agreement with Terex Equipment Ltd for distributing their earthmoving and construction equipment in India, Bhutan and Nepal.

Your Company has also obtained registration from the DGTD for the manufacture at the Hosur and Alwar Plants of identified machine tools to acquire the requisite capability to upgrade manufacturing infrastructure based on in-house skills.

It is a matter of gratification that Ashok Leasing and Hire Purchase Limited (ALHP) promoted by your Company and its dealers has established an impressive track record of performance and profitability.

Your Company's other joint venture with TIDCO, now renamed Automotive Coaches and Components Limited, has made satisfactory progress and will play an important role in the manufacture and introduction of the new FES. This will enable your Company to market fully built buses and trucks.

Note: This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

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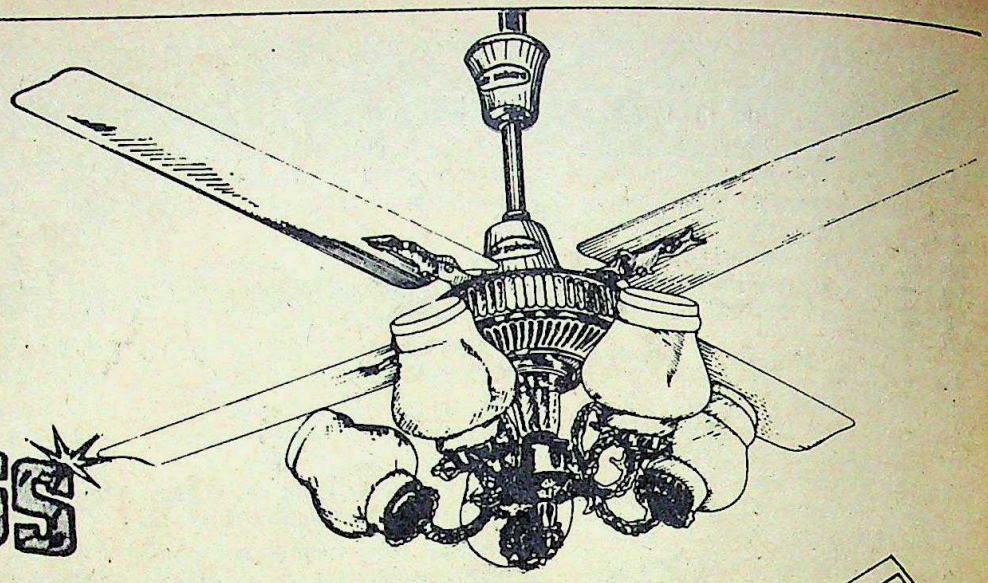
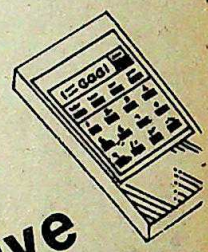
The 21st Century Sensation
The fan that fascinates



Topbrass



For those who demand the exclusive

It's a fan in a million. With a body wrought out of real brass and crowned with a five light chandelier, it's an ornamentation for your ceiling.

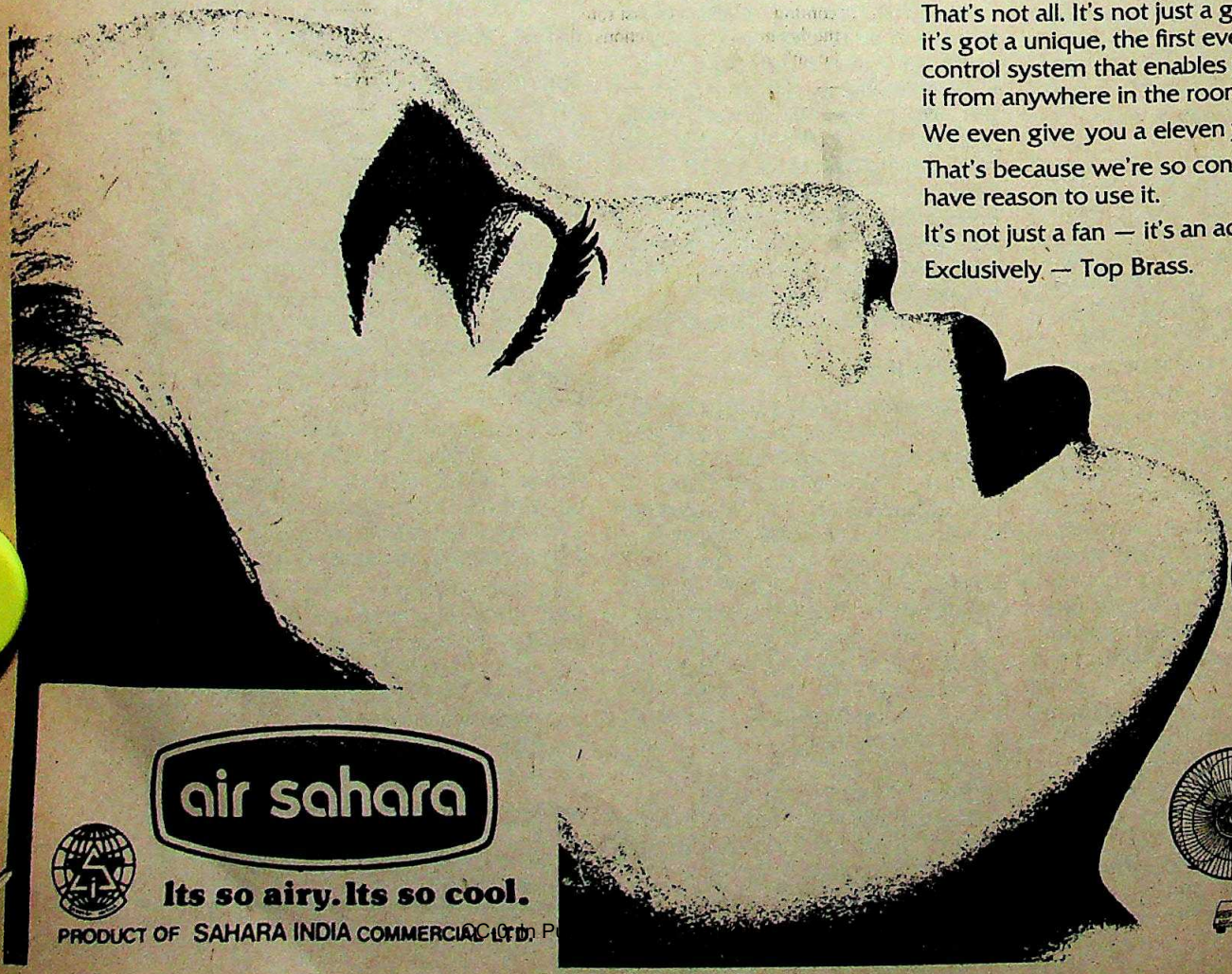
That's not all. It's not just a good looker — it's got a unique, the first ever, remote control system that enables you to control it from anywhere in the room.

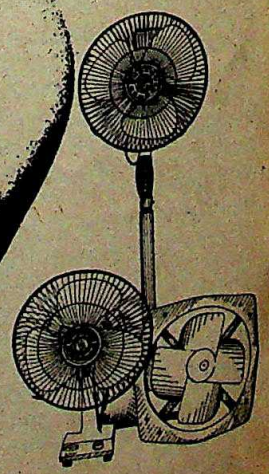
We even give you a eleven years guarantee!

That's because we're so confident you'll never have reason to use it.

It's not just a fan — it's an acquisition.

Exclusively — Top Brass.





air sahara

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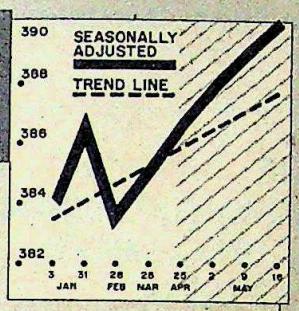
THE economy, by and large, shows no major problem areas at the moment: prices are under control, industrial production may pick up and commercial credit conditions are easy. The great uncertainty of the monsoon, however, looms large and its final outcome could make or break the economy this year.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months (weekly data) or two years (monthly data) figures. The quarters referred to in the text are calendar year quarters.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
3.0% p.a.

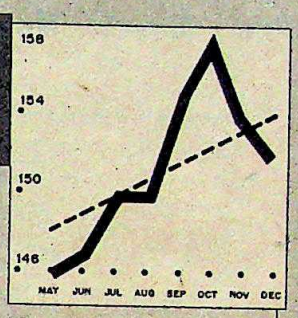


Inflation is currently well under control. But a poor monsoon could trigger-off a spurt in prices since the economy already has excess liquidity.

Industrial Production Index

1980-81 = 100

Current Trend
6.9% p.a.

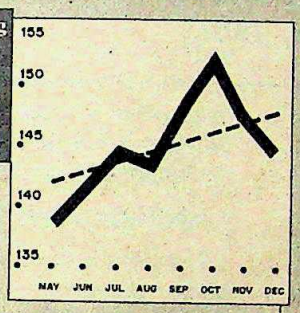


If the trend in industrial production continues (see box for growth in coal, steel and cement) GNP should grow by 5 per cent in 1987-88.

Manufacturing Output

1980-81 = 100

Current Trend
6.8% p.a.

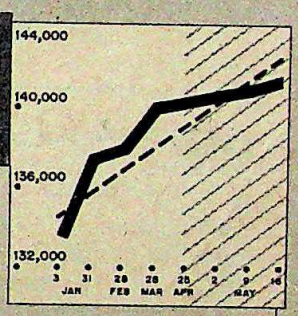


The manufacturing sector of Indian industry is growing at a healthy rate, and the dip in November-December may be reversed.

Money Supply

Rs Crore

Current Trend
15.9% p.a

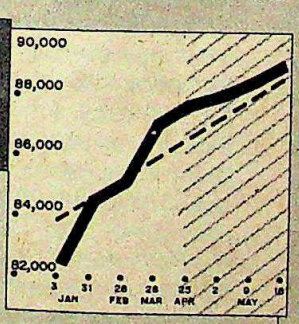


Money supply continues to grow at a fast rate. How long will the dire monetarist predictions of high inflation be unfulfilled?

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
15.1% p.a.

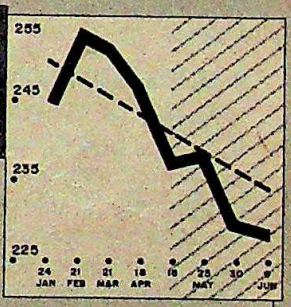


An easing of commercial bank credit should be a welcome relief for the industry. It is important that the Government maintain this trend.

Share Prices

1984-85 = 100

Current Trend
-24.1% p.a.

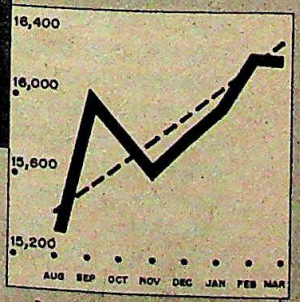


The crash in share prices from, perhaps, unjustifiably high levels, has not been reversed yet as uncertainty continues.

Electricity Generation

Million kwh

Current Trend
9.6% p.a.

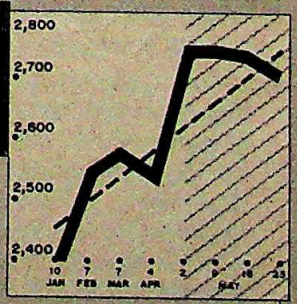


Electricity generation continues to increase at a fast rate, easing a major infrastructural bottleneck. But capacity utilisation has fallen.

Closing Gold Prices

Rs per 10 gm

Current Trend
30.4% p.a.



Gold prices are still rising sharply, making it, currently, the best investment, particularly with the uncertainty in the share market.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

Growth of items in Jan-Dec 1986 over Jan-Dec 1985

	% Growth
Railway Wagons	90.30
Forged Handtools	43.60
Scooters	42.30
Air/Gas Compressors	38.10
Polyester Fibres	35.90
Metallurgical Machinery	28.40
Wrist Watches	26.50
Twist Drills	24.90
Tetracycline	23.80
Motorcycles	23.00
Cement Machinery	22.40
Lifts	22.10
Polyester Filament Yarn	21.60
Nitrogenous Fertiliser	21.40
Newsprint	21.00
Boilers	20.10
Phosphatic	17.70
Calcium Carbide	17.40
Lead	16.80
Storage Batteries	16.40
Baby Food	16.00
Vat Dyes	15.80
PVC Resins	15.80
Scooter Tyres	15.50
Fluorescent Tubes	15.50
DDT	15.30
Cars	14.40
Electric Motors	13.40
Paints & Varnishes	13.20
Rubber Machinery	12.80
Industrial Explosives	12.60
Tooth Paste	12.10
Viscose Filament Yarn	12.00
Mining Machinery	11.30
Printing Machinery	11.00
Caprolactum	10.50
Cement	9.40
Vitamin A	9.10
Typewriters	8.70
Paper & Paper Board	7.50
Earth Moving Equipment	7.20
Transmission Towers	7.10
Auto Ancillaries	6.70
Rubber Footwear	6.40
Polystyrene	6.00
Soda Ash	6.00

Of the 141 series considered, 91 items with a total weight of 71.9 per cent had a positive growth and 50 of them with a total weight of 28.1 per cent had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1987	1986
Coal		
Thousand Tonnes, April	13,031	11,264
Saleable Steel		
Thousand Tonnes, April	637.2	487.0
Cement		
Thousand Tonnes, April	2,900	2,818
Plant Load Factor		
Per cent, April	56.2	58.2
Call Money Rate (Bombay)		
Per cent, April	9.87	10.00

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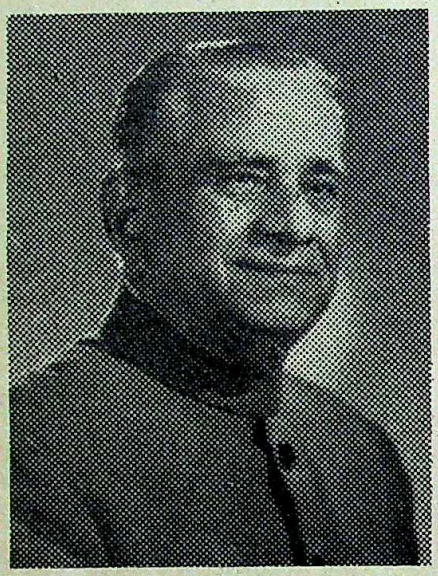
Company Meeting

GARWARE NYLONS LIMITED

Registered Office : Chander Mukhi, Nariman Point, Bombay – 400 021.



Shri. B.D. Garware

STATEMENT OF SHRI B.D. GARWARE, CHAIRMAN, GARWARE NYLONS LIMITED, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 29TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE COMPANY ON 27TH MAY, 1987.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have pleasure in extending to you a warm and cordial welcome to the twentyninth Annual General Meeting of your Company.

The Directors' Report and the Audited Accounts for the year ended 31st August, 1986 have been with you for some time now. I presume, you have had an opportunity of going through the same, and I will take them as read.

2. DIVIDEND

The Directors have recommended, subject to your approval, a Dividend @ 15% (subject to deduction of tax), absorbing a sum of Rs. 1.46 crores.

3. DEBENTURES

The Company's Rights Offer of 10,00,000 – 15% Secured Redeemable Non–Convertible Debentures of Rs. 100/– each, of an aggregate face value of Rs. 10 crores, was well received and fully subscribed. The issue had been made for part–financing the cost of the projects pertaining to increase in the capacity of Nylon Filament Yarn as also manufacture of Nylon Industrial Yarn/Tyre Cord/Fabric My grateful thanks to the Members, Debentureholders, Bankers, Financial Institutions and Investing Public for the confidence reposed in the 'House of Garwares'. I look forward to continuing support in all our future endeavours as well.

4. MODERNISATION & EXPANSION

Apart from continuing modernisation of the existing facilities, the Company has completed its expansion programme for increasing the Nylon Filament Yarn capacity to 6228 tpa. The expansion to increase the Polyester Filament Yarn capacity to 3500 tpa is under process. I am pleased to report that the trial production of Nylon Industrial Yarn has commenced and production of Tyre Cord and Fabric will also start during the third quarter of this year.

The Company's application for broadbanding is progressing well and all permissions in this regard should be received shortly. After this, the Company's licenced capacity for manufacture of Synthetic Filament Yarn will be increased to 11500 tpa and this will mean that there will be no constraint on the quantities of yarn that can be manufactured within the three categories – Nylon, Polyester and Tyre Industrial Yarn to suit the changing pattern of demand.

5. WORKING RESULTS

Due to escalation in the cost of inputs coupled with lower sales realisation, the operating margins were under pressure throughout the year under review. You will no doubt appreciate the fiscal environment in which your Company has been operating and which is adversely affecting the performance not only of your Company but also of the synthetic filament yarn industry as a whole. When certain parameters pertaining to both the input and the output of any manufacturing unit are entangled with Governmental policies which are beyond the control of the Company, you can well imagine, how sensitive its working results will be.

6. BASIC RAW MATERIALS

We are continuing to depend on indigenous source (about 20% – sole supplier) and imports (about 80%) for Caprolactam, the basic raw material for the manufacture of Nylon Filament Yarn and on 100% imports for Pure Terephthalic Acid (PTA), the major raw material for the manufacture of Polyester Filament Yarn. The ex–factory price of indigenous caprolactam has been increasing steadily, the latest increase being in February this year from Rs. 29,000/–

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per M.T. to Rs. 30,400/– per M.T. Excise levy at 15% ad valorem on caprolactam further aggravates the situation. Repeated pleas of the industry from various forums, for repealing this levy, still remain unheeded.

There has also been a steep rise in the cost of imported caprolactam due to rise in its CIF price, apart from increase in the customs duty and the dollar–rupee parity. The prohibitive import duty, inclusive of countervailing duty, presently at 118.5%, merits substantial slashing. PTA also presently attracts a very high rate of customs duty at 190%.

The vital need for smooth flow of essential raw materials to any industry, at fair and reasonable prices, cannot be overemphasised. I, therefore, strongly urge the authorities to reduce the levy of customs duty on caprolactam and PTA, substantially, as also to shift these items to OGL so as to ensure their steady and regulated flow.

7. LEVIES ON FILAMENT YARN

The synthetic filament yarn continues to be heavily burdened with excise levies (Nylon Filament Yarn Rs. 70/– per kg., Polyester Filament Yarn Rs. 83.75 per kg.) under the mistaken notion that it is the rich who consume synthetic fabrics. Such exhorbitant levies keep the products of the industry beyond the reach of the common man, reduce the demand base and thus restrict its expansion. The excise duty is not only heavy in absolute terms but also in comparison with the present excise duty on Polyester Staple Fibre and its blends. Such differential has adversely affected the sales realisation of Filament Yarn due to an artificially depressed demand. Furthermore, the increased availability of Filament Yarn in relation to demand, consequent on increase in production due to expansion of existing and licensing of fresh capacities has further aggravated the situation. The policy implication of such a situation is to lighten the excise burden so as to generate demand as also to ensure optimum utilisation of capacity. Such relief may not affect revenue; on the contrary, with higher production and broader market base, revenue is bound to increase. I, therefore, urge the authorities to reduce the excise duty so as to restore the parity in excise levy on filament yarn vis–a–vis staple fibre spun yarn.

Imports of yarn with lower duties are continuing on OGL basis – in addition to reported smuggling on a large scale. There is, in fact, a valid case, for restructuring the import duty on Nylon and Polyester Filament Yarn so as to discourage avoidable imports. Inspite of such a plea, I regret to say that the anti–dumping duty on imports of Polyester Filament Yarn, correctly levied since November, 1982 at Rs. 15/– per kg. has since been lifted from June last year.

8. PRAGMATIC REVIEW

I wish to stress that all the aspects of Government Policy – nay, their basic approach and attitude towards the synthetic yarn industry requires review "de novo" and must necessarily hinge on purely pragmatic considerations. A fresh breeze of realism blown into fiscal policies, I regret to say, is yet to percolate, in sufficient measure, to the segment of the synthetic yarn industry with which your Company is vitally concerned. The recent announcement regarding removal of specific customs levy of Rs. 3/– per kg. in respect of PTA and Dimethyl Terephthalate is a step in the right direction. I sincerely hope that the authorities will consider the various other longstanding grievances of the industry and extend the long overdue fiscal concessions perhaps in the next phase of reliefs so as to enable the industry to restore its health and sustain its future growth.

9. OUR COMMITMENT

We, on our part, despite these constraints, will continue to improve the operations and reduce costs at all levels; we shall always strive hard to achieve the best possible results. With our emphasis on safe working conditions, a Safety Committee is continuously reviewing operating procedures & incorporating improvements. We have created a ready captive market for many of our products. With the enhanced capacity of Nylon and Polyester Filament Yarn and the plant for the manufacture of Nylon Industrial Yarn/Tyre Cord/Fabric fully operational, we will have a well balanced complex with diversity and flexibility in the production pattern and the broad marketing base to cater to various segments of synthetic yarn users.

10. CURRENT OUTLOOK

Gross sales during the 8 month period September 1986 – April 1987 amount to Rs. 59.63 crores as against Rs. 57.59 crores during the corresponding period in the previous year. Inspite of lower price and higher cost than in former times, I am quite optimistic about the current year's working, specially since there has been a marked increase in production from the middle of this year and I have no doubt that the benefit of this will be derived by the Company from this year onwards.

Presently, the Company is deeply engrossed and involved in the starting up of various expansions that it has undertaken over the past two years or so and I do believe that as a result of these expansions, the production levels will leap substantially achieving newer heights. I have full faith and confidence in all that is being done in the Company to strengthen it and make it grow and I have no doubt whatsoever in my mind that the future can not be anything but rosy and I would like my fellow shareholders to take special note of my comment when considering the year that has been — perhaps the most difficult that this industry has ever witnessed.

11. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Before I conclude, I would like to express my appreciation of the services rendered by Senior Executives, Officers, Staff and devoted employees. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Financial Institutions and Banks for their continued and active support, and last but not the least, I warmly appreciate your support and understanding as also your presence here this afternoon, which reflects your keen interest in the progress and well–being of the Company.

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN

Bombay, 27th May, 1987.

This does not purport to be a report of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

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Judging the Public Sector

GEORGE Bernard Shaw was once approached by a ravishingly beautiful woman with a marriage proposal. She wanted to have a child endowed with her beauty and his brains. Shaw, however, pointed out the possibility of having a child with his looks and her brains, and declined the offer.

This anecdote captures the essence of the problem of public enterprise in India. Public enterprises are hybrid institutions created with the expectation that the strengths of the private sector will be combined with those of the public sector. The private sector is believed to do things "right" (that is, efficiently, quickly, innovatively), even if it does not always do the right things. The Government, on the other hand, often does the right things (such as promoting balanced regional development) but does not always do them right. By combining the strengths of both, public enterprises were expected to do the right things and to do things right. Unfortunately, this experiment in genetic engineering seems to have failed.

The assumption behind much of the criticism of the public sector is that the major factor for its disappointing performance is the inefficiency or greed of public enterprise managers. Further, it is argued that even when public sector managers are well-meaning, they do not have enough autonomy to do the right things. But this boils down to blaming the patient for the mistakes of the surgeon.

The relationship between the Government and public enterprise managers is no different from that which exists between any owner and his managers in the private sector. And public enterprise managers are no different from their private sector counterparts, in that both of them ultimately try to maximise self-interest. The real difference lies in the role of the owners in this relationship.

In the private sector, the owners specify their goals clearly, monitor the achievement of these goals closely and determine rewards and punishments accordingly. In the public sector, goals are rarely clear. There are multiple principals (the Finance Ministry, the Planning Commission, the Department of Public Enterprises, the auditor general, etc), each of which specifies multiple and often conflicting goals. So it is difficult to monitor and evaluate performance. Even when performance can be measured objectively, there doesn't exist a fair and effective system of rewards and punishments.

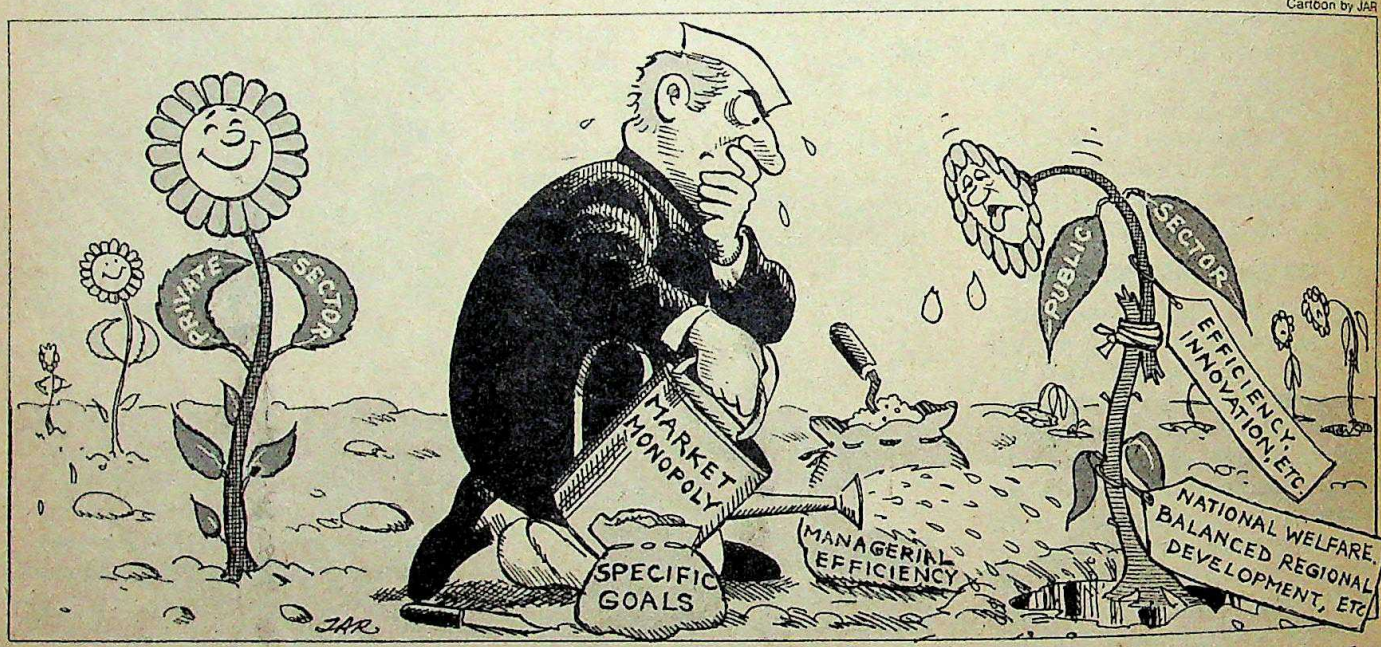
Does this imply that to make public enterprises "do things right", we should emulate the example of the private sector? The answer is both yes and no. For instance, they should not be evaluated primarily on the basis of financial performance. To do so would be like going to a cinema-hall to sleep rather than to watch a movie. In other words, why bother to create public enterprises if all you want them to do is to act like private ones?

Public enterprises are an instrument of public policy and their operation ought to enhance national welfare. However, increases or decreases in the profitability of an enterprise may not necessarily have any correspondence with increases or decreases in national welfare. In many cases, a market monopoly guarantees enormous profits, with or without managerial efficiency.

While policy makers concede that profitability is an inappropriate criterion for measuring public sector performance, they still end up using profitability as an implicit or explicit yardstick. In large part, this is because policy makers have still not successfully answered the question: "If not for profit, then for what?" This intellectual cop-out is the major source of the troubles that plague public enterprises. If we do not even know what we want from our public enterprises, how can we expect to get it? The challenge lies in devising performance indicators which rate performance on commercial and non-commercial objectives.

Take the issue of autonomy versus accountability. There are two ways of controlling any enterprise, public or private. One involves specifying final outcomes clearly and letting the manager pursue them with minimal intervention. This is often called "management by objectives" or "management by results".

Cartoon by JAR



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Alternatively, one can control the production processes to ensure the desired outcome. This requires substantial intervention in the affairs of the enterprise. Since the Government finds it difficult to specify goals, it opts for the latter course.

Reducing controls in order to increase the autonomy of public enterprises, however, is not enough. This may turn out to be both undesirable and unstable. The important question here is: "Autonomy for what?" If public enterprise goals remain fuzzy, more autonomy will simply lead to abuses, which will most certainly invite a cut back on autonomy. This is the classic "autonomy pendulum" observed all over the world.

Reforms, therefore, should focus not only on the "quantity of controls" but also on the "quality of controls." If the former is reduced while the latter is increased, the Government can raise both managerial autonomy and managerial accountability. This would make the debate that focuses on the choice between autonomy and accountability redundant, because the trade-off between the two is imaginary and not real.

Unfortunately, while a simple stroke of the pen can raise or lower the quantity of controls, regulating the quality of controls requires superior attributes of policy-making. The starting point once again is goal specification.

Recent moves towards designing large holding companies, to insulate them from bureaucratic interference, again emphasises the reduction of the quantity of controls. But this too is a cosmetic exercise which leaves the heart of the problem untouched.

The following statement by Minister of State for Public Enterprises K.K. Tewary highlights the problems of current policy thrusts: "If smaller companies are put under bigger ones, the Government will be freed of the responsibility of financing them." Tewary is confusing cause with effect. The real problem is that smaller companies do not generate surpluses. Consequently, the Government often has to subsidise their losses. Whether such financing comes from the government budget directly, or indirectly through the profit of larger enterprises, is a secondary issue. In fact, putting unprofitable enterprises under profitable ones will provide the latter an excuse to justify their future lapses in terms of this extra burden.

The problem of monitoring will be further compounded by the fact that the new mega-conglomerates will be headed by people who will, in all likelihood, have more political clout than most members of the Cabinet. They will probably enjoy more autonomy than their counterparts in the private sector. In the absence of any well-specified goals and a well-developed monitoring system, the potential for disaster is mindboggling, as shown by Pertamina in Indonesia.

THE only real solution to the problem of poor performance of public enterprises lies in getting the Government back into the business of being a "principal" in the principal-agent relationship. This requires action on several broad fronts. First, the Government has to decide on its criteria for monitoring public enterprises. Experience suggests that it is futile to search for any universal criterion, applicable to all public enterprises, which would be the counterpart of profits in the private sector. But whatever the criterion the Government may choose for a public enterprise, it must pass the following tests if it is to be successfully implemented: it must be 'fair' to the managers and to the country. Fairness to managers implies that the criterion should be such that it corresponds only to things within the public enterprise manager's control. For example, in a particular year, if the criterion shows a deterioration, it must be ascertained that it was not due to factors beyond the manager's control. Usually, an exogenous increase in input prices and constant output prices is cited as an illustration of this phenomenon. The solution for this problem would be to measure managerial performance at constant prices. Similarly, a public enterprise manager must not be rewarded for doing something which may fulfil the criterion at the cost of the nation's overall welfare. For example, public enterprises are often judged by their capacity utilisation. But a public enterprise manager can improve capacity utilisation by simply postponing required maintenance.

> "Public enterprises are hybrid institutions created with the expectation that the strengths of the private sector will be combined with those of the public sector. But unfortunately this experiment in genetic engineering has failed."

If the quality of control has to be raised, the Government must not only specify goals but also have the information to determine whether they are being achieved or not. For this purpose, it needs the counterpart of the management information system (MIS) widely employed in the private sector. This information system should not be, however, a copy of the MIS that is required for internal management. Rather, it should be based on social accounting concepts that view enterprise performance from a public or social perspective. The experiences of Pakistan and Korea, both of which have recently implemented such systems, should be instructive. In Venezuela also, the ruling party and the Opposition have adopted a resolution to implement an information and evaluation system.

Recent attempts by the Government to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with public enterprises is a step in the right direction. However, due to poor home-work on the part of the Government, this policy is also faltering badly.

Essentially, the MOU is a contract between the Government and a public enterprise, which specifies mutually agreed upon targets to be fulfilled by the public enterprise and the corresponding commitments of the Government considered essential to ensure attainment of these targets. MOUs were first recommended by the Arjun Sengupta Committee, and have acquired great significance since Rajiv put the full force of his personality behind them.

Tragically, neither the Government nor the public enterprises has a clear idea as to what these MOUs ought to look like. Consequently, only one MOU is reported to have been signed in two years.

One problem is that the Government appears to think that only France has experimented with this approach and has ignored the more relevant experiences of countries like Korea, Pakistan and Bangladesh, where similar approaches have also been tried with some success. Also, to be really effective, performance measurement should be linked to predetermined rewards and punishments.

These are difficult areas of reform. But, if the Government is really serious about improving the performance of public sector enterprise they are inescapable.

Dr Trivedi is State Trading Corporation Professor of Public Enterprise at the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta.

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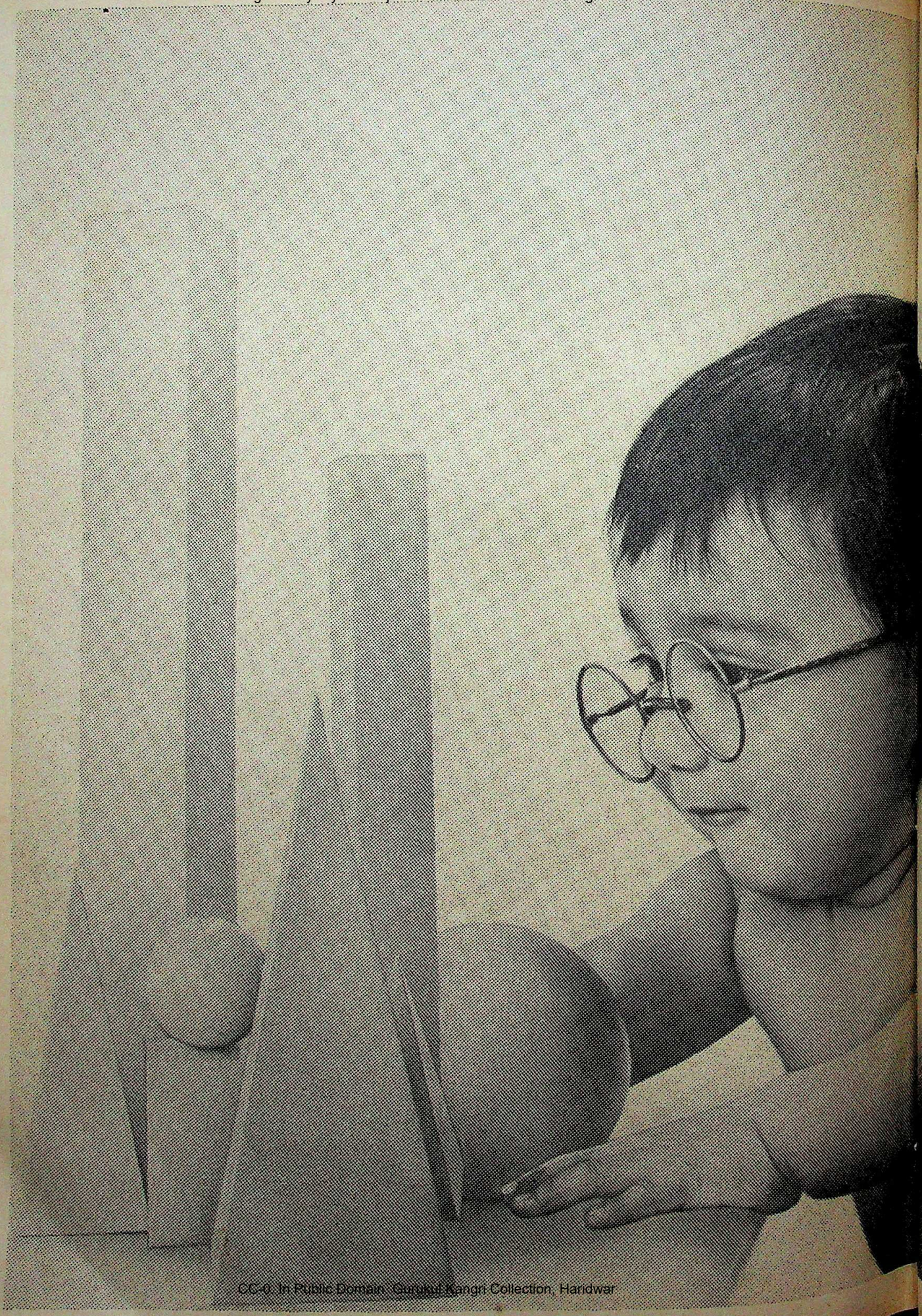

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Jaykay Tech offers a comprehensive range of project consultancy and engineering services in diverse fields including synthetic yarn and fibre, chemicals, petrochemicals, thermo-plastics, cement, thermal power plants and non-conventional sources of energy. The company undertakes complete turnkey ventures from the inception of the idea to the commissioning of the plant.

These services are backed by a vast infrastructure — a team of over a hundred enterprising technical professionals, access to foreign technical know-how and advanced design and fabrication facilities.

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Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

FOREIGN POLICY

Careening Crazily

NO matter what the final outcome and the international fall-out of the Sri Lanka imbroglio may be, events over the last few months indicate that the credibility of Indian foreign policy is taking a nosedive across the world. It is almost as if, through some perverse geopolitical gymnastics, the country has managed to tie itself into problematic knots, causing consternation within the diplomatic community.

The memories of Rajiv Gandhi's successful US visit, the Six-Nation Conference, the fight against apartheid and nuclear armaments seem to have evaporated. What observers see now is a succession of rapid-fire diplomatic debacles, in which the Government has woefully waffled on Sri Lanka, embroiled itself in a potentially explosive border confrontation with China, annoyed the US, failed to respond to the crisis in Fiji, and raised grave scepticism about its performance even with allies like the Soviet Union. Consider some recent incongruities:

Several weeks ago, well before the Indian relief armada sailed for Sri Lanka, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran unilaterally announced that he would break the blockade of Jaffna by sending relief ships to the region. His proclamation, uttered without obtaining clearance from the Centre, drew an almost stunned silence from South Block. For several days, the Foreign Ministry just did not know how to officially react to the announcement as there was no clear signal from the prime minister's office.

On the very day that anti-US hysteria was being drummed up by Rajiv Gandhi in his famous "*nani yaad diladenge*" speech, L.K. Jha was in Washington pleading with US businessmen to invest in India, and Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Tahiliani was on a goodwill visit to the US.

Early last month, as word about China's build-up on India's border with the Tibetan region began to spread, Defence Minister K.C. Pant, accompanied by former foreign secretary Romesh Bhandari paid a quiet visit to Beijing, where they were met—in what was a deliberate snub—by the Chinese minister for mines and minerals instead of any higher authority. And Foreign Minister N.D.Tiwari's forthcoming visit to China—even though billed here as an official trip—was announced in an off-the-cuff remark to the press and later made the subject of a press release. Beijing was not informed of this so-called "official" visit, which is really a detour from an official trip Tiwari is making to Pyongyang.

India failed to denounce the coup against the democratically-elected government of Fiji where half the population is of Indian origin, even after official denunciations were made from England, Australia and New Zealand. Instead, South Block despatched emissaries to these three countries in search of a solution. The loss of India's credibility was evident in the fact that the deposed government led by Dr Timoci Bavadra, chose to send a distress signal to former foreign secretary A.P. Venkateswaran, rather than to the Government of India, urging him to use his good offices to restore a representative government.

Diplomats see not only bumbling and indecision in these amateurish moves but

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also a loosening of the firm hand that was always present at the helm of the steady foreign policy course charted by past governments. In 1982, for instance, Mrs Gandhi had made a conscious decision to build new bridges to the West. She made an opening towards the US, partly because she wanted to diversify India's source of arms supplies which were largely anchored to the Soviet system, and partly because she knew that the Indian economy needed huge infusions of western technology. A parallel policy was to continue negotiations with China over the Tibet region, in order to normalise relations along the Indian border. But in the wake of the recent corruption scandals in which Rajiv and his party have made the US and western imperialism the scapegoat for India's "destabilisation", and with a concomitant leaning on the Soviets in order to drum up domestic support from India's left political parties, the Indo-US honeymoon is all but over.

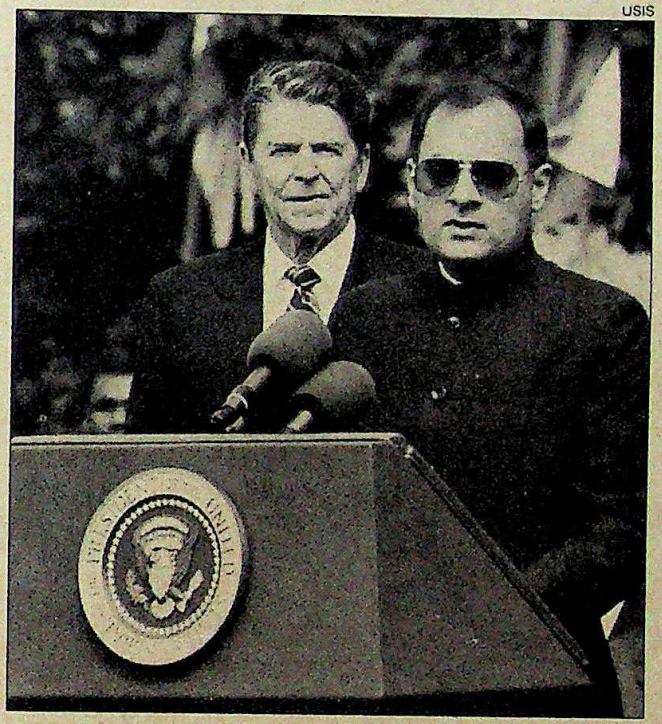
Privately, officials and other India-watchers in the US Administration make no secret of their bitter disappointment at the way Indo-US relations have gone into a tailspin. Officially, however, the State Department does not go beyond optimistic platitudes. Reacting to Rajiv's speech in New Delhi last fortnight, a spokesman said: "We remain committed to maintaining a high-level dialogue with India aimed at broadening our important ties." One official admitted that relations have suffered because of the US aid-package to Pakistan, "which has been necessitated by the Soviet presence in Afghanistan". Yet he quickly added: "While we remain committed to aiding Pakistan, it is absolutely wrong to say that we are trying to break up India," making a special reference to the cooperation between the two countries against Sikh terrorists. The official also firmly stated that neither the US Administration nor the CIA had anything to do with the Fairfax Group.

Most diplomats agree that the postponement of Tiwari's visit to the US, scheduled for May 7, was yet another diplomatic gaffe in which India was hurting its own interests. Not only was it considered insulting, but it was also poorly timed. It left the Indian case unrepresented at a time when Pakistan's persuasive Foreign Minister Sahibzada Yakub Khan was lobbying yet again for the E-3A Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS). What was worse, the Indian Ambassador to the US, P.K. Kaul, was holidaying in California when the AWACS debate raged in the US Congress.

It is now being increasingly suggested that India's new approach to the US has something to do with the forthcoming events centred on the Himalayas. Several officials feel that India has been concerned at the Soviet silence on the growing Sino-Indian boundary dispute and Rajiv has decided to court Moscow more actively. Which is why he cancelled Tiwari's US visit and sent him on an unexpected trip to Kabul instead. According to the official view in Washington, Tiwari's statements in Afghanistan marked a visible departure from the Government's earlier and "healthier" stand on the Soviet presence in Kabul. The visit is being exploited by the anti-Indian lobby, particularly in the Pentagon and the National Security Council. As an official says: "Afghanistan is the most important foreign policy issue as far as this Administration is concerned. Make no mistake about that." According to this school of thought, the very basis of the policy shift is appeasing the Soviets.

Rajiv Gandhi with Ronald Reagan in Washington in June 1985

USIS



The Indo-US honeymoon is all but over with the US being made the scapegoat for 'destabilisation', and a concomitant leaning on the Soviets to gain support from left parties.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) officials are sometimes surprised to see the kind of attention the Sino-Indian border situation is receiving from the US Administration. Last week, a State Department spokesman took the unusual step of making a long statement expressing US concern on the situation. Officials, however, say this is because the US—through its considerable intelligence and surveillance resources—has a pretty good idea of the massing of troops in the Himalayas and finds the situation "far from reassuring". They also assert that there is nothing sinister about the Chinese conveying their warnings to New Delhi through US diplomatic channels. "It is wrong to conclude from this that there is any Sino-US-Pak axis to undermine India," an official said. In the recent past, disturbing messages from Beijing have been conveyed by State Department officials to Ambassador P.K. Kaul.

If Indo-US relations have suffered a set-back, so also has the constructive dialogue with China which was started in 1981 and which was intended to ease the border tension. In this new crisis, it is unlikely, diplomats suggest, that the Soviets will willy-nilly jump to the rescue of the Indians. The Soviets, too, have maintained an ongoing high-level dialogue with China, aimed at ending the cold war between the two communist giants.

During his recent visit to India, Communist Party Central Committee Secretary Anatoly Dobrynin made it abundantly clear, in private meetings, that the Soviets did not buy the Rajiv Gandhi line that certain Indian groups, aided by foreign forces, were trying to destabilise the nation. He told a group of Congressmen: "You can only destabilise a country when you are not united internally." The Soviet leader's visit, one senior diplomat remarked, was not so much a gesture of support as a fact-finding mission to determine how solid the Rajiv Gandhi Government is. And on the China issue, the

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Soviets have remained adamant that the border question must be resolved through negotiation and not confrontation.

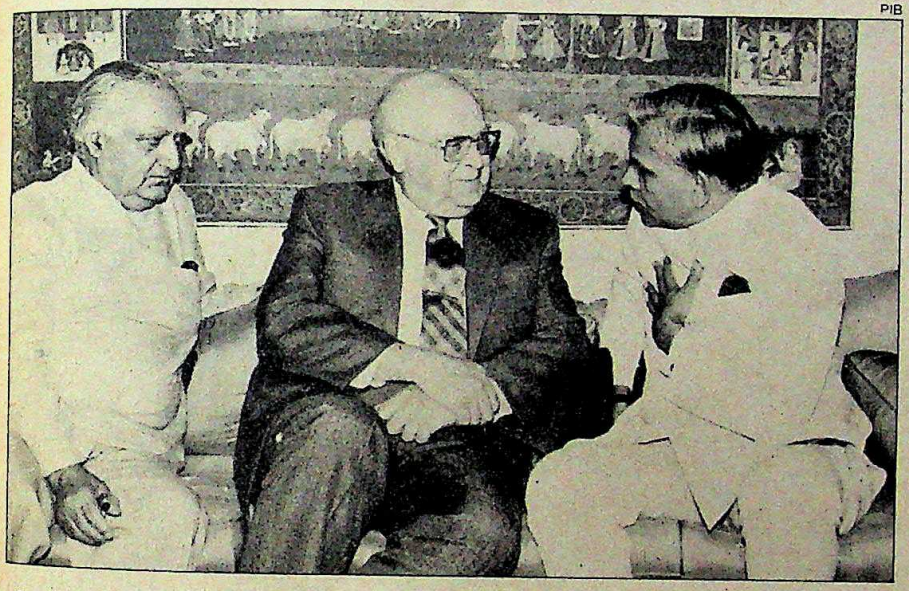
According to informed sources, the Soviets believe that the current Sino-Indian border crisis is coming to a head partly due to Indian intransigence. They feel the initial provocation did not come from China and its now ongoing military build-up along the McMahon Line (which the Chinese call the 'actual line of control'), along Arunachal Pradesh and China's Tibet region, but because of India's hidebound attitude which has all but scuttled the ongoing negotiations which began in 1981. In 1982, a year after these negotiations began, Chinese Premier Deng Xiaoping suggested to G. Parathasarathy, the then chief of the Policy Planning Committee, that the two countries negotiate a "package deal" to settle the border question. This would replace the arduous sector-by-sector approach then being pursued, according to which just about every inch of how the boundary should run was being examined according to custom, tradition, and usage—a process in which, many Indians themselves felt, India might end up ceding territory it already controlled.

The package proposal entailed a simple "as is" territorial swap—the Chinese would give up their traditional claim of 90,000 sq km of territory in Arunachal Pradesh (under Indian control) in exchange for India conceding 38,000 sq km of territory in the western sector in Aksai Chin (already under Chinese control) which, though a barren desert, is of strategic importance to China. The idea was that while negotiations were under way, neither side would assert its traditional claims or create a renewed physical presence in the disputed areas.

But in late 1984, the prime minister's office, opposing strenuous objections by the MEA, began to establish seasonal Intelligence Bureau border observation posts in the Wangdung area of Arunachal Pradesh. At the time, the Chinese had no presence there, even though they claimed it fell on their side of the actual line of control. But when the snow melted and the Indians went back to their posts, they found that the Chinese had also set up a handful of posts in the area, along what they claimed to be their actual line of control and which runs further south of what India calls the McMahon Line. Later, just before the seventh round of official talks were to be held in Beijing last year, India considered cancelling them in a show of protest. But the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs was persuaded by the foreign office to continue negotiations. Nonetheless, on July 19, two days before the seventh round was to start, the Government announced in Parliament that the Chinese had occupied Indian territory. At the talks, China blamed India for violating the informal agreement over the package deal, yet it agreed to a freeze along the border, which meant neither side would move from present positions to the line of control.

But when the Indian negotiating team referred this proposal to the Government, it responded by decreeing that the freeze should be observed by China unilaterally and that the Indian side should be allowed to move up as it liked.

PIB



Dobrynin with Natwar Singh and T.N. Kaul: courting the Soviets

What compounded an already delicate situation was the conferring of statehood on Arunachal Pradesh on February 20, 1987, which took the Chinese totally by surprise. The announcement of the proposed statehood decision could not have been more badly timed. It came almost immediately after the conclusion of the seventh round. In the ensuing tension, India moved a whole brigade into the Wangdung area, the Chinese began establishing helicopter pads, and have now begun to pour troops, rockets and artillery supplies into the Tibetan region. Already, in an area in the eastern sector about 30 km long and 7 km deep, Indian and Chinese troops face each other in ominous positions. "There is little doubt in my mind," a senior diplomat remarked, "that the Chinese are now determined to manage their side of the actual line of control. They are determined to come up to the actual line with troops." The million-dollar question is whether the Indian Government will tolerate this and how it will react.

To date, the Government has no clear line on the border issue about which it is clearly apprehensive. But whether it be China, Pakistan, the US or Sri Lanka, it is clear that there has been a loss of Indian diplomatic edge all around because of ad-hocism or short-sightedness. Foreign Secretary K.P.S. Menon is not known to be an aggressive decision-maker and is content to leave the handling of critical issues to bureaucrats in the prime minister's office, particularly Ronen Sen and Gopi Arora.

Of late, Rajiv himself has become aware that his parroting of the destabilisation theory as well as the confused foreign policy moves by his government have been costing him dearly in terms of an adverse reaction from the international press. To counter this bad press abroad, Rajiv has summoned N.D. Tiwari to take steps to ameliorate the situation. Subsequently, the foreign office sent messages informing all heads of missions that they must cultivate journalists and opinion makers more assiduously in order to forcefully put across India's point of view on the recent controversies involving the nation. But once again, this is but a public relations panacea that is hardly expected to produce results in place of political will, firmness and vision—all of which are suddenly conspicuous by their absence in India's foreign policy scenario.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR with DILIP BOBB and SHEKHAR GUPTA in Washington

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Courting Custom

THE Karnataka Chief Minister, Ramakrishna Hegde, who has spent the past month in the UK and the United States trying to attract non-resident investment to his state and to undergo medical treatment, has visibly impressed the large Indian community in Britain with what some describe as his "personal charm" and "lucid grasp of Indian politics". Last fortnight, Hegde visited a part of Britain normally ignored by visiting Indian dignitaries. He was honoured at a civic reception in Wales by the Lord Mayor at the city hall in Cardiff. Hegde spoke of the need to foster business and cultural ties between India and Wales and scrupulously avoided references to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi following trenchant criticism from Congress(I) party officials in India. A proposal to "twin" the South Glamorgan county council with Bangalore is now under scrutiny. Later, at a public meeting hosted by the Asian Society of Wales and attended by over 500 Indians, Hegde was joined by Menaka Gandhi, who is currently in Britain for what she said was essentially "RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) work". Incidentally, Menaka will be the focus of a documentary to be made on celebrated female politicians by BBC Wales and producer A.K. Verma. She joins the company of Margaret Thatcher, Corazon Aquino, Benazir Bhutto, Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Gro Brutland.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Hegde and Menaka: goodwill visit

Denouncing Extremism

THE growing number of violent clashes between moderate and pro-Khalistan Sikhs in Britain is causing increasing worry to British and Indian officials here. The most recent clash was also the most violent—at the Belvedere Gurudwara in Kent last month—when over 46 people were arrested and more than 30 suffered injuries. So last fortnight's "pro-India" peace rally in Derby, 40 miles north of Birmingham, was welcomed. Organised by groups like the Indian Overseas Congress, gurudwaras controlled by moderates, the Namdhari Sangat, the Shri Ravidass Gurudwara and the Federation of Indian Organisations, the rally attracted 1,000 people. Organisers insisted that many from the 10,000-strong Sikh community in Derby, who would otherwise have attended, were "put off" by the Belvedere Gurudwara clashes. Mohinder Singh Mondair, principal organiser, says it was held to "oppose and publicly denounce Sikh extremism in the UK and in India". He promised more such rallies in other parts of Britain.

MAHANT

Speakers at the "pro-India" peace rally

The Asian Bank

A banking service exclusively designed for Indians and other Asians seems to have made impressive strides in six years. The Equatorial Trust Corporation—the only Asian-owned public limited banking company incorporated in the UK—was founded in 1981 by two banking executives—M.G. Krishnan and N.B. Desai—to fill the gap in existing banking services for the growing ethnic market. Today, its capital of £10.7 million is held by 100 Indians and other Asians. It has public deposits of £35 million, and the chairman is the Indian banker R.C. Shah, former chairman and managing director of Bank of Baroda. Shah says many of the borrowers are Indian family-owned shops and small businesses.

Chairman Shah: impressive growth

Terminal Case

FOR his notable performance as Dr Aziz in David Lean's *A Passage to India*, Victor Banerjee received fine reviews in the British press as an actor of depth and skill. So his lead role in the Ronald Neame-directed comedy, *Foreign Body*, co-starring Trevor Howard, was eagerly awaited. But following its release last fortnight, *Foreign Body* has come in for such withering censure that it now threatens to sink without a trace. Banerjee, portraying Ram Dass, arrives in Britain from the slums of Calcutta to become a London bus conductor and eventually impersonates a Harley Street specialist in "back, neck and joint problems". One critic branded it a dismal comedy that was a "terminal case" while another delivered the rasping verdict that the audience would have no idea of "how offensive this ugly, lubricious and mean-spirited picture is".

Banerjee with co-stars: strong criticism

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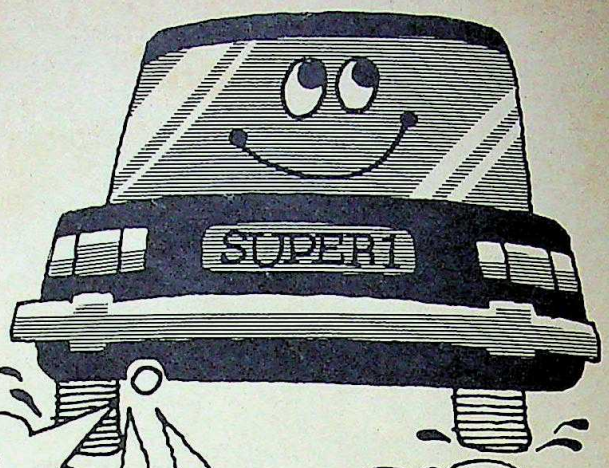

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UNITED STATES

An Arresting Affair

RARELY, if ever, had the Los Angeles court-room seen such tight security. There were metal detectors at the entrance and armed policemen swarmed the court area. And as the judge read out his verdict, the convict was whisked away to a waiting helicopter and flown to the nearby penitentiary of Lompoc to serve a 14-year sentence followed by a five-year probation.

Nemesis finally caught up last fortnight with Franklin Camper, the self-proclaimed trainer of dogs of war whose Mercenary Association school in Dolomite, Alabama, had hit world headlines in 1985. For it was here that four Sikh terrorists, including the well-known fugitive who planned to murder Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Environment Minister Bhajan Lal, had been trained. Yet, the same man had now fallen victim to his sudden fame and tall talk. Camper earned the prison sentence on charges of racketeering, possession of firearms, concealing evidence and conspiracy on the mysterious 1985 fire-bombing of two cars in California. This also marked the end—for the time being—of his school for terror. "Last year, our son ran the school but now Mr Camper wants it closed down and that is what we have done," Camper's wife Mavis told INDIA TODAY on the telephone from Dolomite.

According to the prosecution case, Elizabeth Hamilton, 40, and Charlotte Wyckof, 51, of Dana Point, California, who own the California Preparatory Schools chain, hired Camper and three of his instructors to intimidate two teachers in their own school who had filed complaints of misdoings against them with the authorities. Significantly, the women said they learnt about Camper from a radio talk-show he gave following the massive media exposure on the Sikhs' case.

The mercenaries said the prosecution, charged "thousands of dollars" for the job and "coolly blew up the teachers' cars", using "napalm-like devices". Said Federal Attorney Charles J. Stevens at Los Angeles: "The device they used was an improved napalm firebomb which consists of some soap, oil and gasoline in a sealed container linked to the ignition of the car which provides the spark."

Camper (above); and at his school: terrorist guru

But in the narrow, incestuous world of professional terrorists, it is hard to keep secrets. Soon enough, the police caught up with Camper and his men, two of whom—James Cuneo and Paul Johnson—pleaded guilty and testified against him on the promise of lighter charges. Keeping him company in jail now will be his deputy, William Hedgecorth, 27, and Elizabeth Hamilton, one of the women who hired him. The sentence regarding her partner, Charlotte Wyckof, is yet to be announced. Among those acquitted was Lee Ann Faulk, an Albanian described as Camper's girl-friend.

The stoutest defence for Camper comes from his wife Mavis who asserts her husband's innocence and claims self-righteously that he has been "framed by the people in the National Security Council and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), who were afraid of his making public the embarrassing information he had about the Sikhs and the Iran-Contra scandal". This explosive information, she claims, would have made his testimony before the Congress very embarrassing for the administration.

Mavis also claims Camper knew a lot about the Kanishka air crash and those responsible, and that he had names of Federal agents who "knew with certainty that the Air-India jumbo jet had explosives on board". She asserts that he had information about the activities of key Sikh extremists in America.

She says it is to remove him from the scene that the FBI has framed him. Mavis adds that the two women had hired Camper only to investigate who had been "harassing their children, killing their pets and threatening their lives". The women made eight complaints with the police but no one took notice. And she laments the controversial publicity surrounding the Sikhs' case earlier. The case was not brought up in court but William Del Gasso, one of Camper's attorneys, says that the publicity harmed him. "At least, Mr Camper thinks so," he said.

Del Gasso, however, points out that Camper had already appealed against the judgement in the ninth California Circuit Court and is confident his fortunes will change. Perhaps Camper and his backers could repeat the age-old mercenary saying: "You haven't lost the battle till you are there." But the big-mouthed mentor of mercenaries has now been reduced to a mere set of numerals: Federal prisoner number 15685-001, and a property of the Justice Department.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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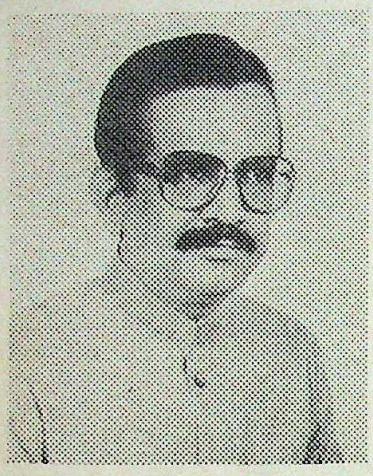

Shri Moosa Raza

GUJARAT STATE FERTILIZERS COMPANY LTD.

P.O. Fertilizernagar
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GSFC CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

*** GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO REORIENT THE NATION'S ECONOMIC POLICIES IS A MAJOR STRIDE TOWARDS IMPROVEMENT OF THE LIVING STANDARDS OF THE MASSES**

*** THE COUNTRY'S PRESENT DELICATE SITUATION IS BUT ONLY A PASSING PHASE**

*** GSFC'S SILVER JUBILEE YEAR – 'A YEAR OF FULFILMENT'**

*** NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AWARDS - A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND REDEDICATION FOR GSFC**

*** GSFC IS POISED TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY THROUGH EXPANSION AND GROWTH**

*** GSFC'S COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TRANSCENDS THE IMMEDIATE CONCERNS AND CONTRIBUTES TO BASIC DEVELOPMENT**

*** GSFC CONTINUING PURSUIT FOR EXCELLENCE THROUGH CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE**

The following is the text of the Statement made by Shri Moosa Raza, Chairman, Gujarat State Fertilizers Company Limited at the Twenty-Fifth Annual General Meeting of the Company held on the 28th May, 1987 at the Registered Office of the Company.

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me immense pleasure to cordially welcome you at this 25th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of your Company. Your Company has completed its 'SILVER JUBILEE' on a highly satisfying note. Real hard work and concrete results have laid a sound foundation during the Silver Jubilee Year of your Company for the future development and growth. The Directors' Report and the Audited Statements of Accounts for the year ended 31st December, 1986, have been with you for some time and may I, therefore, with your permission take them as read.

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Before reviewing the performance of your Company and the programme being implemented currently and to be undertaken in future, I think it worthwhile to share my views with you on the general economic environment in the country. You are aware that under the leadership and guidance of our Prime Minister, the Government is attempting a re-orientation of the economic policies of the country. It is heartening to note that the general thrust of the budget proposals for 1987-88 is broadly in consonance with the pattern set out in the Long Term Fiscal Policy. It is more precisely so with some of the proposals contained in the "Discussion Paper on Simplification and Rationalization of Direct Taxes."

The budget of 1987 seeks to give direction to the growth of the economy in the most critical areas. It seeks to make public sector more productive. It offers a fillip to the rural economy. It has provisions to promote export. And it aims at encouraging indigenisation and savings in foreign exchange. Fresh impetus to housing and improvement of the health and hygiene of the masses have been given due weightage. It also lends further stimulus to the integrated rural development programmes. The budget may not appear to be a panacea for all our ills but it is indeed a major stride towards self-reliance, planned development, conservation of resources and improvement of the living standards of the masses.

The Industrial Licencing Policy determining certain economic sizes of plant capacities for the purpose of either expansion or setting up new industries is also a step in the right direction.

The recent announcement by the Government about withdrawal of Section 194-E and modification to Section 115-J of the Income Tax Act has been widely welcomed.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC SCENE

Our country is passing through a delicate situation today. The smooth pace of progress, which was set over the last two years, is under serious threat of retardation. Communalism, riots and agitations on all and sundry issues shatter the confidence of the people in the democratic processes to which our country is deeply pledged constitutionally, and create a sense of insecurity in which progress and growth are halted. These are the most serious problems which have to be tackled expeditiously. We all hope that these are temporary phases and a country of the size and variety of India has but to face such odds in its march towards progress. Our people have the sixth sense to understand what is good and what is bad and they would ultimately rally round to protect the interest of our country. Let me assure you that your Company deeply shares these national concerns and would stand by to attend to any call of duty for the good of nation with the support and cooperation of its shareholders and employees.

SILVER JUBILEE YEAR – A YEAR OF FULFILMENT

I am delighted to inform you that Company's performance during the year matched with the expectations of the 'Silver Jubilee Year'. The main highlight of the Silver Jubilee Year is that your Company has been able to commission the Coastal DAP Project at Sikka in a record time of just 17 months as against the normal time of 36 months and the scheduled time of 24 months. The commissioning of the main process plant was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Gujarat on 29th December, 1986. Most of the other systems were commissioned step by step before 31st March, 1987 and fullfledged production is expected to commence from July 1987 onwards.

The Company also established, in a record time, facilities for a Monomer Recovery Unit of Nylon-6 Chips Plant at a cost of about Rs. 75.00 lacs. This would greatly help COD/BOD control in effluent stream and recovery of Caprolactam out of wash liquor coming out from processing of Nylon-6 Plant.

GSFC is also producing Methane from its Purge Gas Recovery Plant and supply of this gas to Gujarat Alkalies & Chemicals Ltd. through a pipeline was commenced on schedule.

A new record of 8.08 lac MTs of fertilizer production was established during the year. It is higher by 6.5% as

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ompared to the previous year. The overall capacity tilisation of the fertilizer plants was 115% during the ear. Another record of "Single Day Production" was stablished by producing 2680 MTs of fertilizer as gainst capacity of 2100 MTs. It is gratifying to note hat individually, each fertilizer plant achieved more han 100% production against the budget. Phosphoric cid production achieved a major breakthrough by eaching 139% of capacity utilisation which is higher y 28% compared to the previous year. Capacity utiliation of DAP also rose to 145% during the year. Capactam production achieved the maiden record of xceeding of 100% designed capacity during the year or the first time since its inception. The production of ndustrial Products also showed significant improvement. Almost as many as 14 plants have achieved over 00% capacity utilisation which is a record in the hisory of your Company. Equally matching has been the les performance of your Company. Sales of fertilizrs touched a new high of 9.48 lac MTs as compared to 18 lac MTs during the previous year. This perforance indeed deserves a worthy mention because spite of the glut situation in the fertilizers market used mainly due to the second consecutive drought many parts of the country, heavy imports, wagon portages and stiff competition, your Company's sales erformance was equalled by hardly any unit in the rtilizer industry. Increase of 13.6% was recorded in e sale of Industrial Products. Your Company has rned valuable foreign exchange for the country by port of Melamine to Japan, South Korea & Belgium d maiden export of MEK Oxime and Gypsum to stralia and Muscat respectively.

spite of such high production and sales performance profit for the year was lower. There are four impor- t reasons. Firstly, there has been a continuous esca- on in the input costs. Secondly, your Company's ims with the FICC could not be realised due to ays in finalisation of the Revised Retention Price heme effective from 1st April, 1985 by the Govern- nt. This was announced only recently. Thirdly, the ntinuous drought conditions and import of fertiliz- s created a stiff competition in the fertilizer market d, therefore your Company had to give longer cre- s and higher discounts which, of course, were kept minimum as compared to tempting offers from her competitors. Fourthly, your Company had to r the brunt of higher interest charges. However, n the announcement of the new Retention Prices the period 1.4.1985 to 31.3.1987, I am confident that next year's results would present a much better ture.

PANSION PLANS – INDOW TO 21ST CENTURY

ur Company has received a Letter of Intent from the vernment of India for expansion of the Caprolactam nt from the existing capacity of 20,000 MTs per um to 1,20,000 MTs per annum to be executed in phases. Your Company proposes to establish ditional capacity of 50,000 MTs in the first phase. ter clearance of the various arrangements by the vernment of India, a new plant of the increased pacity would be established. Your Company has progressed in the establishment of 1350 TPD monia Plant. The work on Melamine Expansion m the existing capacity of 5,000 MTs per annum to 000 MTs per annum will also start soon. The setting of the Joint Captive Power Generating Plant is proeding satisfactorily. To meet with the increasing eds of energy, your Company has also proceeded with setting up Co-generation of Steam & Power Plant. The foundation stone of Co-generation Project was laid by Shri Nalinbhai Patel, Minister of State for Energy, Forest & Environment. Similarly, plans for effecting merger of Gujarat Nylons Ltd with your Company are also being worked out. Your Company has applied for licence for the LLDPE Project with a capacity of one lac tons a year. Your Company also plans to participate in the Petro Chemical Complex being set-up at Hajira. Your Company has taken up the debottlenecking programme of the Caprolactam plant with a view to enhancing the capacity by 25% and the first phase of this debottlenecking was completed with the commissioning of the Anone Unit. The work on the second and subsequent phases would be initiated and completed as early as possible. Your Company's Polymer Unit has achieved a major breakthrough in import substitution by successfully developing an indigenous process to manufacture Methacrylic Acid without any foreign collaboration or knowhow. All these plans would require a substantial investment of over Rs. 1,000 crores. I would urge full support from you and the financial institutions in the timely implementation of these projects.

The expansion plans which are envisaged to be implemented by 1990 would open up new vistas of growth for your Company in the last quarter of this century. You will be happy to know that your Company has already started planning to meet the challenge of this further growth which would be a stepping stone for us to enter the 21st century with a sense of confidence.

TOWARDS FULFILMENT OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

You would have noticed from the Directors' Report the efforts made by your Company especially to help the farmers. This objective has been uppermost in our mind while implementing such programmes-improvement of socio economic levels of the farmers and increased food production-which are vital to the country's economy. You are aware that Gujarat and many other parts in the country have been in the grip of a severe drought consecutively for the second year. In keeping with its traditions, your Company has contributed an amount of Rs. 11 lacs to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. As you know, your Company has taken up the Dry Farming Project in some areas of Gujarat. It has been decided to extend this project to Rajkot and Bhavnagar districts in Gujarat, Dhar district in Madhya Pradesh and Dungerpur district in Rajasthan. The Leap Forward Project which has been in force for the last 12 years for the benefit of the tribal farmers is being extended to Vyara, a backward area in the Surat district. Your Company has continued its interest in the Government sponsored Intensive Fertilizer Promotion Scheme, which has given good results in the three districts of Gujarat and two districts of Rajasthan. A massive programme of tree plantation of around 3 lac saplings - two lacs in the fertilizernagar and one lac in the GSFC battery area was undertaken during the year.

As you know your Company has made pioneering efforts in development and commercial production of Biofertilizers and the experiments so far conducted have yielded encouraging results. A well-equipped Biofertilizer Unit was inaugurated by Dr. G.S. Dhillon, Union Minister of Agriculture last February. On this occasion, your Company also organised an all Gujarat Convention of Fertilizer Cooperative Societies and besides the Union Agriculture Minister, this convention was graced by the Chief Minister and the Minister for Cooperation, Gujarat State. You will be happy to know that your Company's contribution to the cooperative movement was greatly appreciated at this Convention.

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

You will be happy to know that your Company has celebrated its Silver Jubilee Year by winning four awards of national and international level during the period. Your Company has achieved the rare distinction of winning the FAI Award for the best performance in production of phosphatic fertilizers for the fourth consecutive year. This is a unique achievement in the fertilizer industry. For the first time in its history, your Company has achieved the FAI Runners-up Award for the second best performance in Nitrogenous fertilizer (Ammonia). The highest award for safety and health performance from the National Safety Council of the United States has also been won by your Company for exemplary display of awareness and commitment towards safety and health. Again your Company has achieved the prestigeous award of the National Productivity Council of India for the second best performance in the productivity field.

PRODUCTIVITY EXCELLENCE THROUGH CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE

As you know GSFC has been meeting productivity challenges from year to year and the excellence achieved by your Company in terms of fulfilment of targets and record capacity utilisation have been unparalleled in the annals of the fertilizer industry in our country. Your Company has shifted the emphasis of its corporate philosophy from small and medium level projects to large size projects and maximization of production and productivity through optimum capacity utilization in all plants. Your Company adopted the philosophy of Challenge and Response to achieve this objective and a threefold strategy was evolved to create new challenges and to meet them successfully. This philosophy envisaged motivation of the work force by creating a new confidence in them for realisation of the untapped potential. This was backed by a long term programme of modernization and revamping. As you can see, your Company has achieved substantial results over the past few years culminating into a record fulfilment year in 1986 and providing a further fillip and a continuing driving force to the growth plans from year to year.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am glad to convey on your behalf my sincere thanks to Government of India, Government of Gujarat, Financial Institutions, Banks and other agencies for the unstinted support and assistance in the fulfilment of our objectives. I deeply appreciate the contribution made and guidance extended by my colleagues on the Board from time to time. I would be failing in my duty if I do not thank earnestly the team of staff and officers of your Company for their loyalty and dedicated efforts in maintaining the reputation and continuous growth of your Company.

– JAI HIND –

Note : This does not purport to be a record of proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Annual General Meeting of the Company.

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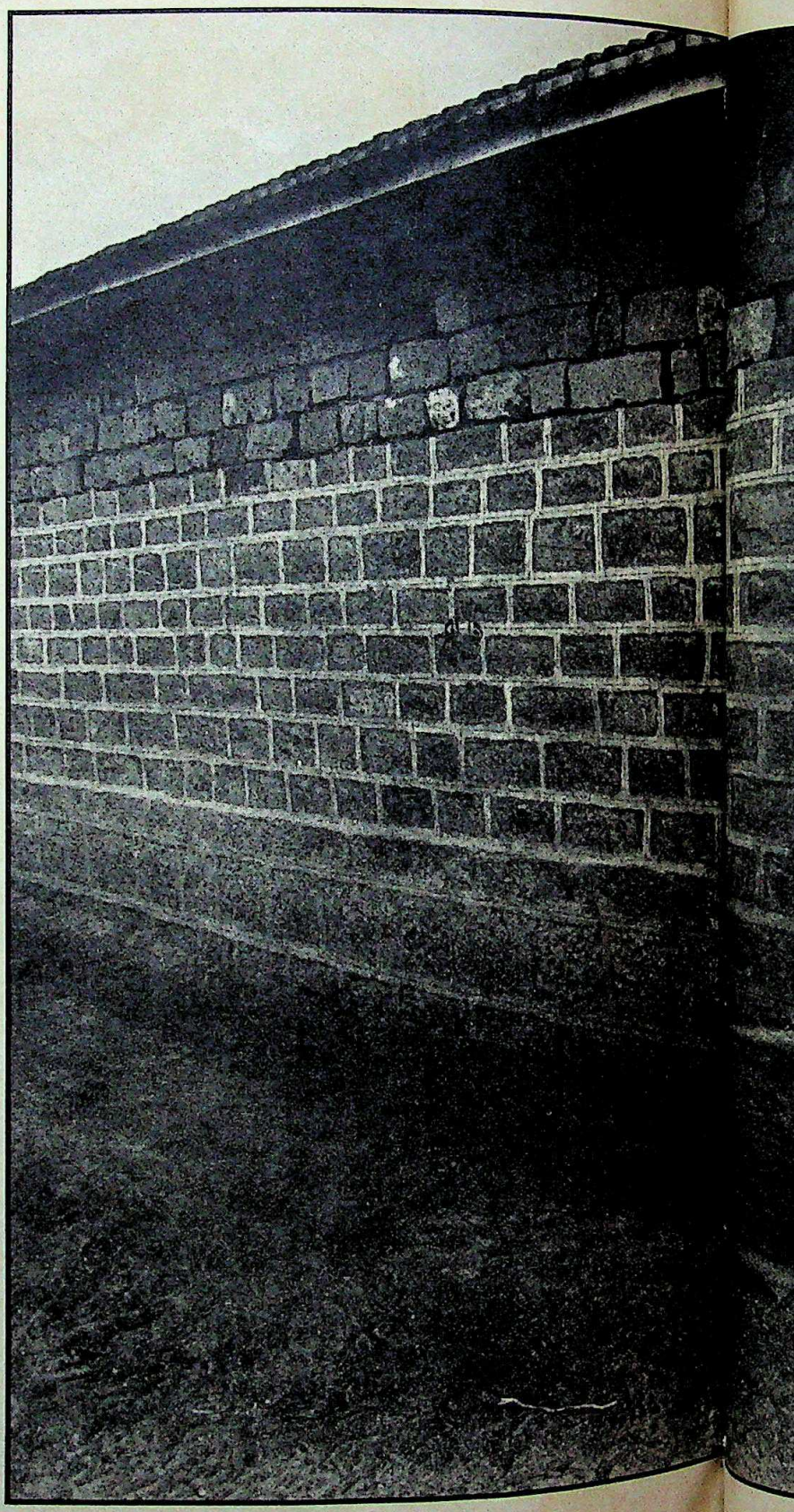
SNAPSHOT

BY SWAPAN PAREKH



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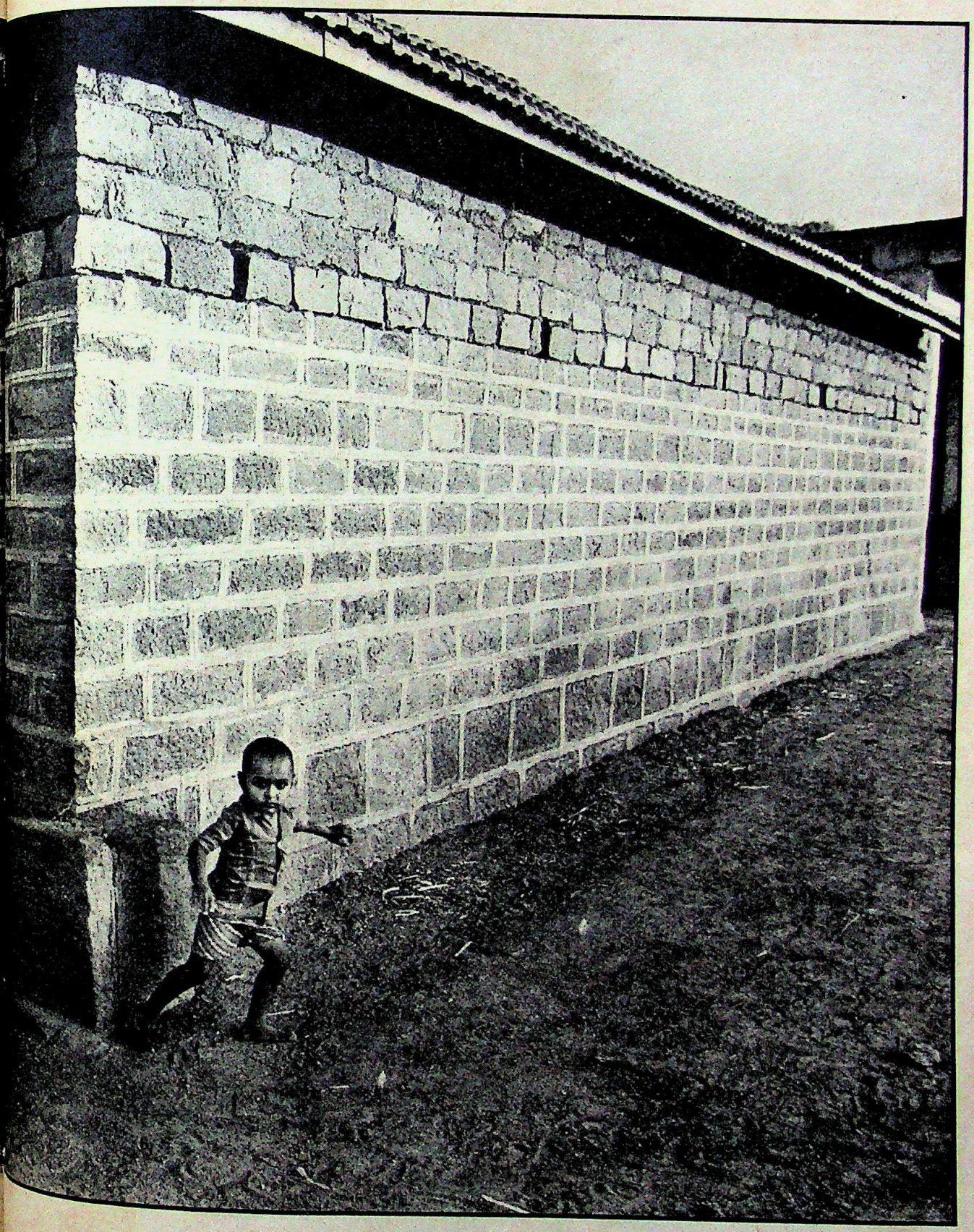

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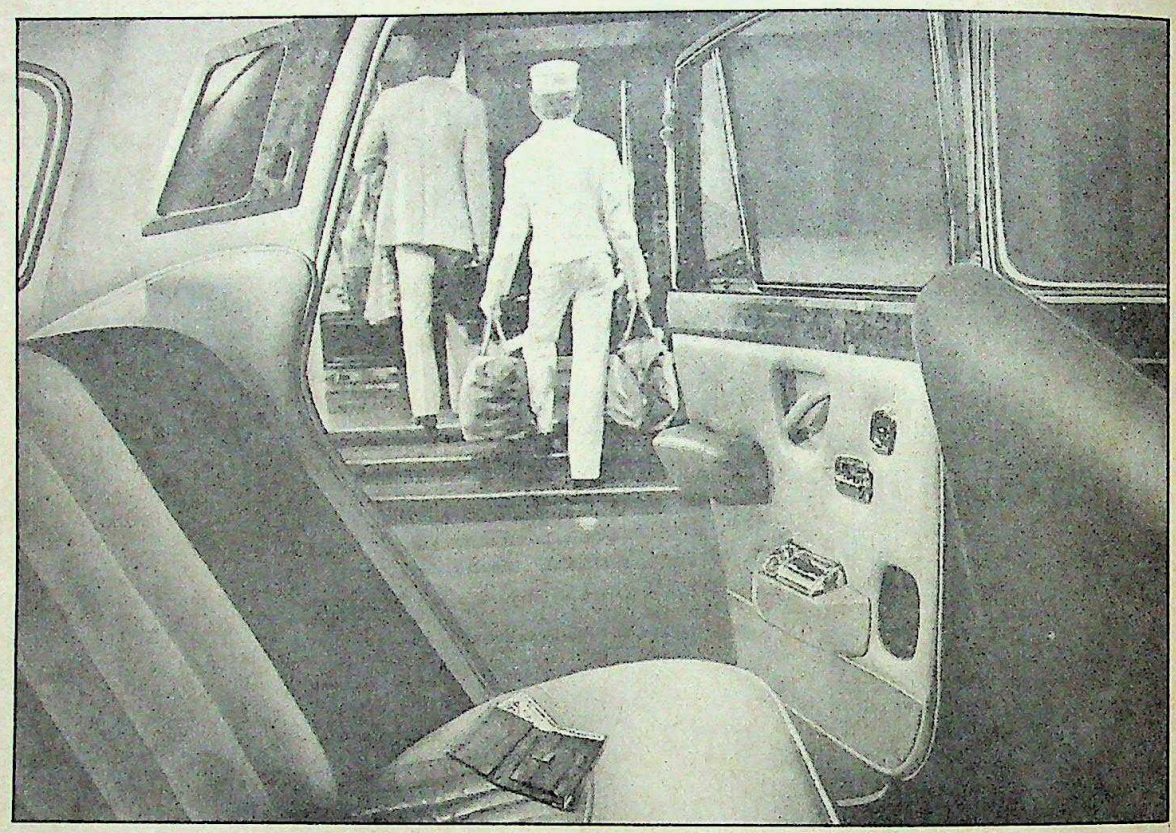
Even if you lose American Express Travelers Cheques you'll have lost nothing



Because no other travellers cheque offers as much protection. None.

Naturally, when you are away from home the last thing you'd want is to lose your wallet along with cash and travellers cheques. But if you were carrying American Express Travelers Cheques, you'd have lost nothing.

If lost or stolen, American Express Travelers Cheques can be :

- Replaced usually within 24 hours at 90,000 locations and over 1400 Travel Service Offices* worldwide.

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And all this at no extra cost.

So when you go abroad carry only American Express Travelers Cheques. And travel with peace of mind.

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Don't leave home without them.

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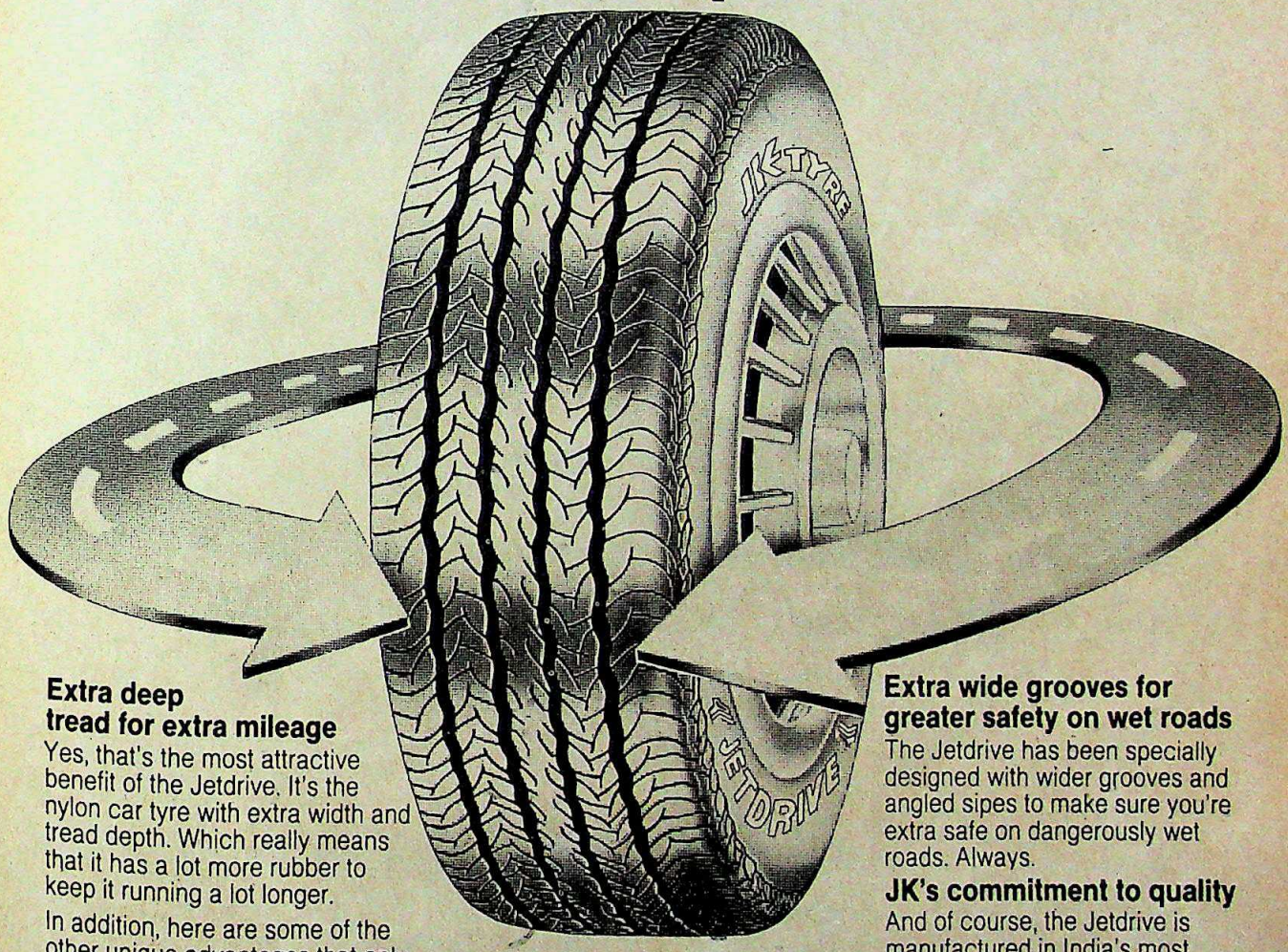
Introducing

JETDRIVE

PREMIUM NYLON CAR TYRE

The extra wide tyre with an extra deep tread.



Extra deep tread for extra mileage

Yes, that's the most attractive benefit of the Jetdrive. It's the nylon car tyre with extra width and tread depth. Which really means that it has a lot more rubber to keep it running a lot longer.

In addition, here are some of the other unique advantages that only Jetdrive can offer:

Extra wide tread for greater road grip

The Jetdrive also has the widest footprint which offers more tyre surface area to keep in contact with the road. Naturally, that gives it a surer grip,ensuring greater stability for you.

Extra wide grooves for greater safety on wet roads

The Jetdrive has been specially designed with wider grooves and angled sipes to make sure you're extra safe on dangerously wet roads. Always.

JK's commitment to quality

And of course, the Jetdrive is manufactured in India's most sophisticated tyre plant, where it's made to match the most exacting quality standards.

Take a good look around. You'll find that only the Jetdrive offers you all this.

For your Maruti, Ambassador and Premier Padmini.

JK TYRE

More mileage for your money.

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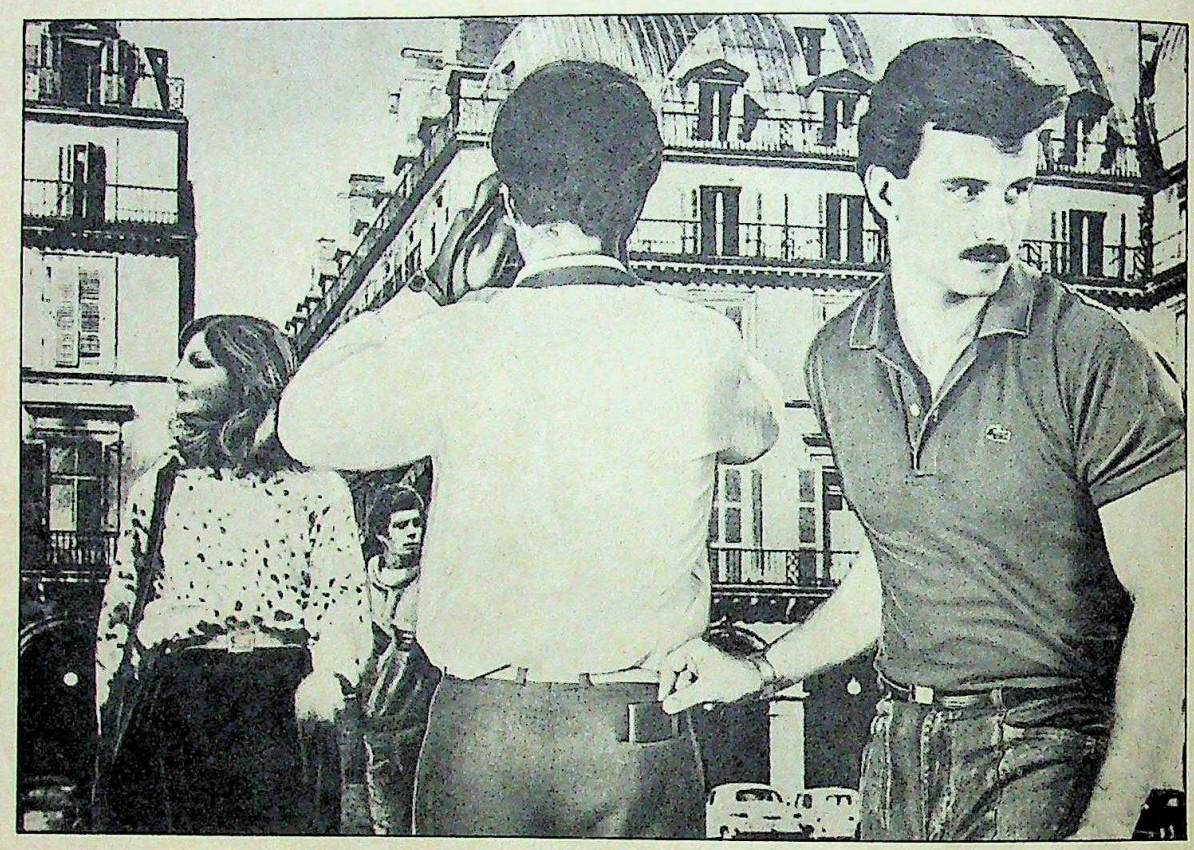
It's because of thieves like this that you should carry only American Express Travelers Cheques



No other travellers cheque offers as much protection. None.

Apart from your business associates there's a large group of people waiting for you – pickpockets. Once they spot you, your wallet is gone. So are your travellers cheques. But if you were carrying American Express Travelers Cheques you'd have lost nothing.

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So when you go abroad carry only American Express Travelers Cheques. And travel with peace of mind.

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SRIDEVI

The New Box Office Goddess

IN a soaking wet chiffon saree she swayed erotically to the soft music. Her diaphanous eyes smouldered, her lips pouted and her every little nuance was full of sensuality. The effect on the audience in the theatre was electric. Many let off low whistles, others shifted uneasily in their chairs. And Mohammed Ayub, 20, a college student, said later: "She seemed to reach out to me alone. She is the woman of my dreams."

At 24, Sridevi has become the new empress of the dreams that tinsel town conjures up. With her recent film *Nagina* turning out to be the biggest block-buster of all times she is also the new box office goddess. She is, as producer Suresh Jindal, puts it: "The ideal Indian image of a female—busty and hippy—the kind you see in an erotic temple sculpture. She is becoming what Marilyn Monroe was to the Americans."

She may not as yet have the sex goddess status that Monroe enjoyed but like her she exudes an innocent sensuality. Shekhar Kapur, who directed the wet scene in his movie *Mr India* released last fortnight, says: "It is as if her face does not know what her body is doing." Shekhar thinks there are basically two kinds of actresses: those who act from the heart and those who perform. To him "Sridevi is the star performer."

If Meena Kumari was the eternal tragedienne and Amitabh made it big with his angry young man image, Sridevi projects a quality, that producers feel, every Indian male craves for in a woman. As one producer says: "They want their wives to be an angel in front of the family and a mistress in bed. She has that quality."

She is also an actress with prodigious talent that has made her undisputedly the number one. Producer-Director

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Manmohan Desai, who has made a string of big hits with Amitabh Bachchan, says: "She's no fluke. Apart from her sex appeal she has enormous talent and is a superb actress. She deserves to be the number one." Ironically, before Desai could cast her in his films her fee had shot to dizzy levels and he confesses: "I can't afford to have Amitabh Bachchan and Sridevi in the same film."

COMMANDING a price of Rs 14 to Rs 20 lakh for each film, she is now the highest paid Indian actress on the Hindi screen, earning twice as much as her contemporaries. Her fee is only matched by former number one heroines Hema Malini and Rekha and works out to roughly Rs 4,000 per hour. Currently she has 14 films on hand. Co-starring with her are several generations of actors including Dharmendra, Jeetendra, Shatrughan Sinha, Rishi Kapoor, Anil Kapoor and Sunny Deol. Setting up a hot pace for herself she works three shifts a day. In fact, so engrossed is Sridevi in her work that she hasn't had a day free in the past two and a half months.

Sridevi seems to possess the Midas touch that transcends the language barrier. Having acted in nearly 300-odd films she enjoys the rare distinction of being the only multi-lingual star who has achieved the number one status in Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam and Hindi cinema. The prestigious *Ladies Home Journal* of USA recently rated her as one of the 100 most influential women in the world—an honour she shared with Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Anita Desai, Lata Mangeshkar, Margaret Alva and Mother Teresa. Jeetendra, who has co-starred in 16 of her 30 Hindi films, says: "I don't think any Hindi film heroine has ever commanded such a screen presence as Sridevi. In a male dominated industry she can make a film run on her own."

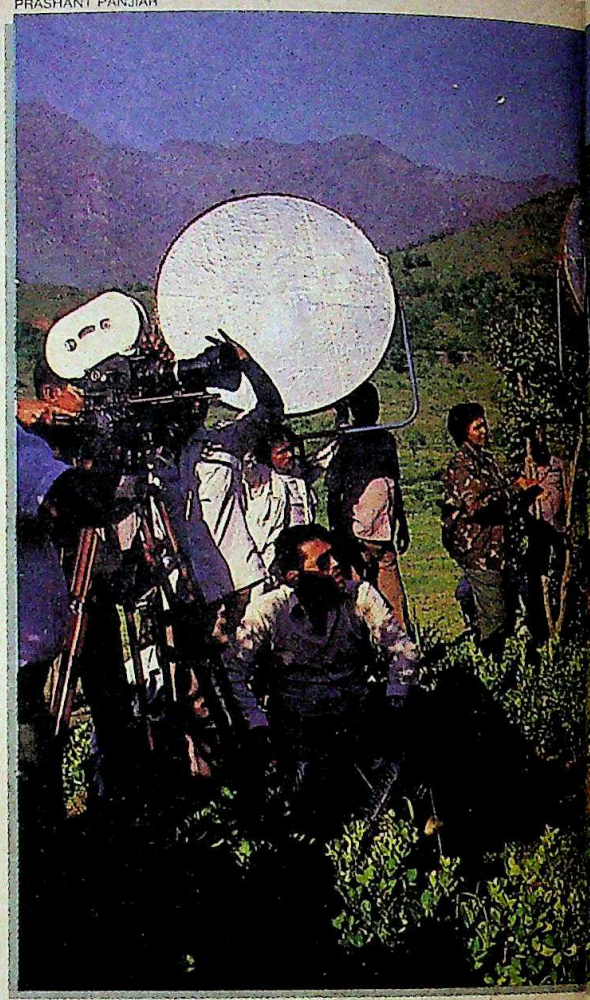
That she proved in *Nagina*. Playing the role of an *ichchadhari nagin* (a snake which can shape form if it so desires) which assumes the form of a village girl to seek revenge, she performs the part with just the right amount of restraint, venom, and vivacity to send the film dancing to the top. Says director Harmesh Malhotra: "She did exactly what I wanted out of the character." And co-star Rishi acknowledges: "Sridevi carried the film on her back. It was her all the way."

Her domineering presence is now the butt of wisecracks. Shatrughan Sinha, who co-stars with her in *Sherni* (Lioness) says: "I'm just a *bakra* (goat) in the film." Rishi adds: "I feel like a homosexual in her films. It may not be long before she sings songs to me rather than vice versa."

Already *Nagina* has grossed over Rs 10 crore and celebrated silver jubilee runs in over 30 centres across the country. In the process it has outspun some of the biggest money-spinners of yesteryears including *Sholay*, *Mother India* and *Mughal-e-Azam*. In several smaller cities of Uttar Pradesh where films traditionally run for hardly three days, *Nagina* ran for several months. Some theatres even reported people throwing coins at the screen when Sridevi did her famous snake dance. Says B.D. Bhatia, a Delhi theatre manager where *Nagina* completed its 28th week: "Sridevi's acting is a big draw."

Sridevi herself is nonchalant about her performance in *Nagina*, saying: "It was a very silent, very Indian kind of role. It was not difficult to play." But if anything the film established her firmly as

PRASHANT PANJIAR



On location in Srinagar and in *Mr India*: star performer

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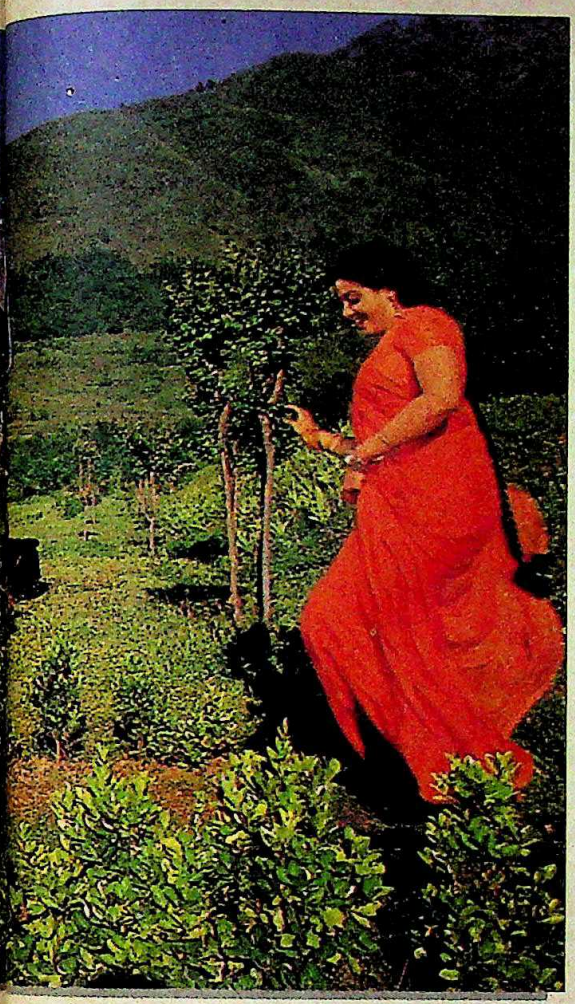


India's best-selling heroine. There were signs that she was slipping particularly after her recent releases—before *Nagina*—like *Sultanat* (where her role was confined mainly to dancing) and *Bhagwan Dada* (she plays a prostitute) flopped at the fickle box-office.

Ironically, *Nagina* was first offered to her arch-rival, Jayaprada, who delayed accepting it. When Malhotra called up Sridevi she was in bed with high fever. But on reading the script she told her mother, Rajeswari, who manages her career: "Mummy, I'm doing this film." Said Rajeswari: "It was her first real heroine-oriented Hindi film and I knew she would play it superbly. So I cancelled some other dance and fight movies and told her to concentrate on *Nagina*." While Rishi reportedly charged out of the sets whenever the snakes were brought in, Sridevi handled them without fear.

But proving that *Nagina* was not just a flash in the pan, Sridevi has turned out yet another scintillating performance in *Mr India*. Overshadowing Anil Kapoor, who plays the invisible Mr India, Sridevi breathes life into every scene that she appears in: as the inane crime reporter, the irritable tenant, the moll in trouble and as Charlie Chaplin himself. The film has all the potential of being another block-buster if the first week returns are any indications.

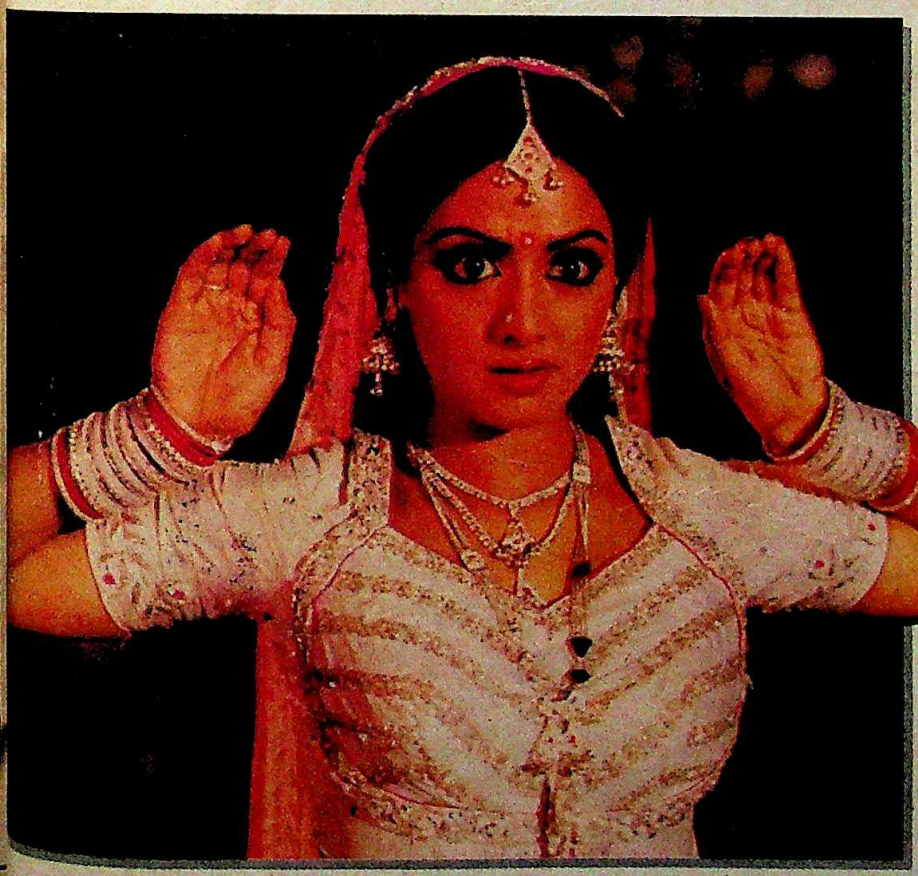
THROUGHOUT the movie her sense of comedy wasn't slapstick: she seemed to quirk her eyebrow, stick her tongue out defiantly or pout just at the right places. She carried the role effortlessly, giving it a comic disbelief reminiscent of Roger Moore as James Bond. And she topped it with some of the most sensual dances that she has ever performed. Says co-star Anil Kapoor: "She was like magic and as flexible as rubber."

It is her extraordinary flexibility as an actress that has made directors rave about her. Says Shekhar: "She's like a child. You can mould her into different blocks. And she understands what you want. She loves her work and enjoys it so much that she gets me excited also." Ramesh Sippy of *Buniyaad* and *Sholay* fame, who has cast her in his next film *Rameen*, says: "She has the right combination of everything. She has good facial control, her sense of comedy and timing is brilliant, she dances superbly and has plenty of oomph. She will stay on for a long time."

She is also one of the most professional stars on the circuit, and what's more doesn't throw tantrums. She is usually the first on the sets and Dance Director Suresh Bhatt says: "When she says she is coming at 7 a.m. she means it. We are all on our toes exactly at that time." And she willingly does any number of retakes for her director.

Her major handicap is Hindi. She still has trouble delivering long dialogues. While her voice in many of her earlier films was dubbed, she now insists that the directors use her own. Malhotra remembers that for *Nagina* she sat up the whole night redubbing entire scenes so that she got the accent right. But as Shatraghan Sinha says mischievously: "Who cares for her minuses when she has such heavy pluses."

Her pluses were not so evident in Srinagar last week when she appeared on the sets of *Sherni and Ram Avtar*. Wearing



In the smash hit *Nagina*: mesmerising presence

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In *Sadma*: talented actress

a shiny tangerine saree and holding a black umbrella to block the scorching sun she gave no hint of her famed sensuality. As she lightly dabbed the beads of sweat on her bulbous nose she looked instead like a teenager preparing for her first party—until she faced the camera. Then she came alive. Her face radiated charm, her eyes danced and a smile lit up her face. And as she glided down the garden path, her body swaying sensuously to the background music, a hush descended over the gaggling crowd. "Cut," screamed the director and the spell was broken. And as suddenly as it came her inner vitality subsided. She was back to being the girl next door.

It is this ability, to transform her seemingly ordinary presence into a bubbling vivacity on screen that has made her a star of the '80s. As Rishi says: "She's got a weird kind of magic that spontaneously ignites when the camera rolls." Director Sunil Hingorani, who has cast her as the heroine in *Ram Avtar*, says: "We call her the ultimate take artiste. She has the ability to switch off and on whenever she wants."

But after her shot she tends to switch off with her co-stars and directors as well. Shekhar confesses that he does not know her personally. Rishi says he has spoken hardly four lines to her off the screen. Says he: "It's like looking at her through a mirror. You can see her but you can't communicate with her." But Jeetendra finds her a warm person and remembers fondly that for his birthday last year she presented him a bouquet of flowers. Sridevi herself explains: "I'm basically shy and reserved . Even as a child it was difficult for me to get along with anyone."*(see interview)*.

That's because she was busy shooting films right from the time she was a precocious four-year-old in Madras. At a party the late Tamil writer Kannadasan asked her father, K. Ayappan, a lawyer, whether she could act in his film. He agreed and she was cast as God Muruga in a film called *Thunnaivan* (Help). For the role the director wanted her to shave her head. Sridevi burst into tears and he agreed to let her keep her locks.

She remembers returning from school staring proudly at the big banners of her movie on the streets. By five she was a celebrity. Recalls her mother: "She was very inquisitive and good in studies." But she devoted more time to acting and dropped out of school in her fifth standard,

INTERVIEW

"Can I help looking sexy?"

IF on screen she projects an image of innocent sensuality, in real life Sridevi exhibits only the innocence and a quiet reserve. She prefers answering in monosyllables unless provoked. Then, the words come out in a torrent, her large eyes flash and her hands keep pace expressively. On location at Srinagar, she took time off for an interview with Principal Correspondent RAJ CHENGAPPA. *Excerpts:*

Q. *What do you think of your image as the sex siren of Hindi cinema?*

A. I feel very bad. When people come and tell me how beautiful I looked in a film, I don't react. But when they tell me I acted well I feel proud.

Q. *But you became number one because of your willingness to bare more than others?*

A. If that's the case then whoever reveals a lot should be number one. Why are they not? If I look sexy just wearing a sari, can I help it? There are so many girls who reveal much more but they don't look anything.

Q. *You were known in Tamil films for the character roles you played. Why did you switch your image in Hindi films?*

A. In Tamil films they love to see me act naturally. But in Hindi films all they want is lot of glamour, richness and *masala*. My bad luck was that my first big hit in Hindi films turned out to be a commercial one (*Himmatwala*). When I did a character role in *Sadma*, the picture flopped. So people started casting me only for glamour roles. But one day I'm

PRASHANT PANJIAR

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In her first film: early beginning

eferring to be tutored at home. S.P. uthuraman, who directed her both as a ild artiste and heroine, recalls: "She as a born actress. Even as a child artiste e could grasp the medium so well. And e was always cool, composed and to-lly relaxed."

Increasingly cut off from the outside orld, Sridevi relied heavily on her other for moral support. Says she: "I felt e being with my mother all the time." In any films she made her mother stand hind the camera so that she could see r. Her mother took charge of her career m then on and even today directs it. herever she is, be it Ladakh or nyakumari, Sridevi faithfully rings up r mother every night. She doesn't mind mitting she's a "mama's girl" and says: o what if my mother controls me. After she is doing everything for my ppiness."

It was her mother who enrolled her for aratnatyam classes when she was six ars old and that training has proved a big asset. Jeetendra, who has done 53 song sequences with her, says: "I take almost four or five rehearsals to master the steps but she takes only one." Bhatt, who has directed many of her dances, says: "She always adds something of her own to the dance sequences. Never loses anything."

But her initial forays as a heroine were disastrous. Her first big break as a teenage heroine was in Malayalam films directed by I.V. Sasi of *Her Nights* fame. Sridevi unwittingly posed in a skimpy skirt and blouse—a role that became a constant source of embarrassment in her later life. In fact, after she made it big in the Hindi films, her Malayalam films were marketed all over India as: "Sridevi and her thundering thighs presented by Her Nights Sasi." She was paid hardly Rs 7,000 for each movie and was given a first class rail ticket for location shooting.

But in Tamil films she established herself as a character actress of repute. She was a willing learner even then. During the shooting of the smash hit *Moondram Pirai*, where she plays a mentally retarded child, on the first day she came heavily made up. The director, Balu Mahendra, sent her a note telling her to remove the pancake from her face. Her co-star Kamalahasan says: "Any other top heroine would have walked out of the film. But the next day she reported without make up." Mahendra feels she has the edge over even actresses like Shabana Azmi because "it is rare that great

ng to prove to everyone that I can also.

Q. *Is that day far away?*

A. Yes. Everything has changed. I e realised that glamour is important not vulgarity. Now it is out of the stion that I would do any revealing ts. I would love to do art films without ke up. And I would love to do a crying . But, so far, I am not satisfied as an ste. I have not done the role where I say, *chalo*, at last I have done it.

Q. *Do you think you will remain mber one for a long time?*

A. I can't be number one for life. As a the time is even shorter. I am not ng to be a performer, going on year r year. I will never give people a nce to get bored of me. The moment nebody younger is going to take my e, I will quit films. I hate to hang on.

Q. *But your colleagues say it is time played a role that reflects your real racter. Something that has moved deeply.*

A. Then there be would no such role lay because my life is routine.

Q. *Who is the real Sridevi?*

A. Someone very simple. I'm an nary person. Nothing very interest-Just another parents' daughter. n ordinary girls have style. I don't k I've got that. You see the real evi in the house. I hate to go out for parties. I like being at home with my parents. I'm a very shy person and difficult to get along with.

Q. *Has your stardom affected your attitude to life?*

A. It doesn't give me a chance to get to know life. Whenever I want a saree or anything, it comes to me. I have never been shopping. But I've got so used to it that even if I get a chance to experience things, I withdraw. I feel very uneasy with anything new. I feel comfortable only with my life style.

Q. *Do some of the characters you play influence your life-style?*

A. The characters that I play are different from my personal life. The moment I play a role I forget it.

Q. *How do you look so innocent despite doing all those daring dances?*

A. It is not an act. You can't do that for a whole life. It would look silly and stupid. It is just that I have a baby face that doesn't change.

Q. *But in front of the camera you become a totally different person.*

A. Because I'm very professional. I don't plan my shot or anything like that. I have never learnt acting. I think it should come from inside.

Q. *What would you like to do after you stop acting?*

A. Get married and settle down. I love children.

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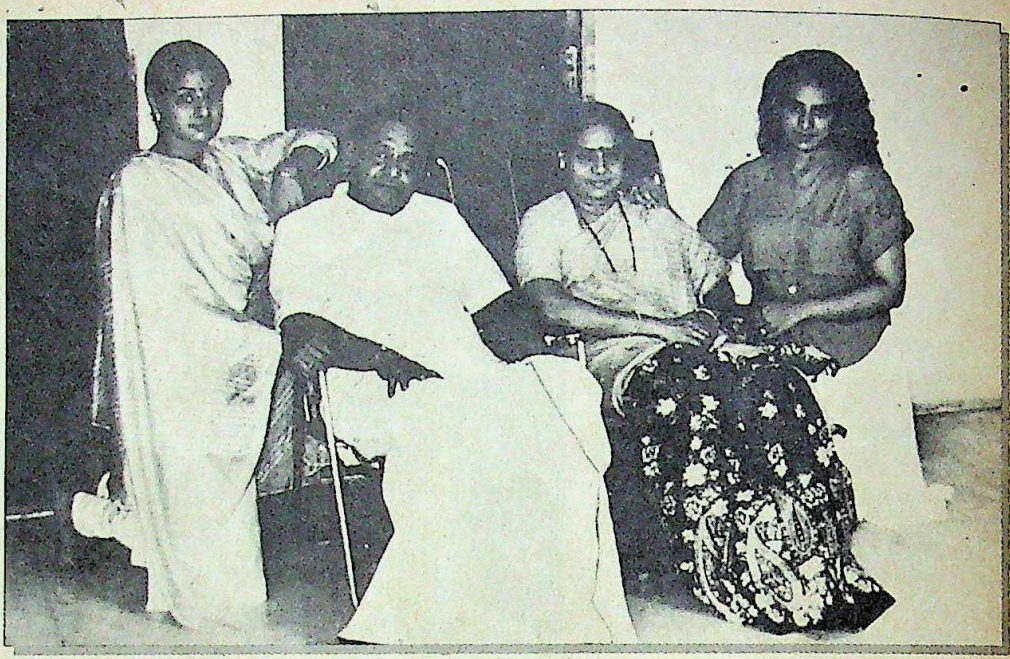
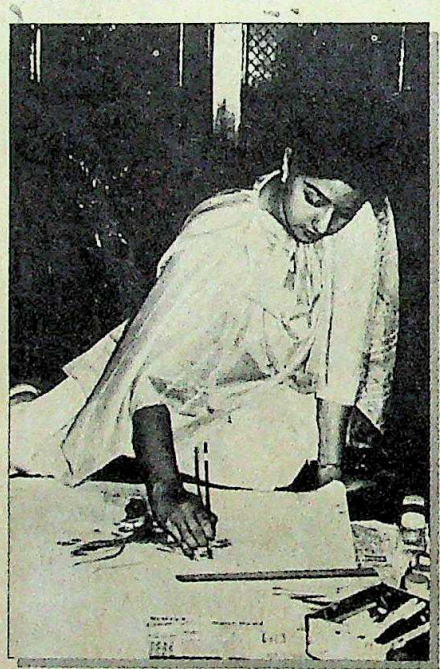
talent is mixed with glamorous looks, a good figure and a thorough professionalism. Sridevi has all that".

But all these qualities didn't help her in her first Hindi film *Solhwan Sawan* opposite Amol Palekar. It bombed at the box-office and Bharati Raja, who directed the film, said: "Nobody gave her a ghost of a chance in Hindi films after that." But she proved the pundits wrong. She was quick to discern that unlike in Tamil films, the Hindi audience has a penchant for glamour, glitz and sex. Pairing up with Jeetendra in *Himmatwala* she wiggled her way to the top with some daring dances and revealing dresses.





With her family and (left) painting: a shy homebody

HOWEVER, by that time the producers realised that she would be a big seller in what Sridevi politely calls "glamour roles" but what in reality exploited her sensuous figure. Soon she was type-cast as the new sex siren of tinsel town. What followed were mindless movies like *Tohfa*, *Mawaali*, *Masterji* and *Maksaad*, films where she showed more of her midriff than her talent. But her gyrating presence ensured that these films would be grossers at the box office. She has even acted in two films, *Inquilab* and *Aakhree Rasta*, with the film industry's tallest star Amitabh Bachchan.

Sridevi's rise to the top has ensured the continuing dominance of south Indian heroines in the Hindi film industry—a phenomenon that still remains unexplained. Rishi feels that it is because they are usually more disciplined actresses. Shekhar thinks it's because by tradition it is more acceptable in the south for women to take up performing arts. Sridevi has a different reason. Says she: "That's because we can do any kind of role and we can dance well, both modern and classical. Also we look very Indian."

Whatever be the reason Sridevi's success has made her rich beyond her wildest dreams. Her father gave up his practice and concentrates on managing her financial affairs. They recently moved into a palatial house in Madras that has pictures of gods hung in every room. Meanwhile there are rumours that they are buying a modern preview and dubbing theatre apart from investing in real estate.

But being rich and famous has only made her withdraw further into her shell. She shuns film parties and outings preferring to spend her little spare time with her family. Her younger sister, Srilata, who chaperones her, says: "We vibe so well that we are more like best friends than sisters." Her pastime is watching horror films—particularly *Dracula and Omen*—or Peter Sellers and Charlie Chaplin comedies. She dabbles a bit in painting, preferring to concentrate on women's portraits. She confesses to being a "lazy person" and has a weakness for "all the things I shouldn't eat like ice-creams and chocolates". She admits she can't cook and says that all she can do is make "a good lime juice".

Her dreams seem to be symbolic of her life. She loves to swim—something her celebrity status prevents her from doing—and in a recent dream she was in front of a large inviting pool. "I wanted to jump in and swim. But I saw a lot of snakes. I kept asking someone whether the snakes would bite me or not and I woke up before I knew the answer." In real life too she confesses that she knows little of the world and would like to explore it.

Her stardom has also unleashed the usual crop of rumours about her affairs with her co-stars. She is consistently linked to another Hindi film star, Mithun Chakraborty. She dismisses all such talk as "just rumours". And as is the trend with most film stars she is thinking of joining the Congress(I) but is unwilling to say more than that.

Today, with the success of *Nagina* behind her and with *Mr India* likely to become another big hit, Sridevi is thinking of switching her image as the sex siren. Says she: "I am concentrating on heroine-dominated roles." Sridevi is also cutting down on her hectic schedule after several directors complained that she was pushing herself far too much. But her quest for acclaim as an actress is going to be more difficult than just putting on more clothes. And no one knows that better than this baby-faced star of the make-believe world.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA in Srinagar and Bombay with SREEDHAR PILLAI in Madras

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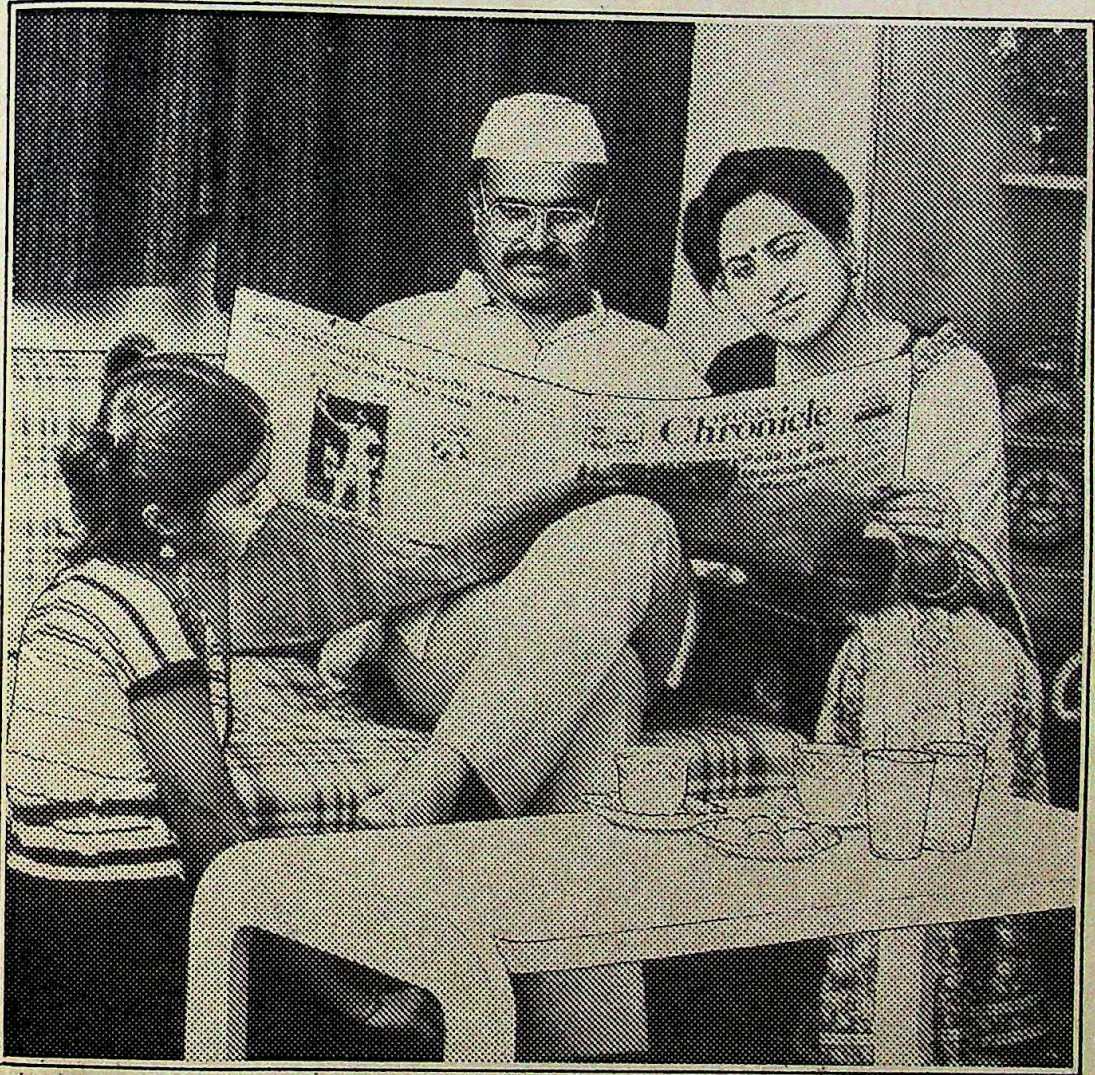

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BASTAR

The Tribal Godman

FOR the superstitious and simple-minded tribals of Bastar, he is the ghost who walks, a mystical figure whose name is spoken in hushed tones of awe and fear. In the eyes of the district administration, he is nothing but a clever charlatan who has created a religious cult to become rich and powerful. To state politicians, he is indispensable as an electoral ally. And to his supporters, he is a unique social reformer whose only mission in life is to wean the tribals away from liquor and other dangerous vices. But in essence, however, Baba Biharidas is the latest in a long line of Indian godmen who have grown larger than life through the cant and controversy that surround their every move.

Ever since his dramatic appearance in Bastar 15 years ago, the bearded baba, 52, has acquired enormous influence among the 13 lakh tribals living in the country's biggest district. Projecting himself as the 'reincarnated' maharaja of Bastar—the legendary and popular ex-ruler of Bastar who was killed in 1966—Biharidas has also acquired a huge fortune and enviable political clout. Adored and adulated by the adivasis, wooed by politicians in the state but hated by the local administration, he has emerged as the single most significant force in the tribal heartland of Madhya Pradesh.

"You can either hate him or love him, but you cannot ignore him," says Bastar-based journalist Kirit Doshi. Last month despite obstacles that were created by the district administration, Biharidas successfully organised a mammoth three-day yagna at his Chapka ashram, 30 km from the district headquarters of Jagdalpur. The event more than amply demonstrated the godman's hold over the tribals, his formidable political clout as well as his fund-gathering capacity.

Ignoring pressure from the district administration, about 20,000 tribals from all over Bastar—as well as the neighbouring areas of Orissa and Maharashtra—assembled at the Chapka ashram for the yagna. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Motilal Vora was scheduled to attend the mass religious ceremony, but cried off at the last minute. Still, at least half-a-dozen MLAs and an MP of the ruling Congress(I) Party showed up on the occasion to support Baba Biharidas's "efforts for national integration through the yagna".

The baba: dubious success

Photographs by IQBAL

But there were obviously less altruistic motives involved. Biharidas charged Rs 100 from each participant who performed the yagna, netting a cool Rs 3 lakh in the process. Besides these proceeds, he also received offerings from the 20,000 visitors who prostrated themselves before the godman to seek his blessings. "Religion is his business," remarked R. Parsuram, the district magistrate of Bastar.

And it is a business that is rapidly becoming an industry with powerful political overtones. Biharidas has been supporting the Congress(I) during elections and had once even shared the dais with the then prime minister Indira Gandhi at an election meeting. It was on the eve of the last parliamentary election that the baba was 'admitted' to the Congress(I)—amidst much fanfare, of course. Moreover, earlier this year, a state Youth Congress(I) camp was organised at his Chapka ashram. Acknowledging his immense clout in the district, Biharidas was boastful: "They all come to me with folded hands when they want votes."

For many years, the Congress(I) could not establish a hold among the tribals, winning only one or, at most, two Assembly seats in the district. The death of the popular maharaja, Praveer Chand Bhanjdeo, in police firing in 1966, whipped up such an anti-Congress(I) hysteria among the tribals that the party was able to win only two out of 11 seats in 1967. But with the advent of this ordinary looking man—of average height, with a pock-marked face, unkempt long hair and beard—the entire political scenario in the district was transformed. With the baba's support, the

Ever since his dramatic appearance in Bastar 15 years ago, Baba Biharidas has acquired enormous influence among the 13 lakh tribals in the district.

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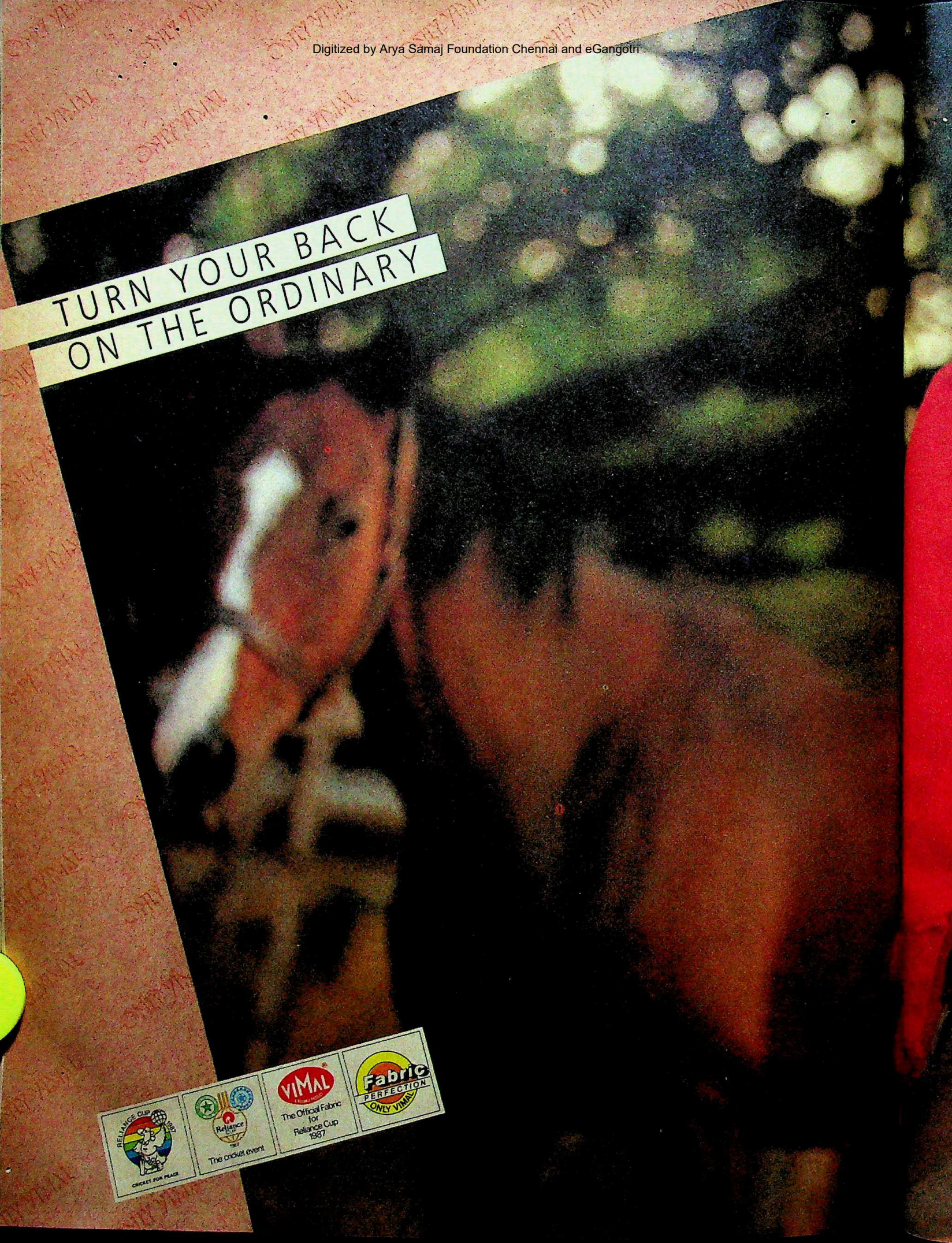

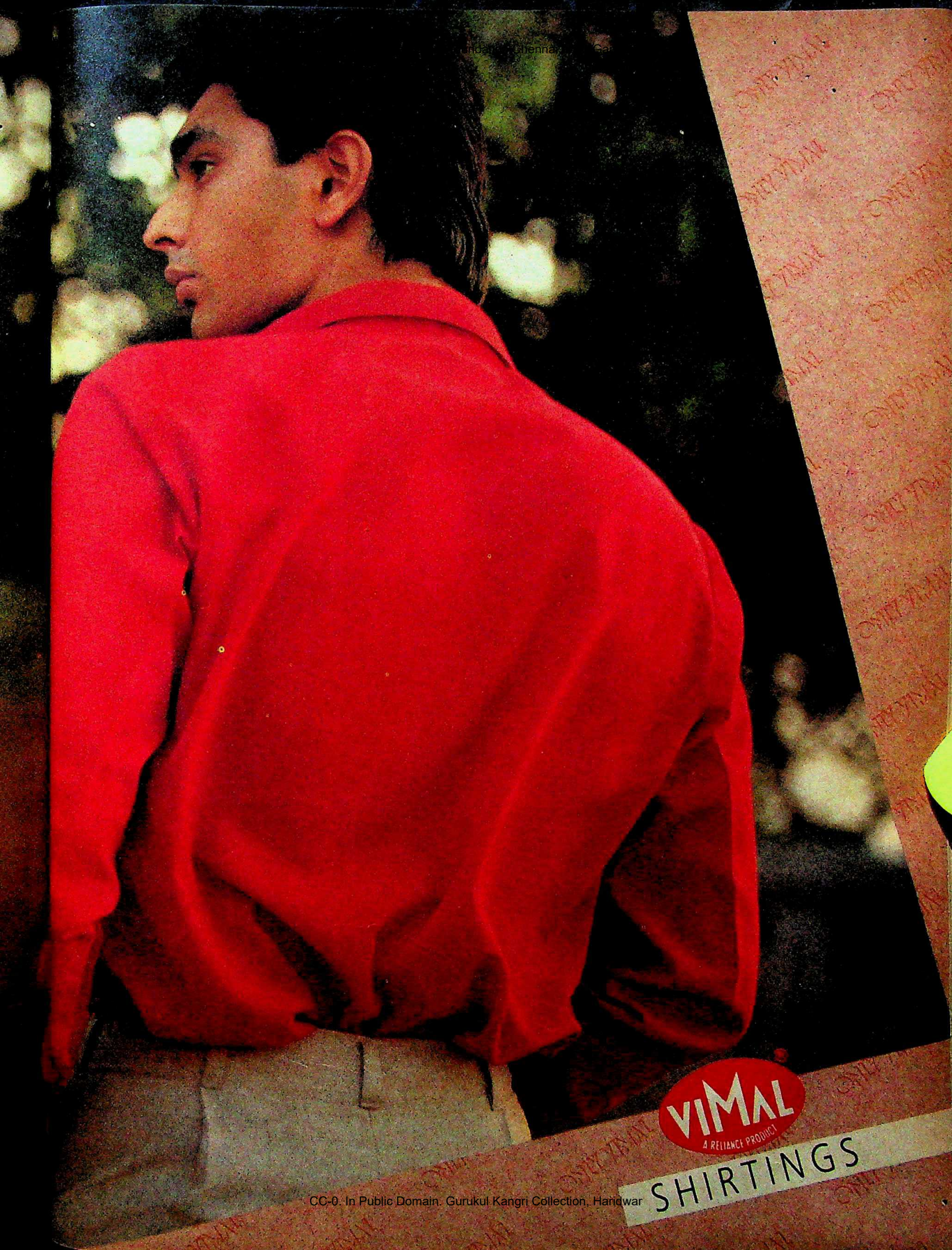

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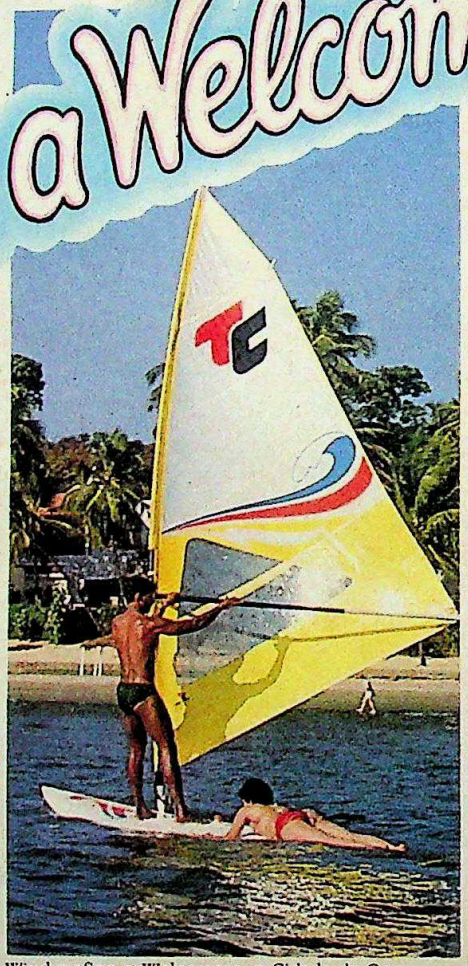

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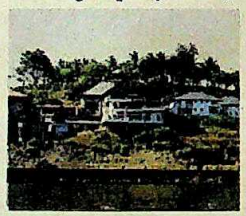

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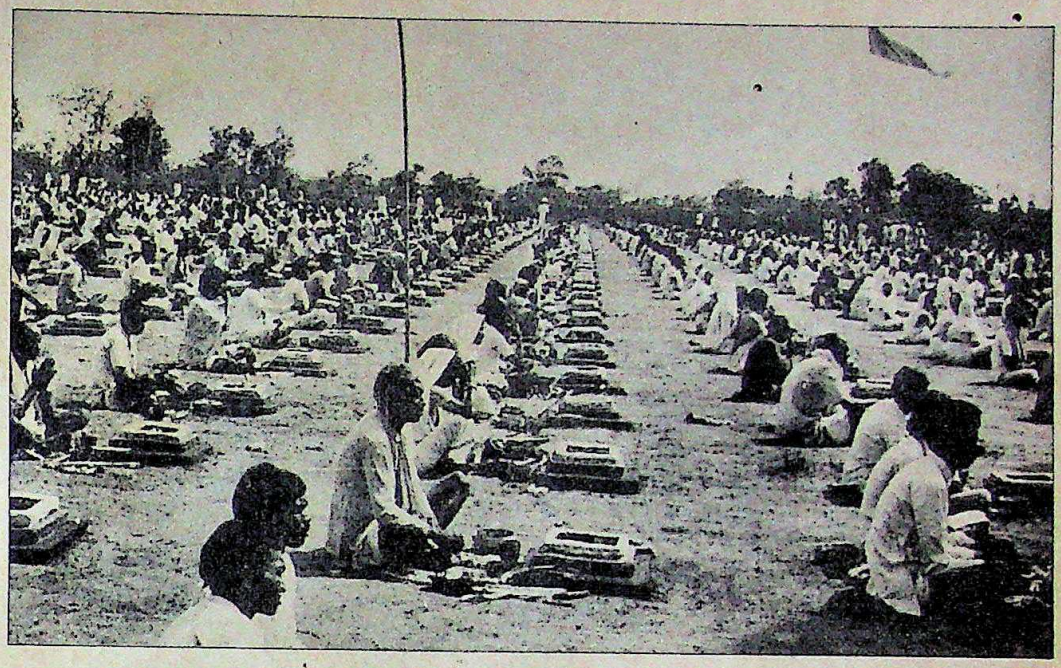

In May, Biharidas successfully organised a mammoth three-day yagna at his Chapka ashram. The event amply demonstrated the godman's hold over the tribals, his political clout as well as his fund-gathering capacity.

Tribal yagna: mass participation

Congress(I) was able to reverse the situation in the next election. It won 10 out of 12 seats in the district.

Biharidas' meteoric rise to fame and fortune started in 1968 when he drifted into Bastar two years after Bhanjdeo's death. Though on the surface, there was little resemblance between the unknown mendicant and the Oxford-educated king, the baba started projecting himself as Bhanjdeo's reincarnation, acquiring legitimacy with the help of a few tribal leaders. Their message was that the king had returned—as a saviour for the tribals—in the guise of a sadhu for fear of being killed by the Government. The ploy worked.

Not long thereafter, the tribals started flooding his ashram at Chapka for his *darshan* and made generous offerings in cash and kind. In 1969, while touring the district, the baba held courts in the villages and collected fines. He collected Rs 500 as his personal 'tax' from every village he visited. Moreover, Biharidas also charged large sums for the 'tulsi kanthi' necklaces which he distributes, claiming these have the power to ward off all evils. Such was his influence among the tribals that at his bidding, they abandoned meat and liquor and sold off their livestock.

Resistance, however, has come from unexpected quarters. Despite his enormous political power, the district administration has been engaged in a running battle with Biharidas in a bid to expose the Bastar baba as a fraud. The former collector of Bastar, B.D. Sharma, had even recommended his externment from the region. At this, Biharidas approached the then chief minister, Shyama Charan Shukla, who agreed to drop all proceedings against him on the latter's assurance of support to the Congress(I). Sharma, who had tried to dare the baba, was then summarily transferred.

The Congress(I) won the next election and Biharidas' influence—as well as his wealth—increased. He invented ingenious methods for making money. Once, he earned lakhs of rupees by selling water from a nearby nullah as holy water. At another time, he asked the tribals to wear yellow clothes and shave their heads, charging a fee for the ceremony. At the peak of his popularity and influence, he appointed his own 'manjhis' (tribal headmen) all over the district.

But his extraordinary career suffered during the Emergency when he was jailed under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act. Since then, Biharidas has been incarcerated on several occasions. At one time he was charged with hurting the religious sentiments of the tribals. At another time, he was held for allegedly inciting the adivasis to violence and setting up parallel governments in the villages. He was externed from the region during the Janata rule, but he managed to stage a come-back armed with a court order.

The Income Tax Department has claimed arrears of Rs 25 lakh from Biharidas. Different government agencies have raided his Chapka ashram several times, and the district administration has slapped a number of cases on him, including one for encroachment on government land by the ashram. "Much of my time goes in making rounds of the various courts," complains an obviously annoyed Biharidas.

Biharidas faced the worst threat to his godmanship in 1981. The Bastar district administration not only stopped his 'vanaspati yagna' (another fund-gathering device which would have netted him a cool Rs 40 lakh) but also initiated a campaign to 'expose' him. They traced his antecedents to a Harijan family in Orissa and discovered a deserted wife in the village. Pamphlets in tribal dialect printed by the administration also highlighted the fact that the holy man had three wives, one of them a minor, and five children.

But Biharidas' hold over the tribals is still intact. Groups of villagers still visit his ashram, prostrating themselves on the ground, their heads touching the baba's feet. Often they sit all day, gazing at him with awe and child-like devotion. "When these people come to me for help how can I deny them?" asks the baba. The daily *durbar* continues at Chapka with Biharidas flanked by the symbols of his dubious success—a cash box and a desert cooler—while a two-in-one blares film music in the background.

—N.K. SINGH in Bastar

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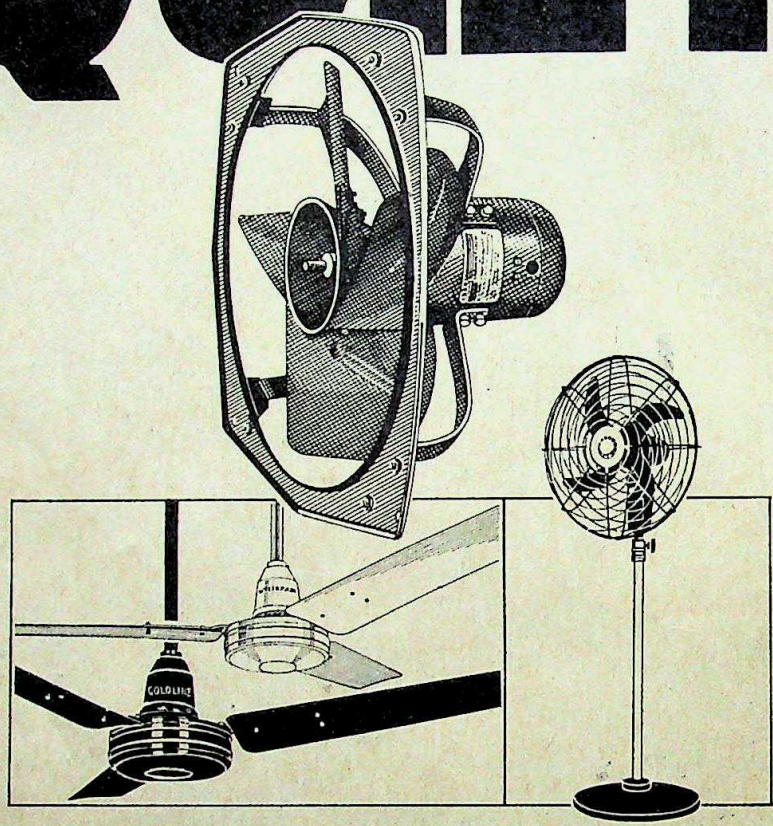
QUIET.



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KARNATAKA

Tribal Trouble

SHORTLY before 2 a.m. on the night of May 23, five masked men clad in coloured vests and khaki shorts stormed into the Avlahalli farm house of Madappas, located 18 km from Bangalore. Indra Madappa, 56, who instinctively jumped up in terror, was clubbed on the head. Her husband's cousin Sidappa, 70, and son Guruswamy were battered by two other dacoits. The dacoits then swept through the house smashing, ransacking and looting. Less than 10 minutes later they had departed with cash and jewellery worth nearly Rs 1 lakh.

On the same night, at about the same time, dacoits clad in khaki shorts invaded Gangadharan Sheth's house in Dharwad, 426 km from Bangalore. After assaulting his family members with clubs and sickles, the dacoits, who seemed to be in a tearing hurry, escaped with cash and jewellery worth nearly Rs 10,000.

Three more dacoities were reported in the same week, one each from Bijapur, Mysore and Belgaum districts, taking the total number of dacoities committed in the state in the first five months of 1987 to 34. And in each case the violence was equally mindless and frightening.

Ever since 1982 the dacoity graph has been rising menacingly in the state. As against 37 dacoities in 1982, 45 dacoities were committed in 1983, 57 in 1984, 53 in 1985 and 75 in 1986. Officials fear this number to be even higher.

Police believe that these dacoities are the handiwork of roving bands of "criminal tribes", both local and outstation. Among the outstation tribes they list Kepmaris and Irkulas of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, Bawarias of Rajasthan and Sansis of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. Even local tribes like Gollars and Raj Paradis are involved in the dacoities.

In most of these cases the dacoits have killed brutally in order to steal piffling amounts. Says the Special Inspector General of Police A.R. Sridharan: "It seems to be some sort of atavistic savagery, perhaps punishing society for forcing them into a life of crime." For, though the tag of "criminal tribes", slapped on some tribes by the British was removed soon after Independence precious little has been done to rehabilitate them. Faced with unemployment sections of these tribes have continued to thieve.

Invariably each of the tribes has a modus operandi. The Irkulas are "stone specialists" and a pile of stones is often left by them at the scene of crime. The Kepmaris specialise in depriving members of their valuables by engaging their attention elsewhere.

Most of these tribals settle next to railway tracks so that they can make good their escape at the first hint of trouble. But things are changing. The Bawarias, brazenly rented a house on the outskirts of Bangalore for Rs 1,500 a month, and stayed in it for three months.

The dacoities are well planned and well executed. The tribals usually select houses in the outlying areas. The women first reconnoitre the area by selling brooms and bamboo baskets. Contact is established with a local for garnering information and support. Sentries are posted at the entry and exit points of the victims' house during an actual dacoity.

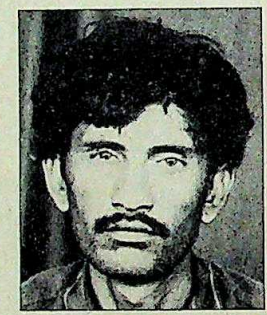
However, the police response to these dacoities has been poor. They blame the declassification of "criminal tribes" by the Government as responsible for their lack of knowledge about the size, headquarters or movement of these tribes.

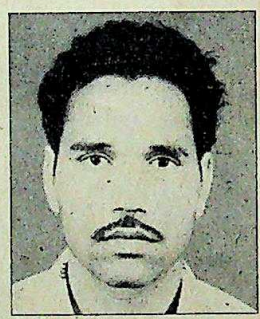
No less demoralising is the typical police refrain that "policing has to be done against tremendous odds". Police patrolling, which was stepped up after the Bawaria gang went on rampage last year, became lax later, leading to a fresh spurt in dacoities. Police officials point out that 75 per cent of the police outposts in the state have neither telephone nor wireless. The constables are expected to trudge a 15-mile beat daily; the sub-inspectors are not even given a motorcycle.

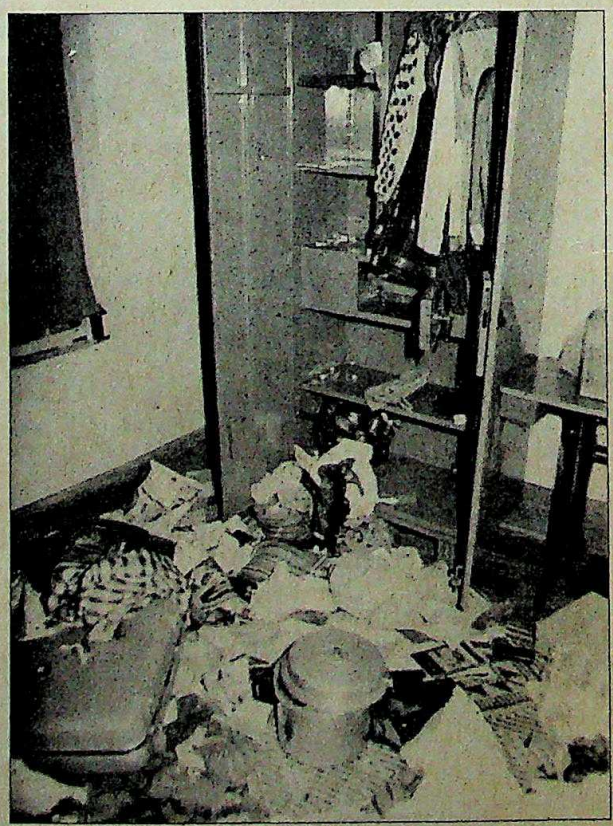
But the masses won't listen. Says Indra Madappa's 24-year-old son Kumar: "The police is good only at giving excuses and covering up." His elder brother Guruswamy now plans to buy a weapon to protect his family. And last fortnight, unnerved by the dacoities, the Home Minister Jalappa Reddy announced that the Government was thinking of introducing shoot-at-sight orders against people found moving suspiciously after 1 a.m. The state Government has obviously decided to fight fire with fire.

—ANITA PRATAP

(From left) Chadha and Rampal of Bawaria gang; and Birju of Sansi gang: frightening violence







Room ransacked by dacoits: spreading terror

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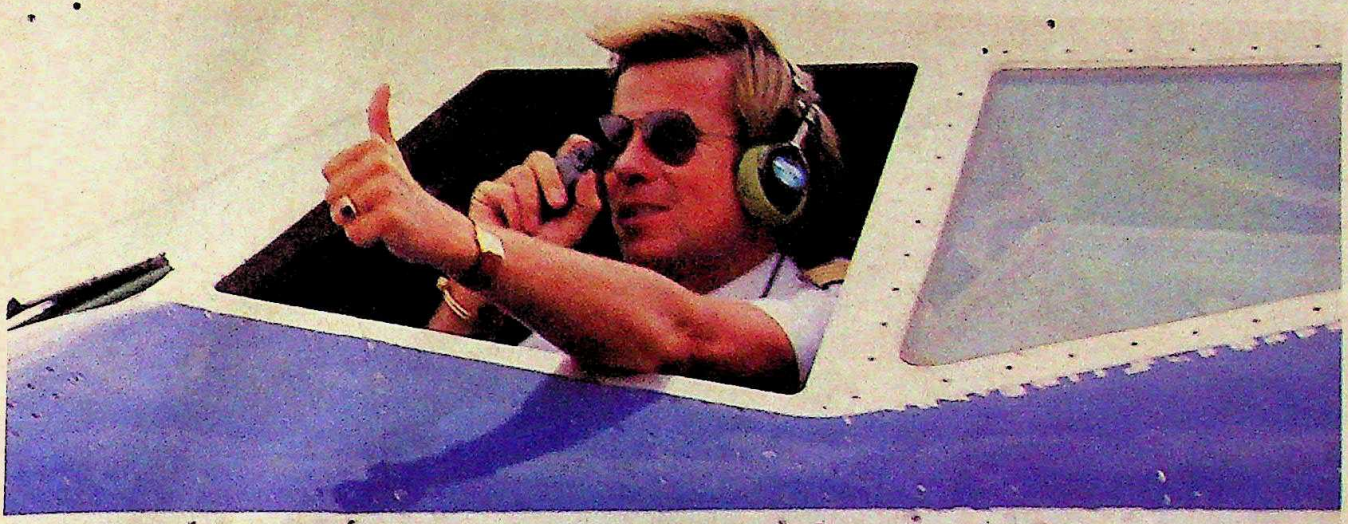

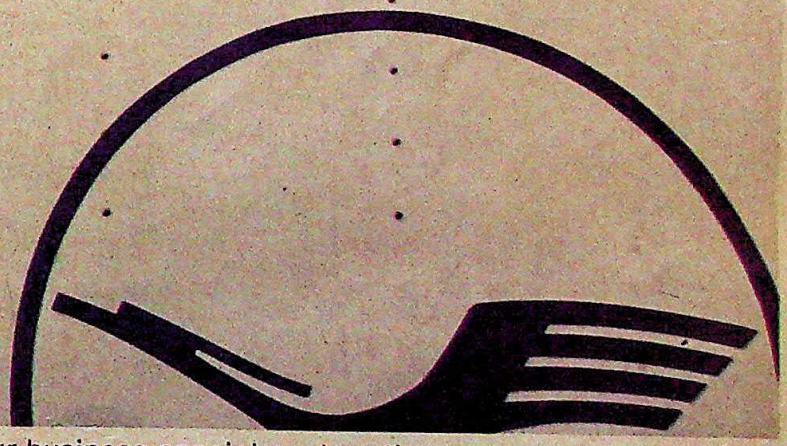

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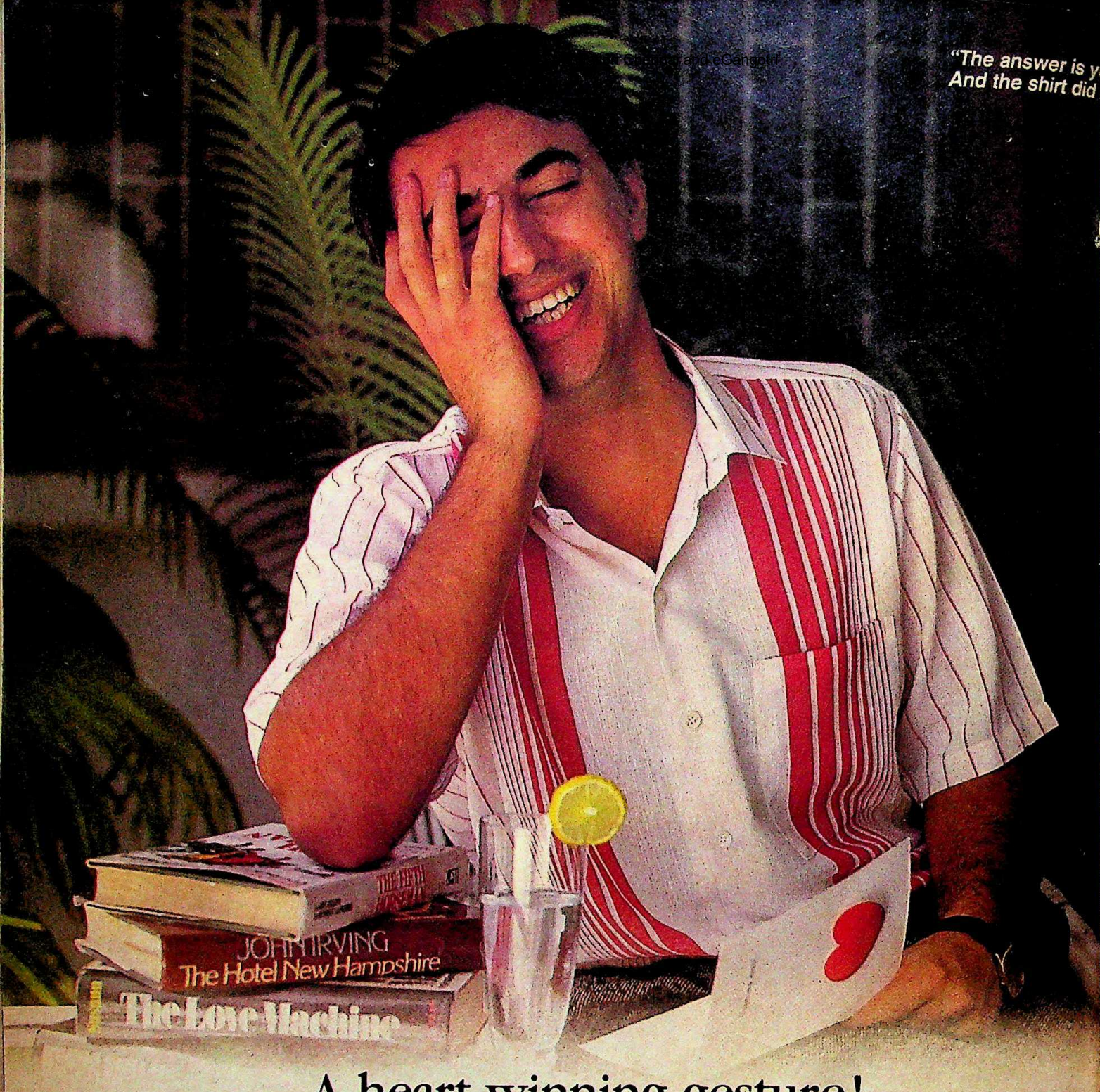

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MEDICAL EQUIPMENT

The Hi-tech Invasion

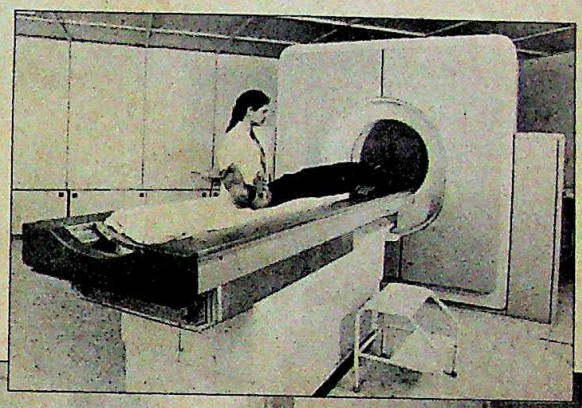
TEN years after the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, received a brain scanner as a gift from Sweden, medical electronics is revolutionising diagnosis, therapy and surgery in the country. The equipment, which includes expensive scanners of various kinds, nuclear gamma cameras and cath labs, and the comparatively cheaper blood gas analysers, helps in treatment in a wide range of situations, ranging from cardiac abnormalities in children to cancer detection and cure. It has not only improved medical monitoring but has also helped to make surgery safer than it ever was.

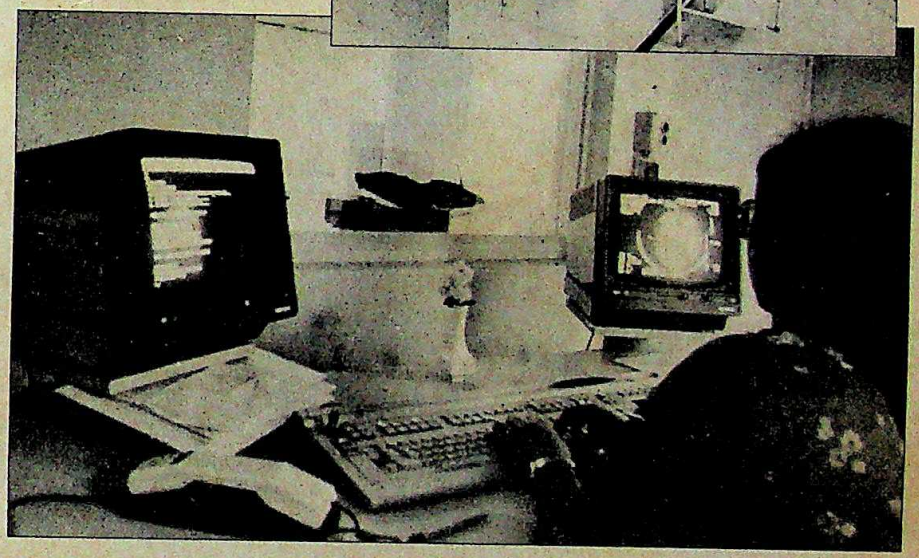
Evidence of the crucial role that the new machines have come to play lies in the fact that although equipment costs are very high, imports are rising quickly. In 1980, hi-tech medical equipment worth less than Rs 20 crore was brought into India, but this year the figure is already at least Rs 65 crore. What is more, the figure is expected to rise at the rate of about 20 per cent annually over the next three years. There are already more than 60 scanners in the country and most of them are with private hospitals.

A number of factors have gone into the making of the current trend of imports in gadgetry. For one, the country produces little beyond the basic X-ray equipment. Indeed, of the 35,000 X-ray machines in India, at least half are 30 years old or more, and are potent radiation hazards. The use of silicon storage tubes in the new scanners, however, reduces radiation dosage to as little as 10 per cent to 20 per cent of that in the older machines.

A recent relaxation in government policy has also made a marked difference. Import duty on hi-tech equipment has recently been slashed from 107 per cent to 40 per cent and total duty exemption has been granted to all hospitals and diagnostic centres willing to treat 40 per cent of the patients free of cost. In projects sponsored by expatriate Indians, free treatment to 25 per cent of the patients enables duty-free imported equipment. This has resulted in the mushroom growth of private hospitals with these facilities and at least 10 major hospitals are to come up nation-wide in the next 15 months.

Helping the growth in imports along are leasing companies that have sprung up suddenly to loan money exclusively to buy medical equipment. Manufacturers and suppliers are also doing their bit to lure buyers with attractive offers of deferred pay back schemes. For instance, a whole body scanner, costing Rs 1 crore, is available on an initial payment of only Rs 10 lakh: the rest can be paid in six instalments ranging over five years. "The emerging trend is the holistic approach for a one-time buy to create a facility costing Rs 2 crore to Rs 4 crore instead of a machine at a time," says A.R. Vishwanath, managing director of Standard Medical Leasing. The company has already put up a one-stop diagnostic centre in Hyderabad and has similar centres in mind for Bangalore, Pune and Calcutta by next June.





(Right and below) A CAT scan at work: vast change

While X-ray pictures will continue to provide basic and cheap information, "the switch from X-rays to the use of scanners is like the jump from still photography to the motion picture," says S.D. Vakil, vice-president (Medical Electronics), International General Electric (India), which is among the top five hi-tech equipment dealers in the country.

It is easy to understand why Vakil waxes eloquent about the new machines. The first generation of computerised axial tomography (CAT) devices—the brain scanner—takes highly accurate pictures of the brain as though it has been sliced up. It owes its magical potential to computers, X-ray tubes, superconducting magnets, radio-wave generators and a broad base of supporting hi-tech gadgets.

All but one of the 60-odd scanners in India today are the first generation CAT scan systems. Most of these are whole body scanners, which can scan the whole body in less than a minute. The CAT scan gives pictures of a one millimetre slice of any part of the body within two seconds.

Neurologists believe that the death rate due to cerebral thrombosis (blocking of vessels carrying blood to the brain) and cerebral haemorrhage (bursting of blood vessels in the brain) has come down with the use of the scanner. But its greatest advantage is in detecting cancer, not only in pinpointing the disease but also in improving the accuracy of radiation treatment and monitoring a patient's recovery.

The most sophisticated equipment in India currently is the nuclear magnetic

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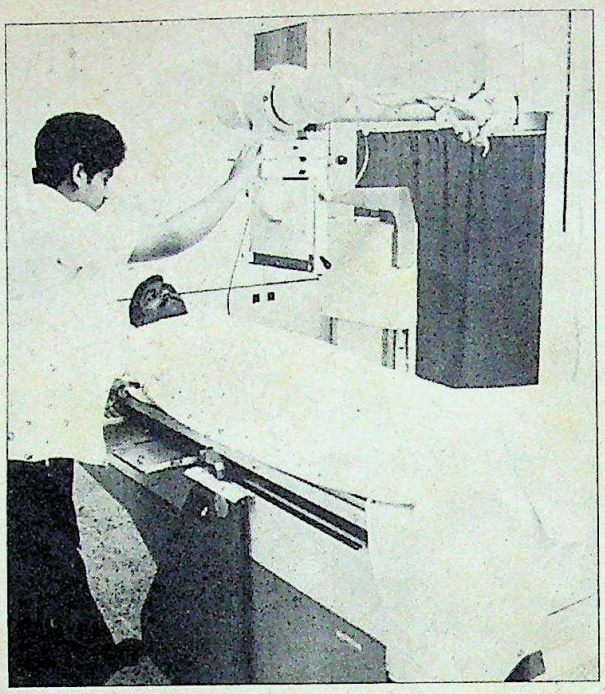
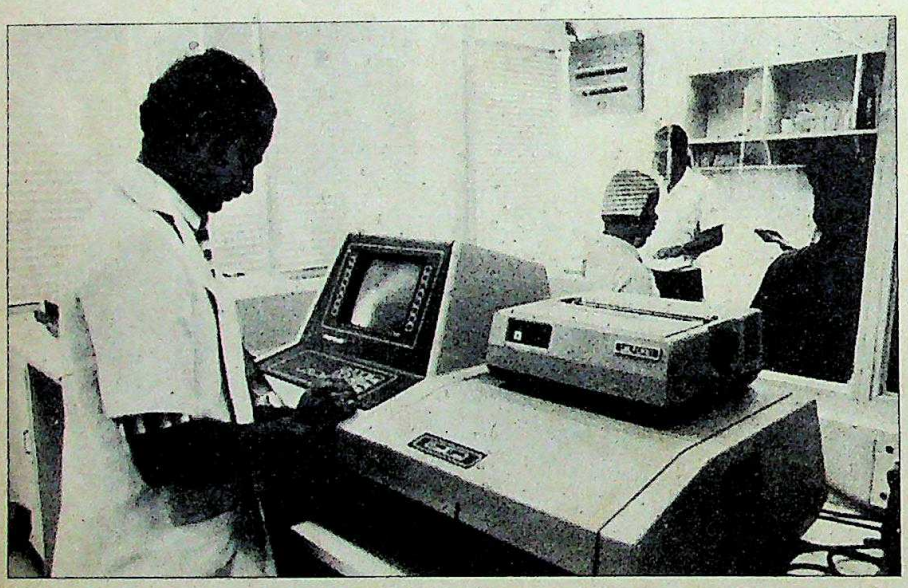
resonance (NMR) scanner (cost: Rs 7.5 crore), installed at Delhi's Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Applied Sciences (INMAS), and the capacity of which is truly astounding. It can not only take moving pictures of organs such as the beating of the heart but can also help classify mental retardation and illness, identify the focus of epilepsy, determine the appropriate time for brain surgery and monitor the treatment of neurological diseases. These are some of the innumerable functions this versatile machine can perform.

Another effective tool for which demand is growing is the nuclear gamma camera, the most modern model costing about Rs 30 lakh. With an estimated half a million dying of cancer a year, the use of this camera to detect cancerous areas can enable early radiation therapy and help check malignant growth. There are already about 140 cobalt therapy units and more are in the offing.





Conducting an angiography and (below) the blood gas analyser

Even cath labs—cardiac cathetrisation laboratories—most of which are located in Bombay, will be installed in other cities as a sequel to the improvement of diagnostic facilities. Using angiography, the equipment helps locate the blocks in blood vessels leading to the heart and peripheral vascular vessels. This enables cardiologists to decide on the procedure to save the patient from a potential heart attack. Microprocessor technology also permits more effective monitoring of blood and oxygen flow without the need to enter the body. Explains Subba Rao, director of the Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences, Hyderabad (NIMS): "Even the otherwise skeptical Chinese who had only a few scanners in July 1984, got nearly 2,000 scanners by the end of that year. These are now being used alongside traditional medicine and acupuncture."

But there is also another side to the actual use of all this equipment. In the context of the inflow of scanners, Subba Rao admits: "The new scanners are only as good as the technicians who can operate them and the doctors who can interpret the results." He says that unless medical students in 110 colleges nationwide get a chance to get used to modern medical equipment, they can never hope for international recognition.

Last year, Rao succeeded in persuading the Andhra Pradesh Government to invest in ultra-sound scanners—commonly used in obstetrics cases—for each of the district hospital, as "a firm first step" to introduce modern equipment. Abdominal, obstetric and gynaecological examinations using the ultra-sound scanner have become fairly routine in most cities and towns—about 30 per cent of pregnant women in urban areas have at least one such scan. Physicians use the more sophisticated ultra-sound scanners to measure the velocity of blood flow in high risk pregnancies, examine the brains of new born babies, take moving pictures of the heart, detect cancerous tumours and plaques in blood vessels that cause arteriosclerosis.

Clearly, the import of the new tools and techniques will add substantially to the nation's health tab. If each of the teaching hospitals is equipped with a nuclear gamma camera, the whole body CAT scanner, a cath lab, an ultra-sound scanner and a modest X-ray unit, the Government will have to spend about Rs 2 crore on each such facility. However Subba Rao claims: "At a teaching hospital, this equipment will pay back the full investment in about three years even if the fee is lower than that charged by private diagnostic centres."

But the Government is yet to work out a policy on this score. Major-general N. Lakshmipathi, director, INMAS, emphasises that, "Though it costs about Rs 10,000 to look at a patient's brain with the NMR scanner, we do not charge a fee. But this national facility can be opened only to those who have been vetted by the other scanner systems. So, it is inevitable that all teaching hospitals must be equipped, despite the high costs, if diagnosis and medical research is to improve."

For government hospitals, the vexatious problem, even if money is found to buy the equipment, will be high patient fees. But whatever the solution, the new hi-tech methods of treatment mean that the future patient will play a more decisive role in his own treatment, and will allow the physician to serve only as a gatekeeper controlling access to the medical machines.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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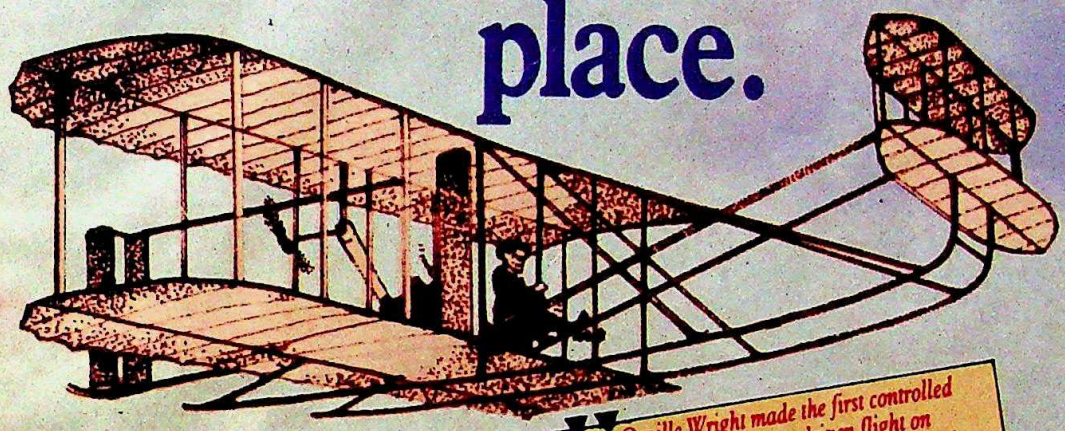

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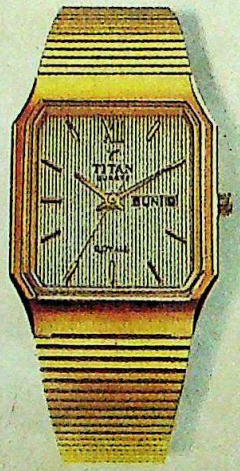

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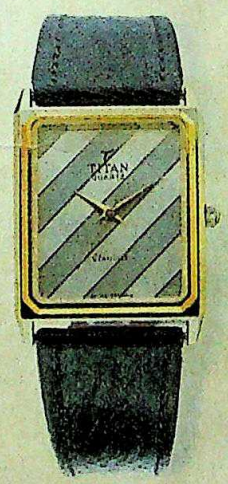

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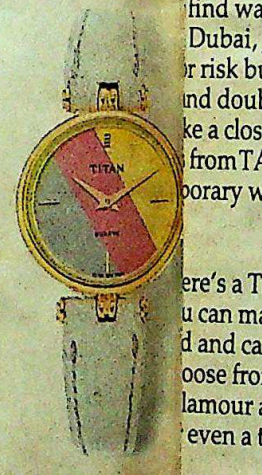

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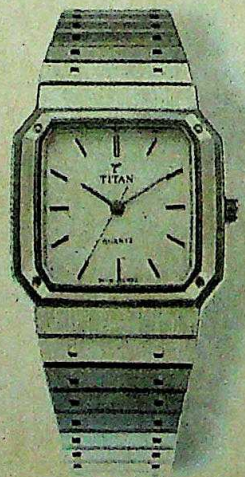

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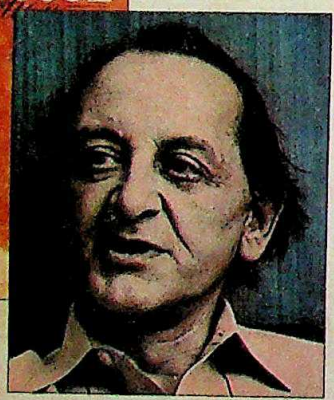
Apna Sangeet: coming home

◆ Sandwiched between the breasts and bottoms in next month's *Penthouse* magazine will be none other than **Rajiv Gandhi**. The latest issue of the soft-porn men's magazine, which is banned in India, has announced that the interview of the month in their next issue will be with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.



Howe: political pose

How Rajiv found his embarrassing way into *Penthouse*, which features not just frontal nudity but outdoes *Playboy* in daring exposure, is a story in itself. The interview is by **Russel Warren Howe**, who occasionally features in *The Statesman*. The prime minister's office says indignantly that Rajiv would never have agreed to an interview with *Penthouse* and claims that Howe interviewed Rajiv two months ago for a book he claimed he was writing on political leaders of the 20th century. Howe says he interviewed Henry Kissinger for *Penthouse*, after which he was approached by the Indian Embassy in Washington and asked to do a similar interview with Rajiv. The embassy denies this and legal moves are afoot to stop publication. Kissinger, however, failed in a similar attempt. Rajiv's press adviser, H.Y. Sharada Prasad, insists: "If Howe has given the interview to *Penthouse* it reflects on his professional integrity". But the damage has been done. The last thing Rajiv needs is the embarrassment of appearing in a magazine that often makes the *Kama Sutra* look like Looney Tunes. The Government can now complain about much more than a foreign hand.

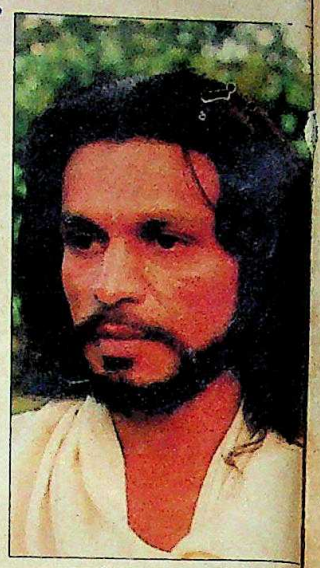
Protesting housewives

◆ They had the beat, and the lyrics, but not the packaging. Now, the throbbing of the *dholak*, in tandem with keyboards and congos, has been getting *balle balles* out of gyrating London audiences. Says **Himmat Singh**, manager of the Punjabi Pop group **Apna Sangeet**—in India to record an album for CBS and perform in Delhi and Bombay—their music "is luring third-generation Punjabis" into the homeland's fold. Punjabi Pop is coming to town.

◆ The moving camera sees, and having seen, it shows. After *India Hotel* was aired on BBC's *40 Minutes*, Bombay's glitterati are wishing they had opted for 40 winks instead. Film maker **Mahesh Bhatt**, heard wondering why the poor didn't blow the Taj up, claims he answered "a question about the common man's perception of the Taj. I am very comfortable with the Taj". Is the Taj comfortable with him?

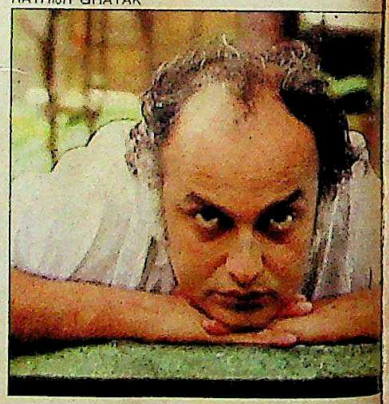
◆ *Aadmi ko bhagwan kahe; Bane huye kaam ko khoya; Chchote ko bade kahe; Dekh Kabira roya*

The man-or-god controversy would only have prompted the saint to sigh and come out with such a couplet, perhaps, at the ways of the world. **Kabirpanthis** from Gujarat—who have gone to court against the screening of the new TV serial Kabir—ha Doordarshan in a bind. Sa Director **Anil Chowdhur** "They claim Kabir is a god, we can't portray him as normal being. We say he i historical character." Th saint would have been stoic



Kabir: man of god

RATHIJIT GHATAK



Bhatt: out of context

◆ Her actions had all th ferocity of a tigress protecting her cubs. **Dr Pushpa Prabhoo** wife of Bombay's Shiv Sena Mayor Dr Ramesh Prabhoo led 300 housewives to the Bombay TV Centre last fort-night to protest against late-night films on Doordarshan's bill of fare—because of their sex content and the unearthly hour. Says the mayoress: "A mention that these films are not meant for those below 18 will not prevent children from watching them." Can cinema halls and videos be far behind

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